



# Confucianism in Pound's Cantos

## 庞德《诗章》中的儒学

南开人  
文库

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## 内容提要

本文研究庞德《诗章》中主题的统一性,论证了庞德所描绘的建筑在其儒学体系上的儒家乐园是贯穿全诗的核心主题。

这项研究首先探讨了庞德走向儒学的历程,一生信奉儒学的原因,阐明了《诗章》中儒家乐园这一主题同诗中一些次主题的关系。庞德在《诗章》中描述了西方社会的丑恶和满目疮痍,旨在反衬儒家乐园的美好。他阐述了西方社会腐败的根源,旨在证明把儒学引入西方使之成为治国治世的理论基础的必要性。他考查了孔子诞生前约 3000 年的中国历史,试图证明儒学是这 3000 年文明史的结晶。他叙述了自孔子时期至乾隆 2000 多年的历史,目的是要说明以儒学原则为治国方略,国家则安定繁荣。这些内容以及已发现的《诗章》中其他的次主题都是围绕着他的治世理想——儒家乐园——这一核心主题展开。因此,儒家乐园是贯穿全诗的核心主题。

其次,本文研究了《诗章》中庞德对其儒家乐园的定位,(乐园同包括自然在内的宇宙万物的关系),乐园的支柱,经济政策,人伦道德,以及人的正心修身,从而阐明了庞德的儒学体系,展示了诗人以这一体系为指导写出的儒家乐园。在庞德的蓝图中,他的儒家乐园是自然的一部分。“仁”是乐园最重要的支柱,因为“仁”是天道的反映。而正心修身则是贯彻实施儒学原则的保证。

庞德《诗章》中的儒学是“庞德学”的一个难点。《诗章》中的儒学观点有何相互关系?诗人仅仅在重复这些观点还是形成了一个自己的儒学体系?这是庞德的儒学的难点所在。《诗章》的另一个

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难点是全诗有没有一个能把所有已知的次主题连接起来的核心主题。这个问题之所以难主要是因为《诗章》没有传统意义上的情节，诗人在诗歌表现形式上又充满了实验和创新。本文关于儒家乐园是贯穿全诗的核心主题这一结论以及对庞德儒学体系的阐述为这两个难题提供了答案。

“庞德学”著作在西方已出版了许多。但是，研究整部《诗章》中庞德和儒学以及儒学主题和其他主题的关系的论著本文是首例。

关键词： 庞德      《诗章》      儒学      儒家乐园

注1： 本书沿用庞德中的汉字拼音。书后附有庞德文章中的汉字拼音同中国汉字和目前标准的汉语标音的对照表(Glossary)。

注2： 庞德《诗章》中用的是繁体汉字。本书在引用庞德的原文时，沿用繁体以保持原文的意义和风貌。

## Abstract

This study concentrates on the unity of Pound's *Cantos*. It argues that Pound's concept of Confucian paradise is the central thematic focus that links various other themes in the poem. Pound presents the hellish conditions of the modern world as a foil to his paradise and emphasizes the necessity of renovation. He traces the causes of the decay of the West and prescribes Confucianism as the right medicine to cure the Western diseases. He examines the 5000 years of Chinese history to tell about the historical sources of Confucianism and to prove its validity as a theory of order. All these and other sub-themes reveal fully their reasons and significance only when considered in light of the central theme of the Poundian Confucian paradise. In this way, this work helps answer the question, whether there is thematic unity in *The Cantos*.

This book offers a detailed reading of Pound's vision of his paradise. His paradise is based on his understanding of Confucianism. His Confucianism consists of three parts: Confucian metaphysics, Confucian humanism, and self-cultivation and daily renovation. Based on this system, Pound depicts his paradise as a world that is a harmonious part of nature, has *ren* as its central foundation and takes self-cultivation and daily renovation as the guarantee of the implementation of Confucian principles. By pre-



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senting Pound's Confucian paradise, the study demonstrates the cohesiveness of Pound's Confucianism; he was not a mere repeater of Confucianism; he wove his interpretations of the Chinese philosophy into a new philosophical wholeness of his own to respond to the modern exigency.

**Key Words:** Pound; *The Cantos*; Confucianism; Confucian paradise

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## Introduction

### Literature Review, Research Purpose and Methodology

Ezra Pound was one of the most important innovative leaders of literary Modernism. His theory and practice have been a driving force, a strong vortex that has propelled and energized literary development since the second decade of the twentieth century. His major work is *The Cantos*, on which he had been working for well over sixty years.

Reading *The Cantos* has always been a challenging task. Among a variety of problems the poem presents, the most significant is whether there is a unifying theme that unites the various themes in this enormous poem. Although it is fascinating and important to discover the poem's fantastic images, great ideas and the local consistency in certain part of the poem as most of the Poundian studies have done, demonstrating the thematic coherence of the poem's materials by relating its parts to its whole remains the most difficult and yet the most crucial work of *Cantos* criticism. It is on this work that this book concentrates.

The work is difficult first because the poem exhibits no "plot" structure, though there is a unifying metaphor in the

poem, the journey of Odysseus in quest of home. Secondly, the difficulty lies also in the ideogrammic method, a procedure that dispenses with grammatical logic as a means of connecting a series of poetic images and depends, instead, upon a means of association by which juxtaposed images elucidate one another through patterns of similarity and contrast. And what makes the poem further difficult to understand is Confucianism that Pound presents according to his understanding in the ideogrammic method.

Since the publication of the first section of *The Cantos*, critics have been asking the question whether *The Cantos* possess any thematic unity. Many major Pound critics gave negative answers to this question. George P. Elliott regarded *The Cantos* as "that large, occasionally splendid, disintegrating bundle of poetry and mutter" and said that "Pound is radically incoherent" (161).

A. Alvarez, another Pound critic, writes in his article *Craft and Morals*: "It (the poem) is full of names, figures and actions; but the abiding central life of the artist judging and ordering the details, creating them in his own coherence, is not there" (54).

Noel Stock, who is a poet as well as a famous Pound critic, concurs in this view and says:

[T]he meaning of the whole work becomes no clearer as he passes Canto 50, and then Canto 70, and actually begins to recede after he passes into the *Rock-Drill* section (Cantos 85-95)

and the job of giving a major form to such a vast understanding is beyond him, and when cracks begin to show he tries to fill them with hasty and inferior materials (122).

Four years after he wrote the above words, Mr. Stock wrote another book *Reading The Cantos: A Study of Meaning in Ezra Pound*. In this book he even maintains that *The Cantos* is not really a poem at all, but notes toward a poem; a collection of fragments of varying quality, some of extraordinary power and beauty, but in no sense formed into a unified work of art.

The negative view was so prevailing that George Dekker thought that “if this kind of denial of the poem’s unity prevails, criticism will have reduced Pound from consideration as a formidable major poet to the status of an occasionally brilliant but generally incoherent crank” (203).

There do exist positive answers to the question of thematic unity of the poem, but their arguments do not seem sufficient or convincing. Richard Pevear senses that “There is a feeling of wholeness in *the Cantos* that is very hard to explain” (133). “The unifying action of *the Cantos*,” as he understands, “is the struggle to move from the darkness of history into the light of the sun” (135). But he doesn’t specify what is in the darkness and what will be under “the light of the sun” in his short essay. What he points out is a process in the poem rather than a major theme.

Hugh Kenner, one of the most famous Pound scholars, thought that “In the *Cantos* the place of a plot is taken by inter-

locking large scale rhythms of recurrence" (*The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, 300), and believed that in the "rhythms of recurrence" lies the essential unity of the poem. But he discovered no line of structural or thematic development in the poem and seemed to think that the pattern of theme-repetition alone could sustain the structural unity. He says: "In the Cantos . . . while everything may be said to be as important as everything else, no action, single or multiple, is being offered the reader for dramatic participation. . . . there is no sweep up to and away from a climactic moment or symbol" (*The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, 277).

G. P. Elliot summarises Kenner's position and at the same time points out its insufficiency. Kenner, he says,

devotes his energies to persuading you that the Cantos do have . . . a [rational] structure, the main principles of which seem to be "the rhythms of recurrence." It is not only a host of subjects, public and private, which recur, but also contrasting sets of imagery, for example those of mud and light. These sub-elements are composed into "ideograms" or "vortices," which, according to Kenner, are the structural units of the poem. . . . Granted that this statement means something, the recurrence of such elements can not be called a structure. . . . behind recurrence there is the fundamental question: why the recurrence? . . . If the recurrences and juxtapositions of the Cantos are there for their own sake, the poem is elaborately

trivial. Kenner fails to make clear what structurally valuable end these recurrences serve (161).

“[W]hy the recurrence” is the key question in the above passage. Pointing out “the rhythms of recurrence” is somewhat like Pevear’s noticing the process moving from “the darkness of history to the light of the sun” in the poem. What is more important is to discover what the recurrence and the process direct at. Nobody seems to have given an answer to this question.

*The Barb of Time* by Daniel D. Pearlman is a thought-provoking book on the structural and thematic unity of *The Cantos*, containing excellent exposition of Pound’s main ideas. Pearlman argues that the organic time as apposed to mechanical time is the central theme that unites the other themes in the poem. Organic time is, according to Pearlman, “the cosmic and seasonal cycles by which healthy societies regulate in all spheres of action”(28). It is, without doubt, a fundamental idea in *The Cantos*. But the idea alone is neither sufficient to function as the main theme to sustain the colossal poetic work nor comprehensive enough to incorporate all the sub-themes, such as the sub-theme of self-cultivation, into the organic-time thematic framework.

Akiko Miyake’s *Ezra Pound and the Mysteries of love* is also a book on the thematic unity of *The Cantos*. She regards the poem as a major work in the Christian mystic religious tradition and argues that the thematic coherence of *The Cantos* is based on Gabriel Rossetti’s mysteries of love. Ezra Pound did employ concepts of love in his writing of *The Cantos* and Miyake’s book helps us realize the importance of the concept in the poem, but

all his life Pound condemned Christianity and could not write in the Christian religious tradition. It seems far-fetched to put all the sub-themes together in the framework of the Christian mysterious love. The author herself admits that "some part of *The Cantos* do not seem relevant to this study, especially the parts related to contemporary history" (Miyake xii).

While alive, Pound himself was often disturbed by the question of the unity of the poem. He is said to have remarked in 1956 to one of his visitors at St. Elizabeth's hospital that "those who found no plan in *the Cantos* would be confounded when they were complete" (qtd. in Pearlman 6). In about 1967 when he was about to finish the enormous epic, he wrote in Canto CXVI the following lines that express further his concern and idea on the question of the poem's unity. First:

And I am not a demigod,

I can not make it cohere.

And then:

To "see again"

The verb is "see," not "walk on"

i. e. it coheres all right

even if my notes do not cohere (The Cantos 796-97)

The first passage reflects back on the poem and says that it does not cohere. And this Pound's detractors are quick to agree. But the second passage asserts that the poem "coheres all right." It becomes coherent when readers see it again. "To see" means to understand and see in the mind's eyes his images and visions in the poem; "to walk on" means to read and pass those images



quickly. So the two passages are not really contradictory, and in order to see the unity of *The Cantos* we must see the poem again and again.

Pound affirms the unity of the poem also in Canto LXXXVII. He writes: "Splendour, /It all coheres" (571). The line reappears in Canto CIX (772). This sentence is actually from Pound's *Sophocles: Women of Trachis* (50) and, according to Terrell, he adds in a note: "This is the key phrase, for which the play exists" (Terrell, 493). If this is the key phrase for that play, it is the key phrase for *The Cantos*, for which the poem exists.

In trying to see the poem, I have discovered that Confucian paradise is the central theme that links various other themes in the poem. Only when considered in the light of this central theme can readers understand why Pound writes about the modern hell, traces the process of the Western decay, examines the world history and discusses ethical, political, economic, religious and philosophical issues in *The Cantos*. The process moving from darkness to the light of sun as is pointed out by Richard Pevear is the process moving from the modern hell to the Confucian paradise. "The rhythms of recurrence" perceived by Hugh Kenner is the repeated rhythms of elaboration aiming at explain why the world needs Confucianism, what Confucianism is, what Western ideas are similar to Confucianism, and what actions are in agreement with Confucian principles. Both the organic time, which Daniel D. Pearlman regards as the main theme of the poem, and the notion of love with different shades of meanings are constituents of Pound's Confucianism. The theme of Confu-