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Semiotic Fitness

The Chinese Written Character and its Metamorphosis in Modern American Poetry

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Since American Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa's manuscript *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* was compiled, published and commended by Ezra Pound in 1919, it has become a major document of twentieth-century American poetry and poetics. Though the Chinese written character is unavoidably misunderstood by both Fenollosa and Pound, Fenollosa's text plays an important role in the poetic revolution of Americanization. Most poets, especially young Beat poets and San Francisco Renaissance poets in the 1950s, tried to mimic graphemic creativity embodied in Pound's *Cantos* and officially introduced some Chinese written characters into their literary productions. In their poetic experiments, they also attempted to create visual poems that mimicked pictorial features of some Chinese written characters within the alphabetic writing system, which, in turn, reflects the nature of graphemic creativity embedded in the Chinese writing system. This graphemic creativity makes Chinese written characters and their linguistic metamorphoses, as verbal-and-visual images, more expressive in sense and content. Consequently, by self-entanglement, they can generate beauty and power, which helps them to be semiotically fit in some poetic works. Engaging with Pound's publication of Fenollosa's manuscript and with poems by Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, and E. E. Cummings, this paper examines, from both theoretical and aesthetic perspectives, how modern American poets achieved semiotic fitness by using and mimicking Chinese written characters in their creative works.

1. Introduction

In the history of twentieth-century American literature, the year 1913 is of significance, due to the Chinese written character's official entry into modern American poetry and poetics. It is the innovative use of the Chinese written character which triggered a revolutionary movement for literary Americanization: "Make it new." According to the archival research of the critic Zhaoming Qian, Mary McNeil Fenollosa, widow of American Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), met Ezra Pound (1885-1972) three times, on 29 September, 6 October, and 11 October, during that year in London (1995: 24-25). Following her talks with Pound, Mary determined that Pound was "the only person who could deal with her late husband's note books as he would [have] wished" (quot. Saussy 2). In mid-December, she then sent her late husband's notes and manuscripts concerning the Chinese language, Chinese and Japanese poetry, and art to Pound (Qian 1995: 24-26). Pound was then involved in the Imagist Movement and had already, with F. S. Flint (1885-1960), articulated the three principles of *Imagisme* in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in March 1913 (Jones 129). Coincidentally, the first principle of imagism, "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective" (Jones 129), is in accordance with the nature of the Chinese written character, which helps Pound find an approach to "perfect Imagism with new models" (Qian 1995: 25). Even though Pound had read Chinese poetry with the help of his Chinese literature tutor, Allen Upward (1863-1926) before his encounter with Mary, he recalled that he was, at that time, "totally ignorant of ideogram" (Saussy 2-3). With Mary's parcel in hand, "Pound saw it as his duty to treat the Fenollosa manuscripts creatively as a scholar-poet instead of obscuring them with philology" (Ruthven 14). Accordingly, Pound's compilation, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica*, which first appeared in *Little Review* in 1919 and was subsequently published as a book in 1936 (Fang 215)[1], recognizes the Chinese written character as a medium for modern English poetry, rather than "as a document whose sources were to be traced, arguments historicised, and errors corrected editorially" (Ruthven 14).

However, in both Fenollosa's manuscript and Pound's further poetic experimentation, Chinese written characters are misunderstood as pictograms or ideograms with pictorial quality, though only about four percent are pictographic.[2] Practically, Fenollosa was aware of the fact that "the pictorial clue of many Chinese ideographs can not [sic] now be traced, and even Chinese lexicographers admit that combinations frequently contribute only a phonetic value," but he still contended that "a large number of the primitive Chinese characters, even the so-called radicals, are shorthand pictures of actions or processes" (Fenollosa and Pound 59, 46). What really interested both Fenollosa and Pound were simple pictograms and composite ideograms, which, as a small minority, tended to be more abstract and

symbolic, with much of their pictorial quality lost in modern Chinese writing. Nevertheless, this misunderstanding never prevented them from discovering the potential of the Chinese written character and its becoming a medium for inventing the ideogrammic method in new poetry writing, that is, "the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated particulars capable of suggesting ideas and concepts through their relation" (Géfin 27). Pound himself, on the one hand, complained that "the whole Occident is still in crass ignorance of the Chinese art of verbal sonority" (Fenollosa and Pound 60). On the other, he commended Fenollosa's essay as "a study of the fundamentals of all aesthetics" and "fruitful in 'new' western painting and poetry," expecting that "an American renaissance" was approaching (Fenollosa and Pound 41). In Pound's view, "[t]he later movements in art have corroborated his theories" (Fenollosa and Pound 41). Fenollasa's essay should thus be comprehended "as a major document of twentieth-century American poetry and poetics" (Saussy 1).

While challenging both Fenollosa's and Pound's misunderstanding of the Chinese written character as simple pictogram and composite ideogram, some (including Chinese) readers still take for granted that the etymon of ideogram is naturally related to an ideographic writing system. They ignore the fact that the ideogram has a link with the alphabetic writing system. For example, Egyptian hieroglyphics, though originally pictographic, had already developed into sound language. As Pound notes, "[t]he Egyptians finally used abbreviated pictures to represent sounds, but the Chinese still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures" (Pound 1961: 21). The misapprehension of the nature and character of the ideogram has, with the exception of work on Pound's *Cantos*, led to a lack of study of the direct appropriation of Chinese written characters in American poetic works. Equally lacking are studies of a mimesis of spatial visibility caused by transformed Chinese signs, a kind of linguistic metamorphosis using the romanized spelling or character dismantlement. According to Elaine S. Wong, the "character dismantlement" refers to "the Chinese rhetorical device based upon graphemic recombination" of Chinese written characters, which illustrates "the regenerative vitality of a graphemic system that can also be found in alphabetic writing" (Wong 6). The shared function of character or word dismantlement existing in both ideographic and alphabetic writing systems, in turn, makes the Chinese written character meaningful in another poetic language. In the alphabetic system, such Chinese written characters or transformed Chinese signs appearing between the lines create visible images when they are presented to the audience in an unfamiliar way. This distancing effect generates a power of spatial visibility, which attracts the reader's attention.

To clarify the function of the Chinese written character inserted in modern American poetry, we set out to rethink it from a new angle: the Chinese written character and its linguistic metamorphosis acting as translated im-

age, verbal-and-visual image, and thinking-and-thinging image. In the process of acculturation, semiotic fitness is taken as a critical means for measuring its effect in literary production.

2. The Semiotic Fitness Principle

In Timo Maran's lexicon, "semiotic fitness in its broader sense can be defined as the success of a subject in adapting to its environment, its skill in bringing together information originating from itself and information originating from the environment with the help of semiotic processes" (82). Such a semiotic process is, to a degree, a reflection of a translator's interpretative activities, which is referred to semiosis. Hence, three main elements – semiotic selection, semiosis, and semiotic fitness – are involved in the translation process: "semiotic selection" determines the value of the subject in its original culture, "semiosis" interprets the information of the subject, and "semiotic fitness" measures the acculturation of the subject in its new environment.

Maran posits that a subject can be analogous to a living organism. In order to survive, this organism-subject should be semiotically fit when "interpreting its organismic information in respect to the surrounding environment" (Maran 82). "While adapting to the environment the subject localizes itself in the environment; thus, semiotic fitness indicates success in localization" (Maran 82). The success of a translated image thus depends upon its semiotic fitness in the target language and culture. It needs to be taken into account that during the process of translation, some meanings of the original text might be adapted, distorted, or even lost, due to the translator's understanding imprinted with his or her own knowledge, preference, intention, bilingual ability, and even socio-cultural background. Through translation, a translated image, though changed in some aspects, is still related to the original image created by the translator. If a translated image is semiotically fit and embraced by the reader in the target culture, we can infer that the translated image is successful.

If a Classic in one culture can also be labeled as a Classic in another, the prerequisite condition is that a web of images related to the text is successfully created and can be semiotically fit in its new environment through multiple translations. "It is classic because of a certain eternal and irrepressible freshness" (Pound 1961: 14). Here, Gary Snyder offers us a standard to measure what a Classic is:

> The Classic provides a kind of norm. Not the statistical norm of behaviorism but a norm that is proved by staying power and informed consensus. Staying power through history is related to the degree of intentionality, intensity, mindfulness, playfulness, and incorporation of previous strategies and standards within the

medium—plus creative reuse or reinterpretation of the received forms, plus intellectual coherence, time-transcending long-term human relevance, plus resonances with the deep images of the unconscious. To achieve this status a text or tale must be enacted across many nations and a few millennia and must have received multiple translations. (Snyder 2010: 79)

Snyder's elaboration of the Classic provides a paradigm for measuring the Chinese written character as a successful translated image. The three "plus" principles he advocates are what the semiotic fitness principle adheres to.

3. The Chinese Written Character as a Translated Image

In the evolution of written signs, apart from Chinese oracle bone script, other proto-written signs (such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, Sumerian cuneiform, Indus script and Maya glyphs) have long disappeared. These ancient logograms not only lacked the ability to capture and express philosophical ideas, profound thoughts, and deep feelings, but they also failed to record the mysterious, complicated things that happened in the physical world. One fact, though, is unquestionable: that all written signs originate from pictograms or ideograms, which makes feasible the shifting of the Chinese written character from an ideographic system to an alphabetic system in poetic production. This shifting process depends upon both a written sign's own graphemic creativity and the poet's creative use of it.

According to Elaine S. Wong, "graphemic creativity" refers to "the creative expressiveness of written signs" (Wong 1). She explains that she opts for "*graphemic* rather than *graphic* to emphasize the nature of written signs as something both seen and read" (Wong 3). Wong holds that her conception "focuses more on creativity as a function of language than on the human agent's power to create" (Wong 2). This paper, however, is more concerned with the semiotic fitness of the Chinese written character as a translated image in modern American poetry. Thus, it contends that the human agent's creative use of some Chinese written characters and transformed Chinese signs can be also viewed as graphemic creativity. Here, "graphemic creativity" has a twofold meaning: "the creative expressiveness of written signs" and "the human agent's power to create." In other words, in the poetic production, graphemic creativity can be generated by both the function of written signs and by a poet's dismantling, transforming or reinterpreting of written signs.

In the West, the Chinese written character has traditionally been understood as an image and has long been treated as picture-thing. As early as 1811, Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat, in his *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises*, states that Chinese characters "present to the eye not the sterile and conventional signs of pronunciation but things themselves" (quot. Kern 1). For Fenollosa, "a picture is naturally the picture of a thing," so he sees

Chinese written characters as picture-things and discovers them as "things in motion, motion in things" (Fenollosa and Pound 45-46). In reading Chinese, readers, therefore, seem to be "watching *things* work out their own fate," for "Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature" (Fenollosa and Pound 45). Drawing on Fenollosa's examination, Pound also points out that the "Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things" (Pound 1961: 21).

When Chinese written characters are taken as picture-things, they are cast as material images seen in poetry, resulting in their power of pictorial visibility. In Pound's definition, "an 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound 1991: 120). Pound's further elaboration of an image helps him establish a new paradigm for the visual in poetry: comparing "IMAGE" to "the poet's pigment" (Pound 1991: 279); taking "phanopoeia" as "a casting of images upon the visual imagination" (Pound 1960: 25); and presenting an image as a sense of "sudden liberation," "freedom from time limits and space limits," and "sudden growth," just like our experience "in the presence of the greatest works of art" (Pound 1991: 120). Through the Chinese written character imagery, visualization and art are harmonized in a new form of visual poetry in the twentieth century, which had a great impact on imagist poetry, concrete poetry, and calligrammes.

This visualization is a representation of a poet's interpretative activities, or a manifestation of a poet's translatorial action, even translatorial power, when the Chinese written character imagery is assimilated into another culture. Hence, the poet, acting as both the translator and the reader, recreates such exotic imagery in literary production "by using the device of fictitious translation, i.e. by presenting their work as the translation of another's work" (Kaindl 17). This kind of translation is now referred to as transfiction. This burgeoning field focuses on the study of translation-related phenomena from a cultural-and-social perspective. In transfiction, though no clear demarcation concerning the boundaries between fiction and reality is attempted, "translation is not seen as a text-based activity but rather as a metaphor for cultural processes" (Kaindl 17). By contrast, "fiction," in Rosemary Arrojo's view, can be taken as "a privileged site in which our imagery finds the necessary freedom to express even our most hidden obsessions and aspirations" (quot. Kaindl 365). "As a result, change, transformation, fragmentation, dislocation and cracks have become key coordinates for understanding the motion created by translation" (Kaindl 2).

When the Chinese written character embedded in English poetry is examined from the perspective of transfiction, we discover that the Chinese not only acts as an image, but that it also can be understood as a translated image. In Chinese poetry, an image is the basic, yet powerful component

through which a poet presents or visualizes a picture of a thing in his or her mind. When a Chinese written character enters an English poem, its spatial visibility and pictorial visibility make it function as a thing or a visual image in the alphabetical writing system, which can be both read and seen. However, for most Western readers, even the translator-poet, seeing a Chinese written character as a thing is more natural than reading or pronouncing it, due to their limited knowledge of Chinese writing. At the same time, the adoption of the Chinese written character in another poetic language is a kind of the translator-poet's visual-creative "copy" or translation work to create a translated image in his or her literary production. As part of this creative process, selection, interpretation, imagination, appropriation and adaptation are involved. The process of translation is, thus, similar to that of visualization as well as the process of inter-signs or inter-symbols undertaken by the poet, whose aim is to discover a language or a discourse to translate or communicate his or her own vision. In this respect, a combination of interlingual translation, intralingual translation, and intersemiotic translation is unavoidably involved in recreating the Chinese written character imagery in literary works. In essence, to examine the dramatically effective use of the Chinese written character in Western poetry is to examine its semiotic fitness as a translated image in the alphabetical system.

In modern American poetry, Ezra Pound is credited as a pioneer treating the Chinese written character as a translated image. In his *Cantos*, he inserted more than one hundred Chinese written characters between lines: some of these are in accord with the Chinese Confucian culture, such as words concerning the ethical codes: "benevolence," "integrity," and "happiness;" and words regarding the celestial symbols: "sacrifice," "spirit," and "sensibility." To project the spatial visibility and pictorial visibility of the selected Chinese written characters and make them readable, they are typeset into a boldface image, sometimes marked with pronunciation and tone. Typographically, this positioning makes a contrast with the lightface English words within the text; sometimes an etymological interpretation provides a clue for readers to seek the unseen relations between the lines. Pound heavily relies on this method to explain the Chinese written characters introduced in his *Cantos*. For example, in "Canto LXI," he writes about his apprehension of the Chinese ideogram "happiness":

> A man's happiness depends on himself
> not on his emperor
> If you think that I think that I can make any man happy
> You have misunderstood the FU

<div align="center">福</div>

(the Happiness ideogram) that I sent you (Pound 1975: 338)

In order to interpret the Chinese written character correctly, Pound uses the bracket and the pronunciation "FU" to signify "the Happiness ideogram." His poetic paraphrase, "A man's happiness depends on himself," but "not on his emperor," enhance the readers' understanding of this character. Accordingly, the character he selected and translated is semiotically fit in the poetic stanza.

In Pound's "Canto LIII," four Chinese written characters, literally "new," "day," "day" and "new" are individually and vertically placed in the right-hand margin. Each character's pronunciation and tone are marked with "hsin[1]," "jih[4]," "jih[4]," and "hsin[1]," while on the left, a story of the engraved words on the bath tub of Emperor Tching Tang of the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC) is narrated in the stanza. These four Chinese written characters are taken from *The Great Learning,* one of the four Confucian Classics, stating that "if you can make it new every day, you will feel fresh day by day, and you have another new day." Pound depicts this historical story in his poem: "Tching prayed on the mountain and /   wrote MAKE IT NEW / On his bath tub /   Day by Day make it new / cut underbrush / pile the logs / keep it growing" (1975: 264-65). Pound's apprehension or misapprehension led to his creative explanation of the Chinese character "new" as being a blend of the characters for "ax" and "tree" (Tan 7). Through his etymological interpretation, readers can understand that the poet's purpose of clearing with an ax is to make it new by "cutting underbrush" and "keeping it growing." The capitalized "MAKE IT NEW," as both a translated image and a visual image, encourages readers to imagine its role toward a new American poetics.

Following Pound's etymologically interpretative method, a group of young American poets in the 1950s, including Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Allen Ginsberg and Lew Welch, created images that suited their unique individual poetic styles through some selected Chinese written characters. For example, in his poem "Another for the Same," Snyder borrows the Chinese character for "hidden" to depict the beauty of Ono No Komachi (825–900?), a Japanese woman *waka* poet, after he watched the Japanese Noh play, *Sotoba Komachi*, in Japan.

> the best of your beauty
> always hidden, yū   幽
>
> "a glow of red leaves in the dark woods"
> in your gray eyes. (Snyder 1971: 79)

To make readers both read and see this character, the poet, as in his *Cantos*, placed it at the right end of the line and writes its meaning, "always hidden," and its pronunciation and level tone, "yū," on the left. Snyder saw it as picture-thing, due to its etymon being a pictogram 🀄, meaning "deep,

serene, and tranquil," which can be dismantled into two parts: the oracle bone script 屾 (literally, "mountain") and the large seal script 𤾔 (literally, "red"). The poet uses color adjectives as pigments to depict beauty: "red leaves," "dark woods," and "grey eyes" in a glow of dim light. The double quotation line below the character exhibits the poet's visual imagination of "always hidden" beauty: the best beauty of a woman is hidden in her body, whereas the best beauty of nature is the whole body of nature hidden everywhere. Within this context, readers not only understand the meaning of the Chinese written character, but also the implied meaning of the title "Another for the Same."

4. The Chinese Written Character as a Verbal-and-Visual Image

To the Western mind, the Chinese written character is the picture-thing whose materiality, owing to its spatial visibility and pictorial quality, makes it act as a visual image in poetry. By contrast, as written sign, the Chinese written character is imagery, the immateriality with picture-as-code of which makes it function as a verbal image to express the imaginary thing in the mind. Hence, from the perspective of interarts studies, the Chinese written character signifies a verbal-and-visual image to seek "the representation of the unrepresentable" (Krieger 22).

Historically, Chinese writing has been evolving for six thousand years, from the ancient script types, including the oracle bone script, bronze inscription, large seal script, and small seal script, to modern script types, including official script, cursive script, regular script, and semi-cursive script. Each type has its own typical handwriting, which has been developed into the art of calligraphy. In this respect, the Chinese written character is a representation of nature-text when the calligrapher imitates the traces left by winding streams, running lava, flickering wings, swaying branches, and galloping hooves in the physical world. As a result, "the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built with it a second world of metaphor, but has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue" (Fenollosa and Pound 55). What Fenollosa discovered is the ontological principle of poetry writing extracted from the Chinese written language as natural metaphor: from the seen natural image to the unseen intellectual image. Here, "the seen" signifies its superficial structure, indicating visual, natural actions, whereas "the unseen" uncovers its deep structure, suggesting a kind of spirituality beyond its materiality. As he pointed out,

> Chinese would be a poor language and Chinese poetry but a narrow art, could they not go on to represent also what is unseen. The best poetry deals not only with natural images but with lofty thoughts, spiritual suggestions and obscure

relations. The greater part of natural truth is hidden in processes too minute for vision and in harmonies too large, in vibrations, cohesions and in affinities. The Chinese compass these also, and with great power and beauty. (Fenollosa and Pound 53)

As natural metaphor, the Chinese written character (in particular, simple pictograms and composite ideograms) has its own "power and beauty," due to its graphemic creativity and pictorial visibility. Energy erupts when "[p]oetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged, and luminous from within" (Fenollosa and Pound 58). This eruption represents the semiotic fitness of the Chinese written character in adapting to its new environment – when both the seen and the unseen qualities are successfully presented in another language through the interpreter's semiotic selection and semiosis.

Snyder's poem "The Uses of Light" illustrates how the Chinese written character contributes to building up the unseen intellectual fabric in another poetic language. In this work, the poet encourages the stones, the trees, the moth and the deer to speak out their enlightenment through "the uses of light" (Snyder 1974: 39). For such beings, "light" as a tool has its own material use: warming, growing, lightening, and watching. But the poet passes the seen material light into the unseen immaterial relations, that is, the Buddha light acting as a mental image of transcendence and enlightenment. In the last stanza, the poet attempts to persuade all sentient beings to transcend:

> A high tower
> on a wide plain.
> If you climb up
> One floor
> You will see a thousand miles more.

> 禪

Chinese readers recognize straightaway that this stanza comes from the last two lines of a Tang poem, "Climbing Yellow Crane Tower," by Wang Zhihuan (Wang Chih-huan). Critics may also know that they are adapted from Snyder's own translation of Wang Zhihuan's poem "Climbing Crane Tower":

> The white sun has gone over the mountains
> The yellow river is flowing to the sea.
> If you wish to see a thousand li,
> Climb one story higher in the tower. (Snyder 1999: 542)

Comparing the poems, readers will find that the same seen material images are used in both poems: a high tower and a wide plain. Obviously, owing to its clarity, concision, crispness, and readability, Snyder's translated images in his poem are closer to the last two lines of the original Chinese poem. Most importantly, to express the unseen immaterial relations, Snyder has placed the traditional Chinese character for "Chan / Zen" at the bottom, suggesting that the Buddha light, a kind of philosophical, transcendental wisdom, can be used for transcendence. The white space between the character and the line, "You will see a thousand miles more," indicates that this transcendence will enable people to see what the real land is. The poet, like a guru, invites readers to climb up and have a "right seeing" of the cultural and political scene embedded in the character. Hence, the Chinese character for Chan Buddhism, as a verbal-and-visual image, is semiotically fit in the poem "The Uses of Light."

   In American poetic experiments, simple pictures are sometimes used to facilitate a better understanding of the deep structure of the Chinese written character. Like a painter or a calligrapher, a poet draws rather than writes a thing or a picture-thing image with special pigment in a poem. In the Poundian ideogrammic line, Philip Whalen is one of the pioneers using both pictures and Chinese written characters in his poetry. For example, in his poem "Scenes of Life at the Capital," he points out that some serious mistakes are unavoidably made if the Chinese written character is understood word by word, in particular when the character is a polysemant. In the poem, a proper noun containing the same three Chinese ideograms, literally "Great Book Mountain," is enumerated to express his attitude toward the Poundian wrong approach. He glosses them as "BIG / HEADQUATERS / MOUNTAIN   / (temple of whatever Buddhist sect)" (Whalen 630) on the right, which contrasts with the Chinese ideograms placed vertically on the left. The capitalized "BIG / HEADQUATERS / MOUNTAIN" gives readers an impression of warning. For him, this is a new kind of philological crime: "I wish to God / I never see your face / Nor heard your lion tongue" (Whalen 631). To alert other poets, Whalen draws a simple picture: a man with glasses is dropped into the "word ocean," where he screams out: "get me out of here! Bail me out of the WORD OCEAN" (see the picture below).

get me out of here! Bail me
out of the WORD OCEAN

"I wish to God
I never see your face
Nor heard your lion tongue"
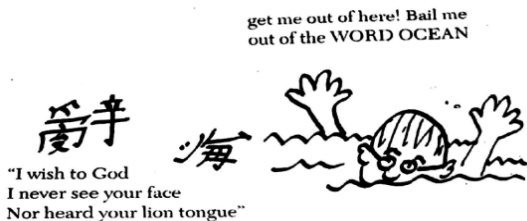
The phenomenon of "WORD OCEAN" reflects the bewilderment of the 1950s young American poets when they followed Pound in their poetic experiments.

Like a philologist, in *The Cantos*, Pound tended to excavate the multifarious lexical meanings of the selected Chinese ideogram, marking with its Chinese pronunciation, tone and English meanings on the page based on his Chinese-English dictionaries (Qian 1995: 102; 2003: 211).[3] This scientific, etymological interpretation is what Pound advocated in his poetics, that is precision. It is a way of historicizing Chinese Confucian ethic in the "WORD OCEAN," which misunderstanding is unavoidably generated due to some ideograms with multiple meanings. Some young poets criticized Pound after they had learned Chinese. For example, Gary Snyder, often categorized as follower of the Poundian ideogrammic method, contends that he acquired his ideogrammic method not from Pound, but "[f]rom the Chinese poetry directly" (Snyder 1999: 324). In relation to Fenollosa's essay, Snyder stated that "I could never make sense of that essay by Pound. I already knew enough about Chinese characters to realize that in some way he was off, and so I never paid much attention to it" (1999: 324). Hence, he had "more of a sense of clarity" than "Pound or even Fenollosa" when "juxtaposing apparently unrelated things" to "make a whole form" (Faas 132-34).

5. The Transformed Chinese Written Character as a Thinking-and-Thinging Image

Unlike the calligrams of the concretists, modern American poets have created their own poetic form, the "concrete ideogram," which is a less visually abstract use of word design. Instead, more pictorial Chinese ideogrammic elements are employed in their creative works; hence, typographic design is a crucial means to make the whole poem look like the "thing" depicted in phonetic writing. In their poetic experiments, American poets prefer to use indented lines, white space, romanized spelling, and character dismantlement in the text. They attempt to make the transformed Chinese written character function as a thinking-and-thinging image.

E. E. Cummings is the acknowledged master of graphemic creativity, adept at making words into pictures in his poetry. The correspondence between Pound and Cummings evidences that Cummings had some knowledge of Chinese ideograms and was well acquainted with Pound's ideogrammic method. In his letter of 26 December 1935 to Cummings, Pound wrote, "[I] [h]ave just had proofs of the Chinese character, with my new notes," which refers to his edition of Fenellosa's essay as a book. In a letter from Cummings to Pound, from about 1956, Cummings wrote a big traditional Chinese written character 火煑, explaining that "[t]he Chinese characters [sic] at the top of this note can be interpreted variously as 'fry,'

'cook,' or 'burn'" (Pound / Cummings 86, 381). Cummings's understanding is correct regarding the meaning of this character. Pound also discussed Chinese ideograms with Cummings in his letter, stating that "an English word is NOT the equivalent of an ideogram," and "[a] trans / of an ideogram CAN assist the reader of not-chinese toward an understanding of an ideogram" (Pound / Cummings 334). For Pound, translation, in particular transliteration, is necessary for understanding more comprehensively the meaning of Chinese characters. In his footnote to "Canto LXXXV," Pound explained that the "[m]eaning of the ideograms is usually given in the English text, transliterations as Couvreur and Mathews" (559). Through his interpretative activities, Pound successfully linked Chinese ideograms with new American poetics. In fact, Pound's "Ideogrammic Series" was intended to include "volumes by Pound, Cummings, Eliot, Williams, and possibly others" (Pound / Cummings 61), though it was not, in the event, published.

Though Cummings includes no Chinese written character in his poetry, he topographically designs his poems into word-pictures by dismantling English words, using indented lines and white space, and imitating object shapes, whose method is similar to Pound's character dismantlement approach. Take one of his poems as an example:

Beautiful

is the
unmea
ning
of (sil
ently) fal
ling (e
ver
yw
here) s

Now (Cummings 713)

This is an untitled poem without any punctuation, in which the poet attempts to define what is "beautiful" in a word-picture, that is, "Beautiful is the unmeaning of (silently) falling (everywhere) snow." The poet employs the material image "falling snow" to visualize the dynamic process of nature and make the reader perceive what is "beautiful." The effect of this metaphorical enumeration is similar to that of a koan in Chan Buddhism, in which esoteric teachings are explicated by Chan master via nature imagery. To express "the unmeaning of falling snow," Cummings adopts the character dismantlement approach to split "unmeaning" into "unmea + ning," which interrupts the continuity of the meaning. His direct treatment of "falling snow" as an "unmeaning" thing corresponds to the first principle

of Imagism that Pound advocated. To project its spatial visibility and temporal transiency, the poet dismantles "everywhere" into "e + ver + yw + here" and "snow" into "s + Now," in which the meaningful phrase "here and Now" induces readers to experience the visuality of snow falling everywhere. The capitalized "Now" illustrates a visual picture of the momentarily falling snow "here," right on the spot which the poet sees or pictures mentally. Also, the dismantled parts, like "ning," "ling," "sil," and "s," make readers "here" seem to hear the sound of "silently falling snow." Like his well-known "falling leaf" poem "l(a)," Cummings utilizes his typical "visual stanza," a spatial structure, in this "falling snow" poem to "create meaning which is not present in the words themselves" (Heusser 278). In such a "visual stanza" poem, "lines are arranged in reference, not to rhyme and meter, but to a shape reflecting the poet's thought" (Triem 12). For Cummings, the main qualities of "beautiful" are embodied in pure, simple, natural, yet sometimes transitory things, like "falling snow" in the physical world. In this poem, through the material image of "falling snow," the poet, therefore, unravels the unseen immaterial relations with the concept of "beautiful," in which "the expression becomes an expressible that intervenes in sense together with content-expressible" (Wong 7).

Manifest intertextuality is another approach used by American poets to seek the representation of the unseen relation in the process of acculturation. It extends Julia Kristeva's original concept of intertextuality, which is defined as "the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position" (Kristeva 15). "In manifest intertextuality, individual other texts are explicitly present in the text under analysis" (Fairclough 1992: 271). Its objective is "to specify what other texts are drawn upon in the constitution of the text being analysed, and how" (Fairclough 2006: 233). A better understanding of the transformed Chinese written character in modern American poetry can be gained through this concept.

In his poem "Wichita Vortex Sutra," Allen Ginsberg refers to his borrowing of the Chinese ideogram "truth" from Pound and introduces it into his own text: "Language, language / Ezra Pound the Chinese Written Character for truth / defined as man standing by his word / Word picture: forked creature / Man / standing by a box, birds flying out / representing mouth speech" (Ginsberg 400-01). He admits that this "truth" ideogram virtually derives from both Fenollosa's and Pound's explanation, which constitutes a manifest intertext. The title "vortex" has a twofold meaning: one refers to Pound's poetic revolutionary movement in the wake of imagism (later "vorticism") that Ginsberg claims to follow; the other indicates the nation's crisis of integrity, for it is now falling into a vortex. The word "sutra" suggests that this poem appears to be like a Buddhist teaching on integrity. Though no Chinese character appears in the poem, the lines give us an indication that the etymological interpretation of the character "truth" as "man standing by his word" is in accordance with the character

dismantled in Fenollosa's essay. That is, "[m]an and word, man standing by his word, man of his word, truth, sincere, unwavering;" and "[t]he word sign is radical supposedly from combination of tongue and above: ? mouth with tongue coming out it" (Fenollosa and Pound 69). Fenollosa's question mark in his interpretation does not prevent Ginsberg from dismantling the character "word" into "mouth" and imagining it as a box. For the "forked creature" who never abides by the "truth," the man is "standing by a box" with "birds flying out." The dismantled part "mouth" from the character "word," "representing mouth speech," makes the character "truth" in this poem shift from the moral thinking of the "truth" to the natural process of the "word picture," a sort of thinging. Language is a record of one's thinking, but its unseen power should not be ignored, for it can be used as a weapon. As the poem continues to articulate, "The war is language, / language abused / for Advertisement, / language used / like magic for power on the planet: / Black Magic language, / formulas for reality— / Communism is a 9 letter word / used by inferior magicians with / the wrong alchemical formula for transforming earth into gold" (400-01). The metaphor, "The war is language," indicates that America "had just accepted a packet of fabricated incidents as reasons for the escalation of the war in Vietnam" (Saussy 7). Hence, in reality, the formulas of language are equivalent to language energy with two extremes: when language is abused for propaganda, the situation will worsen, just like "the wrong alchemical formula for transforming earth into gold."

In 1950s American poetry, one outstanding example of manifest intertextuality between English and Chinese picture-signs is Lew Welch's "The Wanderer" (217-18), the last poem in his collection *Ring of Bone: Collected Poems 1950-1971*. It was written in 1970, one year before his mysterious suicide-style disappearance in the woods of Nevada County, California. Welch employs four hexagrams 56, 39, 2, 55 from the Chinese Classic *I Ching or Book of Changes* as an interpretation of his life journey. As a result, the poem is his poetic miniature spiritual autobiography. Unlike Pound, Snyder, and Whalen, Welch never placed any Chinese written character in his text, but drew simple pictures as illustrations, complemented by the romanized spelling of the character to show its pronunciation. Without his hand-made hexagram as a clue on the left side, few readers would recognize that the title "The Wanderer" is derived from the LU hexagram (meaning "the wanderer;" LU, literally, "journey") from the *I Ching*. In his drawing, one may discern that Chinese ideograms are written in alphabetical writing signs, such as CHIEN (meaning "obstruction"), K'UN (meaning "earth"), FÊNG (meaning "abundance"), LI (meaning "fire"), and CHÊN (meaning "thunder"), with brief interpretations in English. Welch's drawing is based upon Cary F. Baynes's English translation of *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, which is rendered from the German translation of Richard Wilhelm. The hexagrams with boldface and lightface type in his drawing look like Chinese calligraphy, akin to an ekphrastic poem with hexagrams or

trigrams. To show the dynamic process of changes, Welch used the sign "o" for "broken line," and "x" for "unbroken line" in his drawing so that readers can understand how the first hexagram 56 (LU) is changed into the second hexagram 39 (CHIEN), from the third hexagram 2 (K'UN) to the fourth hexagram 55 (FÊNG), and then know how his life journey is changed into the wrong direction (see Welch's hand-made hexagram picture below).
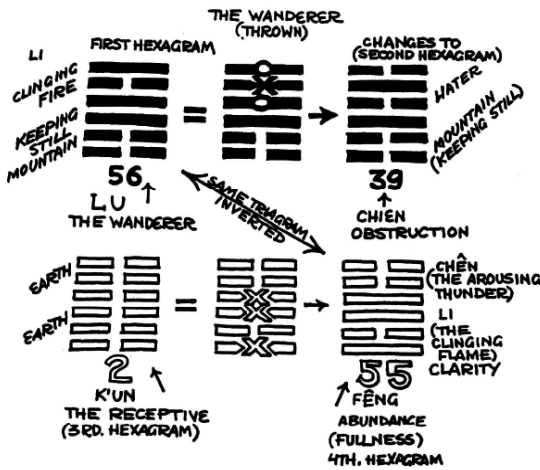
From Welch's poem with a hand-drawn picture, we can determine that this poem is a multiple-manifest intertext concerning the motif that "Life is a journey," a culturally conceptual metaphor. The manifest intertextuality exists in three ways: first, between the poet's hand-made hexagram and his poem "The Wanderer"; second, between the poet's hand-made hexagram and the related hexagram in the *I Ching or Book of Changes*; and third, between the poet's life experience away from the Beat Generation Literary Movement and the content of the poem "The Wanderer."

    With Welch's own hexagram in mind, readers realize that this poem is much simpler and easier to understand. The first stanza is about the first hexagram LU (THE WANDERER), which consists of two trigrams: LI (☲, CLING FIRE) and KEN (☶, KEEPING STILL MOUNTAIN). The poem starts a description of "fire on the mountain" and his "seeking to put it out." When he "chose to move to the right," the poet found that it is "an *Easterly* direction, against / all Nature (for he had not / noticed that the Sun, his sign, / moves *Westerly* — and that all / Men follow the Sun" (217). His destiny is changed, due to the wrong direction: "Thus the Wanderer walked / All the 64 spokes of the / Great Wheel — of course, he was fortunate enough, / or fool enough, to have / lept over many of the / Stations of The Way" (217). In the second hexagram, because "fire, LI, flames up and does

not tarry," LI (☲) is now changed into KAN (☵), "the abysmal, water" situation. In *I Ching,* the CHIEN hexagram, consisting of two trigrams: KAN and KEN, "represents obstructions that appear in the course of time but that can and should be overcome" (Baynes 351). The Chinese character for CHIEN can be dismantled into two parts: "obstruction" and "feet," a visual perception of overcoming obstacles by walking. Consequently, as the poem informs readers, the wanderer had to leap over "many of the Stations of The Way." These two stanzas suggest Welch's own thinking of his life experience with a wrong direction as thinging, which eventually leads to his mysterious Han Shanian death as thinging.

Welch unfortunately missed the famous historical poetry reading at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in October 1955, launched by Kenneth Rexroth, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Michael McClure, when he went to Chicago for part-time work. His journey from San Francisco to Chicago is absolutely "an *Easterly* direction against all Nature" as he depicts in his poem, for he had not anticipated the influence of this poetry reading in society, nor did he realize that this historical meeting of young poets from eastern and western coasts would be recorded as a big event in American literary history. As it says in the fourth stanza, "Perhaps he was only born / upside down, or with his / eyes turned in the wrong / direction, or crossed or / something. Who knows?" (217). As a result of his absence at the poetry reading, his poetic talent was largely ignored by the media and by critics who study the Beat Generation and San Francisco Renaissance of the 1950s. On 23 May 1971, like Han Shan, an ancient Chinese Tang hermit, a Beat hero he admired, Welch walked out of the poet Gary Snyder's house in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, leaving behind a suicide note. He carried a stainless steel .22 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, but his body was never found. The poem may suggest his own philosophical thinking about his planned mysterious death, for the poet addresses his wife Magda: "It's enough to be home, / at last, Magda, for / when you found me I / wasn't even wandering / anymore, just lost — / Abundance, fullness, right / before my eyes" (218). The fourth hexagram 55 (FÊNG) is the same hexagram inverted as the first hexagram 56 (LU), indicating a life circle, from dust to dust.

6. Conclusion

Of the unprecedented influence of the Chinese ideogram in Western poetry, in particular in modern American poetry, Fenollosa asserted in the opening of his manuscript, "[t]his twentieth century not only turns a new page in the book of the world, but opens another and a startling chapter" (Fenollosa and Pound 42). This startling chapter is about the advent of the

Chinese written character (including its linguistic metamorphosis) as a medium for modernist poetry, which points towards a new poetics of literary visual culture.

When the Chinese written character as an image or a translated image is semiotically fit in its new environment, we cannot take for granted that it is only one character or a combination of characters as picture-thing placed in another language. It should be understood as an intertextual or a manifest intertextual text, in which the deep structure of the character, including philosophical thinking, can be interpenetrated through the seen material character to its unseen immaterial relations, eventually to achieve its semiotic fitness in its adapted environment. In this sense, manifest intertextuality involving the Chinese written character in modern American poetry is a reflection of Fenollosa's organicism: "The real process of thought does not merely label things, like so many apothecary's jars on a shelf. A thought grows like a living tissue"; "thinking is thinging, to follow the buds of fact as they open, and see thought folded away within thought like so many petals" (quot. Chisolm 168).

Like a biologist, Fenollosa analyzed the living tissue of the Chinese ideogram and outlined its essential, natural properties. His work is in accordance with Pound's final goal of seeking "the objective presentation of material" for American new poetics "without the need for symbolist, expressionistic or romantic attributes" (Nadel 2). To Pound's mind, "[t]he first definite assertion of the applicability of scientific method to literary criticism is found in Ernest Fenollosa's *Essay on the Chinese Written Character*" (1961: 18). Relying on Fenollosa's scientific analysis of the Chinese ideogram, Pound invented the ideogrammic method for poetry writing. In particular from Pound's practice, Géfin found that "[t]he isomorphic-cumulative ideogram is almost invariably tied to myth, and through myth to fundamental processes of nature" (29-40).

However, in light of Fenollosa-Pound's ideogrammic-etymological method, we have to acknowledge that Fenollosa emphasized the Chinese written character as nature metaphor, a vehicle for English poetry. By contrast, Pound invented the ideogrammic method out of the Chinese written character and took it as a scientific method, a method of poetry generated out of its etymological link with the root of the Chinese written character as picture-thing. In Pound's view, "Fenollosa's essay was perhaps too far ahead of his time to be easily comprehended. He did not proclaim his method as a method. He was trying to explain the Chinese ideograph as a means of transmission and registration of thought" (Pound 1961: 19). What Pound cares about is "to get his method correct, the method for *The Cantos* and for modernist poetry;" rather than "whether he represented the Chinese character correctly or Fenollosa correctly (Qian 2003: 152).

The Poundian ideogrammic method fascinated many young American poets in the 1950s so that they started to translate, imitate, emulate and innovate the Chinese ideogram as an image and as translated image in their

own poetic writing. For them, the application of the ideogrammic method goes beyond how to understand the Chinese written character itself; it is not only a new method for their poetry writing, but also a new tradition deviating from the mainstream represented by giants such as T. S. Eliot. Following the Poundian ideogrammic tradition means that they would have the chance of becoming "part of a movement representing a 'new poetry,' one generated by an altered conception of the poet's relation to phenomenological and artistic experience" (Beech 19). In this respect, "Pound's work foregrounded for younger poets the importance of understanding language and form beyond the traditional concerns of poetry (diction, tone, and rhyme) so as to encompass the structural, etymological, and sonic properties of language, as well as the implicit social and political structures language contains" (Beech 22). No wonder young American poets such as such Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, George Oppen, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg acknowledge Pound's influence and especially his techniques on them (Tan 136).

Following Pound's ideogrammic way, some young American poets, such as Ginsberg, Snyder, Whalen, Welch, and Cummings we discussed above, attempted in their own poetic experiments to mimic pictorial features and capture the regenerative vitality of the Chinese written character within their alphabetic writing. The expressiveness of Chinese written characters and these poets' power of translating Chinese characters into pictures or pictorial things virtually constitute the two sides of graphemic creativity, which make Chinese written characters, acting as verbal-and-visual images, become more expressible in both sense and content. Consequently, as both images and translated images, by self-entanglement, Chinese written characters produce beauty and power, which enables them to be semiotically fit in modern American poetry. Like living organisms, the survival of Chinese written characters in another language articulates their success in reinterpreting related organismic information while adapting to its new environment.

Whatever etymological, historical, or aesthetic strata they reside in, as verbal-and-visual images in modern American poetry, Chinese written characters testify to both the success of a revolutionary art of words into pictures, and the semiotic fitness of the Chinese written character as a translated image in a target language. Therefore, the entire process of deploying the Chinese written character and its linguistic metamorphosis in phonetic writing, from semiotic selection, through semiosis, to semiotic fitness, is an embodiment of Fenollosa's idea of "thinking is thinging," an "organic interplay" of uniting a poet's "educational, historical, and aesthetic thinking" (Chisolm 168). As David A. Colón holds, "[t]he 'ideogram' must be understood as a protracted endeavor that spanned the entire Modernist period" (16).

Notes

1. According to Achilles Fang, Fenollosa's essay was "first published in *Little Review* VI, 5, 6, 7, 8 (Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1919) and then reprinted in *Instigations of Ezra Pound* (New York, 1920, pp. 357-88); in 1936 it appeared as a book (New York: Arrow Editions; London: S. Nott) as Number 1 of 'Ideogramic Series edited by Ezra Pound' (there is no subsequent number of this series)" (p. 215). The essay, edited by Ezra Pound in 1918, was accompanied by a subtitle together with its authorship and illustration, that is, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica*, Ernest Fenollosa, *with a Foreword and Notes* by Ezra Pound.

2. According to *Shuo-wen jie-zi* (*Explanations of Simple and Composite Characters*), a second-century dictionary (about 121) by Xu Shen, it is estimated that only about four percent of Chinese written characters are pictographic (simple pictograms and composite ideograms), while semantic-phonetic characters (composite phonograms) account for about eighty-two percent. Regarding the formation of the Chinese written character, there are six scripts or six graphic principles known as *Liu Shu* in traditional Chinese etymology, that is, *hsiang-hsing* (simple pictograms, or pictographs, meaning "imitating the form"), *chih-shih* (simple ideograms, meaning "pointing at the thing"), *huei-yi* (composite ideograms, meaning "understanding the meaning"), *hsieh-sheng* (composite phonograms or pictophonetic compounds, meaning "harmonizing the sound"), *chuan-chu* (transmissive words, meaning "mutually defining"), and *chia-chieh* (borrowed words, meaning "borrowing") (James J. Y. Liu 3-6).

3. Based on Prof. Zhaoming Qian's research, Pound learned Chinese written characters from three Chinese-English sourcebooks: *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (1865) by Robert Morrison that Dorothy bought by in 1914; *The Chinese Language and How to Learn it: A Manual for Beginners* (1907-09, 2nd edition, 1910) by Sir Walter Caine Hillier that Dorothy used in the 1910s, and *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (1931, revised edition 1944) by Robert Henry Mathews, a copy sent by Willis Hawley in the 1950s.

Funding

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