

# *The Cantos* and Visualizing Confucianism

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**Abstract:** The profound kinship between Ezra Pound and Confucianism is one of the most productive research achievements of Pound Study and *The Cantos* study. The other equally hot issue in the field of Pound Study is the relationship between Pound and visual art. However there is a gap to be filled between the two fields, i.e. How does Pound visualize Confucianism in *The Cantos*. In essence this issue is also the relations between contents and form, or contents and structure of this modern epic. Against the current cultural background of “pictorial turn” to study this issue, the visualization of Confucian culture in *The Cantos* conveys strikingly different cultural and aesthetic meanings. In truth, the visual art and Confucianism in *The Cantos* form two running lines embodying Pound’s quest for poetics and Confucianism. The unique Confucian mask, “one word Confucianism” and the “joint structure” of Confucian ethics are the results of Pound’s visualization of Confucian culture. Zhao Yiheng puts in his *The Muse From Cathay*, Pound’s *Confucian Odes* is translated “by a rare clarity of purpose of Confucianization,” which holds true to Pound’s creation of *The Cantos*. It is not an exaggeration to say that *The Cantos* is written with a definite purpose of Confucianization and the way he reached this goal is “visualization.” The literary iconography this paper employs includes iconography maker—Confucius as a historical figure, the iconography features *The Cantos* embodied in the process of presentation of the Confucianism and what’s more, the visual metaphor of Confucian ethics embodied in the structure of *The Cantos*.

**Key words:** Ezra Pound; *The Cantos*; Confucianism; visualization; pictorial turn; Confucian ethics

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**标题:** 《诗章》与视觉化儒家思想

**内容摘要:** 庞德与儒家思想的渊源是庞德和《诗章》研究最丰富的成果之一，

能媲美这一研究热点的还有庞德与视觉艺术的关系研究。在此两个研究领域之间却一直有一个缝隙有待填平，那就是庞德对儒家文化的视觉呈现问题。这一问题从本质上说也是《诗章》的内容和形式的关系问题。在当代“图式转向”文化背景下审视这一问题，庞德《诗章》中儒家文化的视觉化呈现也显示出不同寻常的文化和美学含义。事实上，《诗章》中的视觉艺术和儒家思想构成了庞德对美学和儒学双重追求的两条线索，《诗章》中特有的孔子面具、“一字儒”、儒家思想的“双旋结构”等都是庞德对儒家文化视觉外化的结果。赵毅衡在《诗神远游》中说，庞德的《诗经》翻译带有“儒学化”的目的，此言也适用于《诗章》。毫不夸张地说，庞德的《诗章》书写也带有明确的“儒学化”的目的，而助他实现儒学化目的的正是视觉艺术呈现的方式。本文所运用的文学图像学定义既包括狭义上的“图像制造者”的人物——孔子，也包括《诗章》文本在对儒家思想的具体呈现过程中的图像特征，更包括《诗章》的结构体现的儒家思想的视觉隐喻。

**关键词：**艾兹拉·庞德；《诗章》；儒家思想；视觉化；图式转向；儒家伦理

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The profound kinship between Ezra Pound and Confucianism is one of the most productive research achievements of Pound Study and *The Cantos* study (Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* 3-13). The other equally hot issue in the field of Pound Study is the relationship between Pound and visual art. However there is a gap to be filled between the two fields, i.e. How does Pound visualize Confucianism in *The Cantos*. In essence this issue is also the relations between contents and form, or contents and structure of this modern epic. Against the current cultural background of “pictorial turn” to study this issue, the visualization of Confucian culture in *The Cantos* conveys strikingly different cultural and aesthetic meanings. In truth, the visual art and Confucianism in *The Cantos* form two running lines embodying Pound’s quest for poetics and Confucianism. The unique Confucian mask, “one word Confucianism” and the “joint structure” of Confucian ethics are the results of Pound’s visualization of Confucian culture (Ren Jiantao 1-8). Zhao Yiheng puts in his *The Muse From Cathay*, Pound’s *Confucian Odes* is translated “by a rare clarity of purpose of Confucianization,” which holds true to Pound’s creation of *The Cantos*. It is not an exaggeration to say that *The Cantos* is written with a

definite purpose of Confucianization and the way he reached this purpose is “visualization” (286). The literary iconography this paper employs includes iconography maker — Confucius as a historical figure, the iconography features *Cantos* embodied in the process of presentation of the Confucianism and what’s more, the visual metaphor of Confucian ethics embodied in the structure of *The Cantos* (Mitchell).

### “One Word Confucianism” and Visualizing Confucius

“One Word Confucianism” is put forward by Zhao Yiheng with reference to Pound’s way of using Chinese characters in Confucian Classics in *The Cantos* (Zhao Yiheng 310). The significance of Zhao’s “One Word Confucianism” lies in the following two aspects: 1) sum up neatly the main contents and resources of Chinese characters in *The Cantos*, which concerns Confucian classics itself; 2) point out the forms of Chinese characters in the *Cantos*: Chinese character as isolated unit integrated into the text of *The Cantos*, which concerns with *The Cantos* itself. Therefore it is not exaggerated to say that “One Word Confucianism” represents thoroughly Pound’s thought of Chinese Character as picture, which is the basic strategy of Pound’s visualizing Confucianism. This strategy helps Pound Confucianize *The Cantos* and visualize Confucianism at the same time. Derrida, the master of deconstructionism once showed great interest in Pound and his Chinese character complex. In his project of deconstructing logocentrism, Derrida arrested immediately this phenomenon in Western culture. Chinese character is a civilization developing outside of all logocentrism and Derrida endowed a name to Pound’s using of Chinese characters: graphic poetics (qtd. Zhang Longxi, The “Tao” and the “Logos” 388).

“One Word Confucianism” first of all realizes the visualization of the image of Confucius. In *Cantos*, Pound uses Vertical typesetting of Chinese Character “仲尼”(Zhong Ni or Pound’s Chung Ni) to foreground Confucius’s significance in *Cantos*. For example “仲尼” as Pound’s unique Picture appear in *Cantos* LVI(LVI/308)<sup>1</sup>:

Mongols are fallen  
 from losing the law of Chung Ni  
 (Confucius)  
 HAN came from the people  
 How many fathers and husbands are fallen  
 Make census  
 Give rice to their families  
 Give them money for rites

The second step of visualizing the image of Confucius is presenting his image with

1 Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975). Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.

“visual imagination.” At the very beginning of *Cantos XIII*(XIII/58), the image of Confucius stands vividly on the paper:

**K**UNG walked  
 by the dynastic temple  
 and into the cedar grove,  
 and then out by the lower river,  
 And with him Khieu, Tchi  
 and Tian the low speaking

This “painterly passages” seems to draw a picture of Confucius as vivid as life (Terrell 60). Meanwhile Pound imagines a situation in which Confucius propagated the doctrine, imparted professional knowledge, and resolved doubts:

And “we are known,” said King,  
 “You will take up charioteering?  
     The you will become known,  
 “Or perhaps I should take up chaioteering, or archery?  
 “Or the practive of public speaking?”  
 And Tseu-lou said, “I would put the defences in order,”  
 And Khieu said, “If I were lord of a province  
 I would put it in better order than this is”  
 And Tchi said, “I would prefer a small mountain temple,  
 “with odre in the observances,  
     With a sutable performance of the ritual,”  
 .....  
     And Kung smiled upon all of them equally  
 And Thseng-sie desired to know  
     “Which had ansered correctly?”  
 And Kung said, “They have all answered correctly,  
 “That is to say, each in his nature”

( XIII/58 )

Pound successfully “invents” his Confucian and Confucius by these “painterly passages” (Qian Zhaoming 59). This figure of Confucius is obviously not the “historical Confucius,” “but the character of Confucius who appears in the *Analects*” (Yang Xiao 499). Pound’s Confucius is in some sense the projection of his own nature and own dream. Pound’s desire for freedom and democracy made his Confucius “more



some internal logical connection; 2) Pound's "Personae" is expressed differently in the framework of Oriental culture. Wendy Stallard Flory, in terms of the relationship between Pound and Confucius, gives a more definite interpretation. Flory believes that by 1945, Pound's reliance on the writings of Confucius had become indispensable to him, in other words, Confucius became the key reference point for Pound's conception of himself as public activist and private individual, not only intellectually, but, in an even more influential way, psychologically (144).

### **"One Word Confucianism" and Visualizing Confucian Terminology**

In some sense, *Cantos* is a sort of reservoir of Confucian Terminology which is visualized by the technically used "One Word Confucianism." The concept that language is an imaginal thinking is not unique to Chinese culture and Chinese philosophy. Ludwig Wittgenstein, one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, once put, important language image was the picture in the "logic space" projected by certain philosophical proposition (Mitchell). American visual cultural scholar W. J. Thomas Mitchell declares in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, "This view of poetry, and of language in general, as a process of pictorial production and reproduction was accompanied in seventeenth-and eighteenth century English literary theory by a decline in the prestige of rhetorical figures and trope" (Mitchell 22). Mitchell in particular talked about Ezra Pound and Imagism. Mitchell believed that the image in poetry was not defined as "pictorial likeness or impression," but as "a synchronic structure in some metaphorical space—that which (in Pound's words) 'presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'" (Mitchell 25). *Cantos* maximizes the marks of Confucianism by visualizing its key words. Some critics believe that Pound's notion of use of Chinese Letters is to make the literary works vivid, the aim of which is a trope. In other words, Pound's use of Chinese Characters is to show that "poetry is supposed to embody image" which is "the poetic creation concept of modernist imagism" (Wang Guiming 104). It is true that this is one of the intentions of Pound's use of Chinese character, but obviously Pound goes beyond that.

To Western readers, the real visually intriguing images come from the Chinese characters on the pages of *The Cantos*. Girolamo Mancuso believes that Pound uses Chinese characters as visual pivot and around which words dispose poetics concepts of his own and even includes his invisible self (76). What Girolamo Mancuso put is obvious right but it is probably the flower rather than the root. In truth, Pound's visualization of Chinese characters can be traced back to his reading of "Fenollosa's essay on the ideographic nature of the Chinese written language"(Wil-

liams 146). In the latter part of *Cantos*, especially in *The Pisan Cantos* (LXXIV-LXXXIV 1948), *Rock-Drill De Los Cantares* (Lxxxv-XCV 1955), *Thrones de los Cantares* (XCVI-CIX 1959), Pound quotes lots of words of Classic Confucianism, such as 诚、信、明、仁、义、和、中、王、道、志、德、敬、显、旦、正名、日新、圣谕、光明, and in LXXVII, LXXXV, LXXXVI in particular, Chinese characters fill in the whole pages. Some scholars believe that there are two reasons that can explain the appearance of these Chinese characters: 1) Pound at that time was studying Chinese, attempting to retranslate *Analects* and translate *Mencius*, so the appearance of these Chinese characters are natural; 2) The appearance of Chinese characters represents Pound's creative concept at his early years, i.e., using original words and sentences without further interpretation, and the forms of different languages will enhance the stylistic feature and watching interests (Wang Guiming 103). This idea is impressive, but watching interests seem not to touch the essence of Pound's writing. Chinese Characters to Pound is Chinese culture. Zhang Longxi claims, "Western views of Chinese culture and the Chinese language are[...] closely intertwined from the very start" (Zhang Longxi 99). Sun Hong is more specific in this point. He believes that Pound finds the same Confucian philosophy expressed in Chinese Characters and in ideograms, and shared the Confucian concerns and affection for the visible things in nature (111). Rebecca Beasley in *Ezra Pound and the Visual Culture of Modernism* claims that Pound is devoted to the project of language revolution, the immediateness of visual image (55-57), "pushing language toward the condition of proper names rather than abstractions" (Dickey 257). For example, in *Cantos* LXXVII, LXXVIII and LXXIX, Pound inserts so many Chinese characters that Ira B. Nadel calls it "orient text" and believes that the meaning of this type of text can occur only when the visual "interacts" the linguistic (18). And more important, the "orient text" joints "two forms of perception," therefore Pound could present "a visual image" at the same time he outlines a "rhetorical function" (Nadel 18). Different fonts and sizes establish different codes or strategies for reading (Nadel 18). As Pound explains in a letter, all typographic disposition, placings of words on the page, is intended to facilitate the reader's intonation, whether he be reading silently to self or aloud to friends (Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound* 322). This combination of appearance and meaning, or text or sound, is Pound's "Phanopeia" (Nadel 18).

Therefore, it is obvious that Pound constructs the paper page as a "visual field" (Nadel 18). The Chinese characters in *Cantos* are born in the gazing of Pound and closed in the gazing of the readers, and the meaning is produced in the mutual gazings of the poet and readers. Pound's translating of *The Four Books* in

1937 is an interesting example. On one of his vacations, Pound did not bring his dictionary, so he had to gaze at the Chinese characters on the pages. Pound said that as he did not agree with the meaning of the translation, nor understand the meaning of the Chinese character, what he could do was to gaze at the radicals of the Chinese characters which is Pound's unique "Watching Chinese characters"(Zhao Yiheng). Pound did not understand Chinese, but he guessed the meaning with the help of dictionary and the unique ideogram of Chinese. In the eyes of Pound, Chinese is very much paintings and visualized graphs. Then how does Pound interpret his understanding of Confucianism via these visualized graphs is a frustrating, but rather academically valuable question. Peter Makin also talks about Pound's experience of watching Chinese characters and confirms "Poundian etymological misconception" (76), because he believes that this misconception and misreading ironically are proved to be a catalyst for some wonderful thoughts, making him get some inspiration and meaning for his translation (Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* 14-44). Peter remarks that this method in Pound's hand produces translations "that are not merely beautiful and curious, but coherent, at a high level of coherence" (124). Zhao Yiheng in *The Muse From Cathay* devotes one chapter to the discussion of "the Chinese Characters in *Cantos*." He believes that the full-page Chinese characters in *Cantos* are not so much a flaunting of Pound's knowledge as showing his admiration for Chinese cultures. At the same time the Chinese characters "achieve certain poetic and aesthetic effect." What's more, Pound used Chinese character "to represent meanings," using Chinese character as the "representation" of Confucianism, so that the Chinese characters which are double Dutch to Western readers become the "glorious rallying point" for poetic meanings and the threading symbol of the theme of paradise (Zhao Yiheng 310). Zhao Yiheng counts the occurrence frequency of Chinese characters in *Cantos*, and the findings are very impressive: 14 Chinese characters are used more than 5 times, respectively 正 (Zheng) (14 times)、明 (Ming) (10)、本 (Ben) (10)、止 (Zhi) (9)、新 (Xin) (8)、灵 (Ling) (8)、旦 (Dan) (8)、仁 (Ren) (7)、端 (Duan) (7)、日 (Ri) (7)、中 (Zhong) (7)、显 (Xian) (6)、周 (Zhou) (5) which are also the key words in Confucian classics. This "One Word Confucianism" is seemingly simple, but is crucial to Pound's grasping the essence of Confucianism. In addition, from the above calculation, it is not difficult to find that Pound is extremely concerned with a few issues: 1) the frequent occurrence of 中庸 (Zhong Yong)、正 (Zheng)、正名 (Zheng Ming, Pound's Ch'ing Ming or Cheng Ming) represents Pound's interests in Confucian Humanism; 2) Pound's concern about the concept of heyday which is embodied in Characters like "明" (Ming)、"显" (Xian)、"旦" (Dan)、

“周” (Zhou), etc.

### “One Word Confucianism” and Visualizing Confucian Ethics

*Cantos*' writing lasts for over 50 years. The ups and downs of Pound's life and social and political revolutions and transformations make *Cantos* seem to be inconsistent, so that even Pound himself admitted that he was afraid that *Cantos* was “rather obscure,” “especially in fragments” (Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941* 10). However with the development of *Cantos*' study, more and more critics realize that the seemingly loose structure is in truth logically integrated with some eternal rules running through *Cantos*. Just as Chinese scholar Zhu Yige puts, “the concept of Confucius has some integrated relation with the structure of *Cantos*” (110-114). Confucian Ethics, in particular the concept of “order” is one of them. In some sense this order eventually ensures the consistency of *Cantos*:

i.e. it coheres all right

even if my notes do not cohere.(CXVI/797)

Some critics notice that when Pound in 1937 resumed his study of Confucian classics, part of his aim was to “discover a coherent and systematic ethical base for *The Cantos*” (Nicholls 150), because “we are at the crisis point of the world” (Pound, *Confucius: The Great Digest, the Unwobbling Pivot, the Analects*).

Then what on earth is the order on which Pound put a high value and tries his best to explain? This order is an ethical order, or in the specific context of *Cantos*, an ethical order of Confucianism. In 1922 and 1923, when Pound drafted Confucian *Canto XIII*, his admiration and enthusiasm for Confucius became intensified. He set a high value on the doctrine of obligation and order of Confucianism which formed a strong contrast with the “other-worldliness” of Christianity (Nicholls 149):

And Kung gave the words ‘order’

and ‘brotherly deference’

and said nothing of the ‘life after death’.(XIV/59)

Pound uses “Order” and its synonyms “mantram” frequently in *Cantos*. For example, in his well-known essay “Immediate Need of Confucius” published in 1937, Pound used mantram instead of Order: “the Western need of Confucius, and ... specifically of the first chapter of the *Ta Hio*, which you may treat as a mantram, or

as a mantram reinforced; a mantram elaborated so that the meditation my gradually be concentrated into contemplation” (Pound, “Immediate Need of Confucius 77 ). “By ‘overusing’ it Pound has surprisingly recaptured something close enough to the original spirit” (Qian Zhaoming 61).

This concept of Confucian order in *Cantos* is realized through visualizing the “joint structure” of Confucian ethics and “one word Confucianism” again functions effectively. Pound described the Confucian world as “series of tensions” (Anderson 339) which are no other than the “joint structure” of Confucian ethics: moral idealism and ethical centralism (Ren Jiantao 6). “Moral idealism is an idealism rooted in the moral settlement of one’s lives which has eternal value and will not change with time and space; while ethical centralism is constructed on the basis of social demand and political control, the shortcoming of which is its provisionality with the change of time and space. Confucianism is lovely from the perspective of the former, ugly the latter. However choosing either of them is in truth hurting the wholeness of the ‘joint structure’ formed from its original stage” (Ren Jiantao 4). More and more scholars realize that “the Confucian school manifested a variety of forms in its relation to state power in order to bolster its dominance” and “Confucius’s notion of benevolence (Ren 仁 ) was related to his conception of propriety (Li 礼 )buttressing the order of blood-related hierarchical clan-based society” (Lim Tae-seung 1032). Pound absorbs both moral idealism and ethical centralism, therefore what he feels is Confucianism full of contradictions which is the reason why Pound views Confucian world as “series of tensions,” which are in some sense the unity and conflict between the sacredness and kingship. Confucian ethics forms joint structure in that the orientations of moral idealism of personal nature Confucianism and ethical centralism of social and political Confucianism, corresponding to the axis of the supreme morality internalized as cultivation and externalized as governance of virtue, coexist and mutually interact in Confucianism (Ren Jiantao 4). In *Cantos*, Kingcraft is also expressed with “one word Confucianism”:

Name for name, king for king

王 wang

王 wang

(LXXXIX/591)

Obviously this passage is a rewriting of “君君臣臣父父子子” which is the basic order of ancient Chinese family and society. The reason that the Chinese characters

like 尧 (Rao)、舜 (Shun)、禹 (Yu) (LIII/263、LVI/302、LVI/309)、周 (LIII/268、LIII/274、LVI/309) appear in *Cantos* is that they are the representative figures of “supreme morality internalized as cultivation and externalized as governance of virtue.”

What “supreme morality internalized as cultivation and externalized as governance of virtue” corresponds in Confucianism is two different types of order: 1) heart order on the basis of moral idealism; 2) social order on the basis of ethical centralism. There are similar interpretations of the types of Confucianism. Chinese scholar Xiao Bin in *Traditional China and Free Concepts* points out, the structure of Confucianism can be classified into personal disposition Confucianism and social and political Confucianism. And obviously this way of interpretation also corresponds to the heart order and social order. In *Cantos* these two types of order are fully represented and interpreted in unique Poundian way. What’s more, Pound insightfully points out the internal relations between the two:

If a man have not order within him  
He can not spread order about him,  
And if a man have not order within him  
His family will not act with due order,  
    And if the prince have not order within him  
He can not put order in his dominions. (XIII/59)

Sun Hong believes that what we see in *Cantos* is exactly the mode and form of *Da Xue*, particularly the first three of its ten Confucian gradations: correcting the self, regulating the family, and governing the state, and the philosophy gradations give form to Pound’s subject matter (100).

Some critics notice that “Pound’s identification with Confucius had both negative and positive consequences” that can be linked to the “two poles of the Confucian paradigm of reformist activity,” i.e. focus upon the governance of the state and attention to psychological “governance” of the self (Flory 145). A typical example of the negative influence of Confucian practical ethics is Pound’s support of Mussolini, for which his enthusiasm for Confucian leadership which in proper political atmosphere develops into his carter for political dictatorship should partially be responsible. But if we draw the conclusion that Confucianism plants the “seeds of fascism” in Pound’s heart (Cheadle 65-6), therefore it should be responsible for Pound’s Fascist stance (Feng Lan 8), it is too hasty to be logical and fair. And the reason is that they fail to see the “joint structure” of Confucian ethics.

Pound's obsession with both heart order and social order of Confucianism in some sense is supposed to be responsible for his uneven personal life and his split between his aesthetic pursuit and political ambition. So there is a widely accepted misunderstanding as to Pound's relation with Confucianism. For example, Flory once made an observation on the relation between Pound's life and his obsession with Confucianism: "When he can focus undistractedly on his work with the Confucian texts and the Chinese language, he is able to preserve his mental balance and sense of proportion. When his attention turns, in any sense, to politics and economics—or even when he begins to think about change and action—his obsessions and lack of contact with reality immediately become apparent" (Flory 149). What is implied in Flory's statement is Confucianism is more personal and moral than political and social. And if we access to Confucianism from both its heart order and social order, it is obvious that Pound is influenced by both and his kinship with Confucianism is not intermittent. Fully understanding of the "joint structure" of Confucianism will pave the way for a thorough grasping of the seemingly clumsy and frequently distracting structure of *The Cantos*, because in some sense Pound's painful dilemma and struggle between the heart order and social order, between moral idealism and ethical centralism can explain at least in part the coherence and fragments of *Cantos*.

Pound said that he was indebted to Confucius (Palandri), and the above analysis proves his statement. And of course in some senses, this indebtedness is mutual in that by visualizing Confucius to western readers, Pound willingly or unwillingly keeps "Confucian Blossoms' from falling" (Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism* 3). Pound attempts to conquer the distance between himself and the Orient, which is not realized through sustaining an "imaginative geography" but "through the direct absorption of a world manifested and made possible through his immediate engagement with its imagery and symbolic language" (Nadel 26). In other words, the aim of Pound's visualizing Confucius, Chinese characters and Confucianism is to shorten his distance with Chinese culture. And meanwhile, this method helps to realize his dream of decentralization and develop his modernist poetics as Pound's commitment to Confucianism can be traced back to 1914 which in some sense marks the burgeoning of modernist poetry and poetics (Feng Lan, *Ezra Pound / Ming Mao* 79-89). As to this, Derrida in his *Of Grammatology* has remarkable comments:

It was normal that the breakthrough was more secure and more penetrating on the side of literature and poetic writing : normal also that it, like Nietzsche, at

first destroyed and caused to vacillate the transcendental authority and dominant category of the episteme : being. This is the meaning of the work of Fenellosa whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known : this irreducibly graphic poetics was, with that of Mallarme, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given all its historical significance. (97)

Derrida believes that compared with philosophical and scientific activities, literary and poetic activities could realize the dream of “decentering” more accurately and sensibly. And Pound's literary practice is a canonical example. Pound on the one hand constructs modern poetics, on the other hand decenters Western centralism, and thus paves the way for his “Paideuma” (Wang Zhuo 151).

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