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The "Seven Lakes Canto" Revisited

My initial interest in Ezra Pound was aroused by the "Seven Lakes Canto" (or Canto 49). When I was doing research for my dissertation during the heyday of Pound scholarship, my work on this specific canto was based partly on research, partly on speculation. I knew that lines 37-40 were transliterations of Japanese readings of a famous Chinese song, known as *Ch'ing-yun ko*, supposedly praising the semi-legendary sage ruler Emperor Shun; lines 51-55 were a fairly accurate translation of the old Chinese folk song, *Chi-yang ko*, traditionally dated during the time of Emperor Yao, the predecessor of Shun. It was mainly my curiosity about the first 32 lines, whose sources I was unable to identify, that prompted me to visit Pound at St. Elizabeths in 1952.

During one of my interviews he told me that the main source of Canto 49, which presented a "glimpse of Paradiso," was from a "Chinese anthology," interleaved with pictures of scenes described in the poems. He received the book from his parents, who had acquired it from a missionary returned from the Orient. A Chinese lady, Miss Tseng, who visited him in Rapallo, helped him with the translation. Possibly misled by the word "anthology", I searched for poems bearing any reference to the scenes described in the "Seven Lakes Canto" in many known Chinese poetry anthologies, but in vain. Nor was I successful in finding out the identity of Miss Tseng, until 1968, when I met by chance her brother, Professor Tseng Yueh-nung, in Taiwan.

New light has been shed on the "Seven Lakes Canto" in recent years, by Professors Daniel D. Pearlman and Hugh Kenner. Pearlman has inserted facsimiles in his book, *The Barb of Time*, four of the eight poems and pictures of "Sho-Sho scenes" of the original "Chinese book." (Appendix B) Hugh Kenner's "extra luck" of having been shown an un-mailed letter Pound wrote to his father yielded the English paraphrase of the eight poems that made up lines 3-32. The puzzle relating to "The Seven Lakes Canto" is, in the main, solved. There remain a few questions yet to be answered.

In "More on the Seven Lakes Canto," after quoting a portion of Pound's letter to his father that contains the paraphrase of the Chinese poems, Kenner asks, "These paraphrases, not the Chinese, would appear to be what Canto 49 was made from. Where did they come from? . . . I

know of no Pound "translation" from the Chinese in which he was not guided by another version, Fenollosa's, Legge's[,] Karlgren'. No, he had a visitor's help, I don't know whose, with these poems." (*Paideuma* Vol. 2, No. 1, 44-45) The answers to these questions may be found in the collection of Pound's unpublished letters (TP of "Letters of Ezra Pound" is at Yale Library, Special Collection. In the following excerpts, only the number of the letters will be cited). On March First, 1928, Pound wrote to his mother:

Dorothy is up a mountain with a returned missionary. Yes, Chinese book arrived, verry interestin', [sic] returned missionary promises us a descendant of Confucius in a month or so, who will prob. be able to decipher it. (No. 929,)

This is the first mention in writing of the "Chinese book" that his parents sent to him which corroborated what he told me *viva voce*. The "descendant of Confucius" promised by the "returned missionary" turned out to be the same Miss Tseng that he mentioned in 1952, except that Pound had mistaken her to be a descendant of Confucius rather than of Tseng Tze, disciple of Confucius. She was mentioned again in Pound's letter to Glenn Hughes, dated May 17, 1928:

Conferred with descendant of Kung and Thseng-Tsu [sic] just before leaving Rapallo and have sent my salutations to the Ten Remnants. (Letters, no. 939).

Two weeks later (May 30, 1928) he wrote to his father from Wien (Vienna), possibly in answer to the latter's inquiry about the Chinese poems:

Translation of Chinese poems in picture book is at Rapallo. They are poems on a set of scenes in Miss Thseng's part of the country. Sort of habit to make pictures and poems on that set of scenes. (No. 942)

Back in Rapallo from Vienna, Pound wrote to his father again on July 22, in response to the latter's request for copies of the translations of the Chinese poems:

Will try to copy out those Chinese poems for you sometime. when thermometer is lower. (No. 947)

Pound's letter to his father dated 30 July with "unspecified year" that Hugh Kenner had the "extra luck" to see was probably not written in 1929, as Mary de Rachewiltz has suggested, but in 1928, and it was never mailed to his father; the reason for which is given in another letter to Homer dated August first, 1928:

I copied out these Chinese poems two days ago, but dont know whether I can trust you to return copy, you have horrible habit of taking copies etc.

If I fix up a printable version later I DON'T want rough draft left about. (No. 956)

Although he did not send the Chinese poems he copied out in July 30 to his father, Pound made further reference to the Chinese book in another letter to him dated September first of the same year:

Given infinite time I MIGHT be able to read a Chinese poem, thass [sic] to say I know how the ideograph works, and *can* find 'em in the dictionary or vocable. BUT I shd. scarcely attempt it unless there were urgent reason. Also some of the script in that book was fairly fancy. For your book Miss Thseng, descendant of Kung read out the stuff to me. Am perfectly able to look up an ideograph and see what shade it can give, etc. BUT it iz a matter of time. Wd. be no point in it. No I am not a sinologue. Don't spread the idea that I read it az easy as yourapeann langwudg. (Letters No. 956)

From the above quotations from Pound's letters we may sum up as follows: 1) Pound received a Chinese book from his parents some time before March 1, 1928. 2) A Miss Thseng (i.e. Tseng), a descendant of Tseng Tzu, visited Pound in Rapallo before May 17, and helped him to "decipher" the poems. 3) Pound copied out the English paraphrase of the poems on July 30 for his father, but did not mail the letter, because Pound did not want the source of his poetry to lay around.

A biographical note may be added here concerning "the descendant of Tseng Tzu," whose full name Pound did not remember. Her full name is Pao-sun Tseng (b. 1894). According to her genealogy, she is a descendant of the philosopher Tseng Hsi (sixth century B.C.), one of the most famous disciples of Confucius. Coincidentally, she was born at Siang Hsiang, Hunan, the same lake region described in the "Seven Lakes Canto." Her great-grand father was Marquis Tseng Kuo-fan of the Ching dynasty. Her father, Tseng Kuang-chun, was poet and essayist. She was graduated from the National Normal School for Girls at Hangchow in 1909. Later she attended Blackheath High School, London, 1913 and Westfield College, University of London, 1914-16, where she received the degree of Bachelor of Science with Honors. After returning to China, she founded and presided over the I Fang Girls College in Changsha, Hunan in 1918. She was co-opted member of the National Christian Council of China, 1923-28. In 1928 she was made delegate to the International Missionary Council Conference at Jerusalem. It must be in that year that she visited Pound in Rapallo, and helped him with the translation. The following year she was a delegate to the Institute of Pacific Relations Third Biennial Conference at Kyoto. In 1949 she and her brother followed the Nationalist Government to Taiwan and founded the Chinese Christian University of Tung-hai, Tai-chung, Taiwan. Quite by chance I met her brother, Professor Tseng Yueh-nung, a found-

ing member of the Confucius-Mencius Society, during my research on Confucian influence in Taiwan. Miss Tseng, at the time, was in poor health, and was unable to receive me. As far as I know, she is still living.

One more note on the source of the "lines by no man." Historically, the set of scenes known as "The Eight Scenes of Hsiao-Hsiang" was first painted by Sung Ti (1011-1072), an artist of the Sung dynasty. The proper name Hsiao-Hsiang (Japanese pronunciation "Sho-sho") refers to a lake-region in Hunan, where the two rivers, Hsiao Chiang and Hsiang Chiang converge and diverge, forming numerous lakes, of which seven are better known. The original Sung paintings had long been lost, but the titles of the eight scenes are frequently cited in catalogues of paintings and in Chinese art history; and copies and replicas abound. The scenes had no strict order of sequence, since their titles are listed in different order in different reference works. The poems bearing the same titles of the scenes were not necessarily by the artists who painted the pictures.

The "Chinese book" that Pound received from his parents is most likely a Japanese imitation of a Chinese copy of the "Eight Scenes of Hsiao-Hsiang." And the poems, though unsigned, are likely written by Japanese sinologues. My conclusion is reached, not merely by speculation, but by close examination of the styles of the calligraphy and finesse of versification.