

Gained in Translation: Ezra Pound, Hu Shi, and Literary Revolution

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I. Introduction

Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), Chinese philosopher, essayist, and diplomat, is well-known for his advocacy of literary reform for modern China. His article, “A Preliminary Discussion of Literary Reform,” which appeared in *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (*The New Youth*) magazine in January, 1917, proposed the radical idea of writing in vernacular Chinese rather than classical. Until Hu’s article was published, no reformers or revolutionaries had conceived of writing in anything other than classical Chinese. Hu’s literary revolution began with a poetic revolution, but quickly extended to literature in general, and then to expression of new ideas in all fields. Hu’s program offered a pragmatic means of improving communication, fostering social criticism, and reevaluating the importance of popular Chinese novels from past centuries. Hu Shi’s literary renaissance has been examined in great detail by many scholars; this paper traces the synergistic effect of ideas, people, and literary movements that informed Hu Shi’s successful literary and language revolutions.

Hu Shi received a Boxer Indemnity grant to study agriculture at Cornell University in the United States in 1910. Two years later he changed his major to philosophy and literature, and after graduation, continued his education at Columbia University under John Dewey (1859-1952). Hu remained in the United States until 1917. Hu’s sojourn in America coincided with a literary revolution in English-language poetry called the Imagist movement that occurred in England and the United States between 1908 and 1917. Hu’s diaries indicate that he was fully aware of this movement, and was inspired by it.

Begun by Thomas E. Hulme (1883-1917), the Imagist movement was catalyzed by Ezra Pound (1885-1972), and continued later under the leader-

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ship of Amy Lowell (1874-1925). Imagism was begun as a protest against the rigidity of traditional English poetry, which followed proscribed rules of rhythm and rhyme schemes. Romantic and Victorian poetry, which had held sway until the early 1900s, had become didactic, prolix, and stilted. Poets felt they needed new potentialities in language to express the ideas of a rapidly modernizing society, and were searching for a precise rhetoric that espoused classical values more befitting the modern era, as well as new poetic forms that allowed more freedom of expression in changing times.

It was at this juncture that two men with imperfect mastery of foreign languages, Yone Noguchi (1875-1947) and Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), inspired Ezra Pound—considered by many to be the greatest American poet of the twentieth century—to effect a literary revolution in English-language poetry and rhetoric that in turn inspired Hu Shi’s literary revolution. I will examine first the influence of Yone Noguchi and Ernest Fenollosa on the poetic revolution that swept England and America in the early 1900s before turning to the Imagists and their impact on Hu Shi.

II. Yone Noguchi and the Introduction of Japanese Poetry to English Literary Circles

Yone Noguchi unwittingly became a pivotal agent in introducing literary Japonisme to the West. Noguchi, the fourth son of a family of merchants and Buddhist priests, attended Keio Gijuku, where he was encouraged by Yukichi Fukuzawa (1834-1901) to travel to the United States. After arriving in San Francisco in 1893 he worked at odd jobs while reading voraciously to improve his English. Hearing about the California poet Joaquin Miller (1837-1913), Noguchi visited Miller and asked if he could live at the poet’s residence as an unpaid laborer in exchange for room and board. Miller agreed. Miller was a taciturn man who believed above all in the beauties of nature and silence, but as a colorful figure who had lived with Native Americans and welcomed foreigners to his home, he was also genuinely supportive of Noguchi.¹ Noguchi lived in the cottage at Miller’s “Heights” residence for four years, where he made the unlikely decision to become a poet using English as his written medium. Miller was helpful in this regard; he was an honorary member of the San Francisco Bohemian Club, where cultured journalists and musicians met. While living with Miller, Noguchi was able to publish the first of his poems in a small, iconoclastic San Francisco magazine called the *Lark*, published by Gelett Burgess (1866-1951), a prominent member of the San Francisco Bay Area literary renaissance. Noguchi’s free

1 Yone Noguchi, *The Story of Yone Noguchi Told by Himself* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914), p. 67; p. 69.

verse poetry, imbued with Japanese sensibilities and images from the nature of California and Japan, caused a sensation among the Bohemians.² Noguchi was subsequently able to publish more books of poetry in English, through which he gained a wide number of admirers in American literary circles as “a disciple of things weird and mystic.”³ Critics described Noguchi’s poems as “unintelligible as a Japanese dream, yet [with] a poetic quality which need not be understood to be enjoyed....With his intuitive grasp of Nature’s greatest meanings, Yone Noguchi is an avowed admirer of Walt Whitman, but his Oriental spirit protests against being called a follower of that poet.”⁴

In 1902 Noguchi traveled to England, where he wrote a slender book of verse and sent it to one of Miller’s friends, the English writer and critic, William M. Rossetti (1829-1919), for appraisal. Rossetti liked the poems, especially descriptions in the poem, “The Myoto,” such as the unusual visual image, “velvet-footed moonbeams.” Foreshadowing the future Imagist poetic movement, Rossetti described such novel expressions as “a daring transfer of one impression of sense into a different but analogous impression.”⁵ Rossetti helped Noguchi to publish the poems in a pamphlet of verse entitled *From the Eastern Sea* in 1903. “Lines from the Japanese,” and “I Have Cast the World,” are the most haiku-like poems in Noguchi’s 1903 publication, the latter of which continues to be published in anthologies of Imagist poetry.⁶

I HAVE cast the world
And think me as nothing,
Yet I feel cold on snow-falling day,
And happy on flower-day.

Such prominent literary figures as Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, and H. A. Giles were astonished by Noguchi’s merging of Eastern themes, novel metaphors, and poetical English.⁷ Iza Duffus Hardy (1850-1922) wrote to Noguchi that...“you open so strange and new a world of thought and expres-

2 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters* (Tokyo: The Yone Noguchi Society, 1975), p. 14.

3 Carolyn Wells, “The Latest Thing in Poets,” *Critic* 29 (Nov. 14, 1896), p. 302.

4 Ibid.

5 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p.85. The first two stanzas of “The Myoto” are: “The woman whispered in the voice that roses have lost: “My love!” The man said, “Yes, dear!” In the voice that seas cannot utter. The woman whispered in the voice of velvet-footed moonbeams: “My love!” The man said, “Yes, dear!” For the entire poem, see: Noguchi Yone, *From the Eastern Sea* (London: Yone Noguchi, 1903).

6 Bob Blaisdell, ed., *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1999), p. 97.

7 Noguchi Yone, *From the Eastern Sea*, pp. 106-107.

sion to us of the West.”⁸ Rossetti praised the volume for its “feeling for the beauties of Nature, a conversion of these into the aliment of the loving and contemplative soul, and what Europeans recognize as idealism.”⁹ Noguchi’s free verse was a novelty among English poetry circles of the time. Arthur Diosy (1856-1923), founder of the Japan Society of the United Kingdom, for example, appraised Noguchi’s first volume of poetry positively, but added that “...the metre of your blank verse is unfamiliar to the British eye...”¹⁰ The Scottish critic, William Archer (1856-1924), expressed similar reservations: “Your knowledge of English is quite remarkable, but it is not perfect, and your metres are not known in English verse.”¹¹ Such remarks imply that Noguchi unwittingly introduced free verse to English-language poetry.

By the time Noguchi wrote “A Proposal to American Poets” in 1904, in which he advocated Japanese *hokku* as a model for English-language poetry, the literary world was listening. The poet Masaoka Shiki in 1892 had replaced the term *hokku* with haiku, a fact of which Noguchi was apparently unaware. In the article, Noguchi challenged American poets, declaring: “Pray, you try Japanese Hokku, my American poets! You say far too much, I should say.”¹² Along with his translations of two *hokku* by Basho, Noguchi introduced four of his own attempts at *hokku* in English, including:

Fallen leaves! Nay, spirits?
Shall I go downward with thee
Long a stream of Fate?

Later scholars have noted that Noguchi’s explanations of haiku were flawed and that his own haiku did not always contain the prerequisite three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 moras, *kigo* (seasonal references), and *kireji* (cutting words).¹³ It is quite possible, however, that if Noguchi had accurately detailed the rules for writing haiku, Western poets would not have been as receptive to it. It was Noguchi’s proscriptions for brevity and his unrecognizable meter describing nature and love that resonated with the new generation of English poets. The British poet and critic, Thomas E. Hulme, for example, in his 1908 “Lecture on Modern Poetry” declared that traditional poetry was

8 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p.86.

9 Yone Noguchi, *The Pilgrimage; Japanese Hokkus; The Ganges Calls Me* (Tokyo: Edition Synapse), 2007, Afterword.

10 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p. 88.

11 Ibid., p. 92.

12 Yone Noguchi, “A Proposal to American Poets,” *Reader* 3:3 (February 1904), p. 248.

13 Edward Marx, “A Slightly-Open Door: Yone Noguchi and the Invention of English Haiku,” *Genre XXXIX*, University of Oklahoma, Fall, 2006, pp. 109-111.

in the latter stages of decay: “The carcass is dead, and all the flies are upon it. Imitative poetry springs up like weeds, and women whimper and whine of you and I alas, and roses, roses all the way.”¹⁴ He stated that modern poets “no longer strive to attain the absolutely perfect in poetry....the tendency will be rather towards the production of a general effect....What has found expression in painting as Impressionism will soon find expression in poetry as free verse...The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images....This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear.”¹⁵

In January 1909 the Poets’ Club in Soho, London, published *For Christmas MDCCCXVIII*, a poetry anthology that contained two of Hulme’s poems: “Autumn” and “A City Sunset.” These two poems are considered the first examples of “Imagist” poetry. “Autumn” echoes Noguchi’s poem, “Autumn Song,” also published in 1909, in Noguchi’s two-volume *The Pilgrimage*, a collection of English verse about Japan, nature, Buddhism, and other themes presented mainly in free verse. Here is Noguchi’s poem, followed by Hulme’s on the same theme:

“Autumn Song” by Noguchi Yone

The gold vision of a bird-wing sways on the silver foam of
 song,
 The oldest song rises again on the Autumn heart of
 dream.
 The ghost castle of glory is built by the sad magic of
 Time,
 With the last laughter of sorrow, and with the red tempest
 of leaves.
 My little soul born out of the dews of singing dawn,
 Bids farewell to the large seas of Life and speech.

“Autumn” by T.E. Hulme

A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
 I walked abroad,
 And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
 Like a red-faced farmer.
 I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
 And round about were the wistful stars
 With white faces like town children.

“A City Sunset” is replete with images of the color red, such as “sudden

14 Thomas Ernest Hulme, *Lecture on Modern Poetry* (Poets’ Club, 1908).

15 Ibid.

flaring sky,” “frolic of crimson,” and “heaven’s jocund maid flaunting a trailed red robe.” As is apparent, Hulme’s images are haiku-like, and the poem lacks meter and rhyme. Noguchi’s nonstandard version of haiku thus helped open an avenue for free verse with easily visualized images.

In April 1909, Ezra Pound attended Hulme’s literary association, where *hokku*, *tanka*, and Japanese art were being enthusiastically discussed. That same year, Noguchi’s *The Pilgrimage* was heralded as an “interchange...of the images which the eye sees or the ear hears with the impression which these stamp upon the mind and the emotions. Noguchi has a singular faculty...for merging sounds into sights, or vice-versa, the perceptions of sense into the abstractions and intuitions of the spirit: he brings to our consciousness matter and thought in a perpetual flux, phenomena adumbrating ideas, a homogeneous kosmos.”¹⁶ The second volume contains the same four *hokku* that Noguchi published in “A Proposal to American Poets,” as well as two more of his own *hokku*. Noguchi describes *hokku* as seventeen-syllable poems that “might be compared with a tiny star, I dare say, carrying the whole sky at its back.”¹⁷ In 1911 Noguchi sent a copy of *The Pilgrimage* to Ezra Pound (1885-1972).

Noguchi became the primary medium for introducing Japanese poetics and Noh drama to literary figures in England, including to Pound. When Pound thanked Noguchi in a letter in September, 1911 for *The Pilgrimage*, Pound admitted, “Of your country I know almost nothing—surely if the east & the west are ever to understand each other that understanding must come slowly & come first through the arts.”¹⁸

It did not take long for Pound to absorb the concepts of free verse, brevity, and visual images that Noguchi expounded. Indeed, Pound has been said to have been “among the most important of Japanese influences in English-language verse of the first half of the twentieth century.”¹⁹ In 1912, when the *Complete Poetical Works of T.E. Hulme* was published with commentary by Ezra Pound, the Imagist poetry contained therein was described in the afterword as being of “great rhythmical beauty in curious verse-forms.”²⁰ The

16 Yone Noguchi, *The Pilgrimage*, Afterword.

17 Ibid., p.137. Many Western poets used Noguchi’s term, *hokku*, when they first began writing haiku. Besides Lowell and Pound, e.e. cummings also wrote *hokku*. See: “Three Hokku” in *E.E. Cummings: Complete Poems 1904-1962*, George James Firmage, ed. (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1994).

18 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p.211.

19 *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century*, <http://themargins.net/bib/B/BK/006/bkintro.html>

20 Ezra Pound, *Ripostes of Ezra Pound: Whereto are Appended the Complete*

description of Hulme's poetry mirrors that of Noguchi's. Modern poets had now found a new voice: sensual images in free verse. Free verse and Imagism arrived on the literary scene simultaneously.²¹ Free verse not only used non-metrical prosody, but was also self-consciously against traditional meter. In this sense, Pound's Imagism, which unleashed an entirely new way to approach language, was "one manifestation of an almost mystical theory of perception which is one of the remarkable phenomena of our time."²²

In October of that same year, Harriet Monroe (1860-1936) founded the *Poetry* magazine in what was then America's agricultural heartland, Chicago. Monroe hoped her magazine would appeal to the "most complete expression of truth and beauty."²³ Monroe said of the new poets that they "swept away Victorian excesses and weaknesses—all the overemphasis on trite sentiment with its repetitions and clichés, and archaic formalities of diction and technique." Although east coast newspapers derided the idea of a poetry magazine being published in Chicago (the "Porkopolis") as incongruous with the city's image, the magazine became interchangeable with the history of modern poetry in America.²⁴ The earliest issues contained poems by Ezra Pound, H.D. (1886-1961), and Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), the latter who were unknown at the time. Other regular contributors included Carl Sandburg (1878-1967), Sara Teasdale (1884-1933), Yone Noguchi, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), and William Carlos Williams (1883-1963).²⁵ Pound also submitted the first poem in English by Rabindranath Tagore to *Poetry* magazine, which in December 1912 carried six of what later became his Nobel prize-winning *Gitanjali* poems.

Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme (Edinburgh: NF. II. L. and Co., Ltd., 1912), p. 61.

21 Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 131.

22 Ibid., pp. 133-136.

23 Dana Goodyear, "The Moneyed Muse," *The New Yorker* (February 19, 2007).

24 Ibid.

25 Poetry Foundation, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/archive>; Noguchi continued to have a respected place among the Imagist poets of *Poetry* magazine as is evidenced by his correspondence with Harriet Monroe and Imagist poet John Gold Fletcher. Monroe wrote in a letter dated December 13, 1923 to Noguchi that "Your portrait...a fine photograph of your head in profile...adorns our 'poets gallery' at the *Poetry* office, among about thirty of our leading poets." Fletcher wrote on January 25, 1921 to Noguchi that "I am glad you had the inspiration to write to me. For I owe you a debt. The only book of yours I ever saw (previous to [*Seen and Unseen*]) was your *Pilgrimage*, and the first poem in that book suggested to me my "Blue Symphony...." See: Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p. 223; p. 219, respectively.

Pound, living in London, was the foreign editor and a contributor to the magazine from its inception. In the March 1913 issue of *Poetry* magazine, Pound penned two articles on Imagism, one under the name of fellow poet F.S. Flint (1885-1960) entitled “Imagisme,” and another under his own name: “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.” Flint’s article was actually written by Pound, H.D., and Richard Aldington (1892-1962), and contained three tenets of Imagism:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.²⁶

The third point was a call for free verse, which was expected to follow natural rhythms.

The proscriptions in Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” in the same issue contained ten rules on how *not* to write poetry. These were:

1. Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.
2. Don’t use such an expression as “dim lands *of peace*.” It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer’s not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.
3. Go in fear of abstractions.
4. What the expert is tired of today the public will be tired of tomorrow.
5. Don’t imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music.
6. Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.
7. Don’t allow “influence” to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of one or two poets whom you happen to admire.
8. Use either no ornament or good ornament.
9. If you are using a symmetrical form, don’t put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush.
10. Don’t mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word.²⁷

In April, Pound published his haiku-like poem, “In a Station of the Metro” in *Poetry* magazine. The poem is considered to be the first “Imagist” poem that clearly reflects a haiku influence. Pound himself called his effort a “hokku-like sentence.”²⁸ Pound explained that he chose this form with which to write his poem because “...it struck me that in Japan where a work of art

26 F. S. Flint, “Imagisme,” *Poetry*, (March 1913).

27 Ezra Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” *Poetry* (March 1913).

28 Ezra Pound, “Vorticism,” *Fortnightly Review* (September, 1914), pp. 465-467.

is not estimated by its acreage and where sixteen syllables [sic] are counted enough for a poem if you arrange and punctuate them properly, one might make a very little poem....”²⁹ Sources for Pound’s information on Japanese *hokku* were limited to explanations in English, of which Noguchi was the most obvious advocate at the time.

Noguchi is also thought to have arranged a meeting between Pound and Mary McNeill Scott Fenollosa (1865-1954) in September 1913; two months later, Pound was in possession of Ernest Fenollosa’s papers.³⁰ Pound also met Noguchi when Pound was acting as secretary for William Butler Yeats in Sussex in 1914, and is said to have sent Noguchi a copy of the Metro poem.³¹ Pound wrote to his mother of his meeting with Noguchi: “Yone Noguchi dined with me on Tuesday; interesting *littérateur* of the second order....Still you needn’t repeat this, as the acquaintance may grow and there’s no telling when one will want to go to Japan.”³² Though Pound was never to realize his ambition of traveling to Japan, Noguchi’s introduction of Mary Fenollosa to Pound was fortuitous for all poets interested in modernizing the English language; Pound based his highly influential notions of “super-position,” Imagism, Vorticism, and the Ideogrammic Method on Fenollosa’s explication of Chinese ideographs as combinations of visual images and actions.

III. Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound, and the Ideogrammic Method

Ernest Fenollosa first traveled to Japan in 1878 to teach political economy and philosophy at the Imperial University of Tokyo after studying art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. During his eight-year stay in Japan, Fenollosa helped revive *Nihonga*, helped found the Tokyo Fine Arts Academy and the Imperial Museum, conducted the first inventory of Japan’s national treasures, and converted to Buddhism. He also studied Chinese poetry (*kanshi*) under the renowned Japanese Sinologist, Kainan Mori (1863-1911). Fenollosa died before he could publish his essay on Chinese characters as a medium for poetry, but Pound revised and completed the work. Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Character Written as a Medium for Chinese Poetry* (hereafter referred to as *Chinese Poetry*) focused on the pictorial nature of Chinese ideograms, emphasizing the notions that each character is alive through its verbal idea of

29 Ezra Pound, “How I Began,” *T. P.’s Weekly*, June 6, 1913, p. 707.

30 *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century* <http://themargins.net/bib/D/d15.html>

31 Ikuko Atsumi, *Yone Noguchi: Collected English Letters*, p. 15.

32 *Japonisme, Orientalism, Modernism: A Bibliography of Japan in English-Language Verse of the Early 20th Century* <http://themargins.net/bib/B/BK/00/bkintro.thmlr>

action; that the wealth of transitive verbs in Chinese poetry originates from the power of combining several pictorial elements in a single character; and that juxtaposition of those characters creates a visual as well as a semantic poetic impact. The second half of Fenollosa's book is comprised of Pound's translation notes of Chinese poetry based on Fenollosa's glosses. Fenollosa's exposition on the inherent energy contained in Chinese characters and their capacity for expressing abstract notions through concrete images inspired Pound to develop the Ideogrammic Method of poetic representation. It should be noted that Fenollosa's work, as well as Pound's interpretation of it, has come under attack from many scholars as being flawed.³³ Chinese poetry, especially of the Tang period—the main focus of Fenollosa's work—required elaborate rules for composition and sound schemes, of which Fenollosa was apparently unaware. Yet it was this ignorance that helped him appreciate the fundamentals of Chinese poetry in ways his predecessors had not. In fact, Fenollosa's interpretation of Chinese poetry read as Japanese *kanshi* was revolutionary. In his introduction to *Chinese Poetry*, Fenollosa states:

An unfortunate belief has spread both in England and in America that Chinese and Japanese poetry are hardly more than an amusement, trivial, childish, and not to be reckoned in the world's serious literary performance. I have heard well-known sinologues state that, save for the purpose of professional linguistic scholarship, these branches of poetry are fields too barren to repay the toil necessary for their cultivation.³⁴

Given the biases of the time, Fenollosa dedicated much of his discussion to justification for the study of Chinese poetry, citing in particular its “semi-pictorial appeals to the eye.” Intrigued by the poetry's visual impact, Fenollosa attempted to explain how lines of Chinese poetry could be distinguished from prose, as well as the rationale for the order in which characters appear. He stated that thought as represented by Chinese characters was successive, the “transferences of force from agent to object, which constitute natural phenomena, occupy time,” and that Chinese poetry speaks with the vividness of painting and with the mobility of sounds.³⁵ Fenollosa asserted that English and Chinese were similar in structure, Chinese simply lacking the articles that are necessary for English to be grammatically correct. To illustrate his point, Fenollosa proposed the sentence, “Farmer pounds rice,” which

33 Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 4-6.

34 Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Foreword and Notes by Ezra Pound (London: Stanley Nott, 1936), p. 9.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

follows the natural order of cause and effect and is understandable as English even without articles. Fenollosa surmised that this similarity between English and Chinese “renders translation from one [language] to the other exceptionally easy,” a misapprehension that perhaps encouraged Pound to take up the task of translating the Chinese poems in Fenollosa’s book in spite of having no knowledge of Asian languages at all.³⁶

Fenollosa believed that Chinese ideographs and word order concisely transmit visual images:

Abstract meaning gives little vividness, and fullness of imagination gives all. Chinese poetry demands that we abandon our narrow grammatical categories, that we follow the original text with a wealth of concrete verbs....So far we have exhibited the Chinese characters and the Chinese sentence chiefly as vivid shorthand pictures of actions and processes in nature. These embody true poetry....
We need in poetry thousands of active words, each doing its utmost to show forth the motive and vital forces....Poetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged, and luminous from within.”
 Refined harmony lies in the delicate balance of overtones.³⁷

Fenollosa’s work on Chinese characters conflated well with Pound’s interest in haiku-like forms and vivid images. As was the case with Noguchi’s introduction of *hokku* through the foreign medium of English, Fenollosa’s explanation of Chinese poetry through the medium of Japanese instruction gave rise to the phenomenon of inaccurate representation. Yet it was this linguistic lacuna that enabled Pound to succeed in his mission to create freer rules for composition of English poetry. To Pound, Fenollosa’s ideas were inspiring; he came to believe that words could be charged with meaning in three ways, as he explained in his *ABC of Reading*: “phanopoeia, melopoeia, logopoeia...You use a word to throw a visual image on to the reader’s imagination, or you charge it by sound, or you use groups of words to do this.”³⁸ Pound’s theory reflects the ideas of Fenollosa, of whom Pound later said

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.³⁹

A proponent of conciseness, Pound was intrigued by notions of both short

36 Ibid., p. 20.

37 Ibid., p. 25; p. 32; p. 36.

38 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 37.

39 Ibid., p. 19.

poetic forms and ideograms that could represent multiple meanings through visual and semantic means. He later elaborated on Fenollosa's treatment of Chinese characters:

By contrast to the method of abstraction, or of defining things in more and still more general terms, Fenollosa emphasizes the method of science, "which is the method of poetry," as distinct from that of "philosophic discussion," and is the way the Chinese go about it in their ideographs or abbreviated picture writing.⁴⁰

Pound explained his Ideogrammic Method for writing English poetry, which was based on Fenollosa's essay, in terms of Chinese characters:

...when the Chinaman wanted to make a picture of something more complicated, or of a general idea, how did he go about it? He is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint?

He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of

ROSE	CHERRY
IRON RUST	FLAMINGO

...The Chinese "word" or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS.....Fenollosa was telling how and why a language written in this way simply HAD TO STAY POETIC...⁴¹

Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" discussed above is considered one of the leading poems of the Imagist movement, and implements Fenollosa's advice for poetry. The poem was followed by Pound's poetry anthology entitled *Des Imagistes*, first published in the *Glebe* in 1914. In the preface of the anthology, Pound reiterated the three tenets of Imagism that he had published under F.S. Flint's name. The anthology contains Imagist poems by Richard Aldington, H.D., F.S. Flint, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce (1882-1941), Ezra Pound, and others. The themes of the poems range from Greek to Asian. Here is an Asian-themed poem by Pound from *Des Imagistes*:

"Ts'ai Chi'h"

The petals fall in the fountain,
 the orange colored rose-leaves,
 Their ochre clings to the stone.⁴²

Pound's poems represent a syncretism of Chinese motifs and Japanese haiku-like forms, a blending of Chinoiserie and Japonisme that create a new

40 Ibid., p. 20.

41 Ibid., p. 22.

42 Ezra Pound, *Des Imagistes* (New York: Charles and Albert Boni, 1914).

paradigm for poetry written in English.

After publication of *Des Imagistes*, Pound had a disagreement with Amy Lowell, whose poetry, he felt, did not meet the standards of the Imagist movement. In September 1914 he wrote an article entitled “Vorticism” in the *Fortnightly Review*, in which he stated that the “image is the poet’s pigment (The image has been defined as ‘that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.’).”⁴³ In the article, Pound explains his conflation of Fenollosa’s study on Chinese characters and Japanese *hokku* that culminated in his Metro poem:

A Chinaman said long ago that if a man can’t say what he has to say
in twelve lines he had better keep quiet. The Japanese have evolved
the still shorter form of the hokku.

“The fallen blossom flies back to its branch: A butterfly.”...

The “one image poem” is a form of super-position, that is to say,
it is one idea set on top of another....I wrote a thirty-line
poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call a
work “of second intensity.” Six months later I made a
poem half that length; a year later I made the following
hokku-like sentence:

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals, on a wet, black bough.”⁴⁴

In addition to his fascination with Japanese poetic forms, Pound became intrigued with Chinese language and poetry through his work on Fenollosa’s *Chinese Poetry*. In 1915 Pound produced his anthology, *Cathay*, an eclectic collection of his “translations” of Chinese poems based on Fenollosa’s glosses and his own inventions. The introduction to *Cathay* states that the poems are “for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku [Li Bai], from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa, and the decipherings of the professors Mori [Kainan] and Ariga [Nagao].”⁴⁵ The collection has been analyzed thoroughly by many scholars, including Wai-lim Yip, who compares several extant English translations with Pound’s, and finds that in many cases Pound better captures the essence of the poems through use of “super-position,” a juxtaposition of images and meaning based on his ideogrammic method.⁴⁶ In contrast to Pound, other translators either forced the Chinese verse into English rhyme and meter schemes, or added so many extra-textual images that the original meaning was obscured.

43 Ezra Pound, “Vorticism,” *Fortnightly Review* (September, 1914), p. 462.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 465-467.

45 Ezra Pound, *Cathay* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915, foreword).

46 *Ibid.*, p. 22.; Wai-lim Yip, *Ezra Pound’s Cathay*, p. 83.

Even as Pound's modernist literary movement, based largely on Orientalism, became profoundly influential in the English speaking world, Amy Lowell, with her sizable fortune and literary connections, made an immeasurable impact of her own. Lowell included poets in her Imagist publications that only loosely met Pound's "A Few Don'ts." In April 1915 Lowell published an anthology of verse entitled *Some Imagist Poets*, in which she explains that a difference of opinion having occurred among the contributors to *Des Imagistes*, Lowell decided to publish an anthology independent of Pound and his coterie. In the preface Lowell stated her Imagist Credo as follows:

The poets in this volume do not represent a clique. Several of them are personally unknown to the others, but they are united by certain common principles, arrived at independently. These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude. They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature, and they are simply these: -

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject....
4. To present an image....
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.⁴⁷

Lowell's six points parallel Pound's ten points, and again constitute a practical means for writing new poetry better representing the modern era. Contributors to the volume were Richard Aldington, H.D., John Gould Fletcher (1886-1950), F.S. Flint, D.H. Lawrence, and Amy Lowell herself.

The Imagists now had many forums in which to publish their poetry, and to influence the rise of many different poetry groups, bringing to fruition the modernist era in American and British poetry. University students, including those from China, followed the exciting developments in poetry and language as intently as they did issues such as women's rights, world politics, and

47 Amy Lowell, *Some Imagist Poets, An Anthology* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, April 1915).

philosophy. Hu Shi was one of these students.

IV. Imagism, Hu Shi, and the Program for Chinese Literary Reform

At Cornell University Hu Shi studied science, agriculture, history, German, Latin, and English. He excelled in school, was president of the university's Cosmopolitan Club, belonged to the Chinese Students' Christian Association, won speech contests, and became well-versed in a remarkable number of disciplines East and West.⁴⁸ Under the tutelage of such luminaries as Cyrus Northrup (1834-1922) and William Strunk (1869-1946) Hu also read many of the classics of English literature, including the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Chaucer, and Emerson. In July 1914 Hu Shi and his Chinese friends, such as Mei Guangdi 梅光迪, formed a reading group to discuss weekly the Western novels and plays that they read, starting with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946).⁴⁹

Hu kept informed of the tumultuous changes then occurring in China, and became interested in such issues as women's suffrage, political systems, world events, and language reform. Though Hu often wrote poems in Chinese,⁵⁰ it wasn't until he had to prepare a sonnet for the tenth anniversary of the Cornell Cosmopolitan Club in December 1914 that he began to become serious about writing poetry in English. His sonnet on that occasion reflected the angst he felt about the lack of world peace. His original version was revised twice by Professor Martin W. Sampson, who taught creative writing at Cornell. Hu dedicated two pages of his diary to the rules of composition for sonnets, which he called "English *lǚshī* (英文之律詩).⁵¹ He wrote a second sonnet in English, entitled "To Mars," an anti-war poem, which he showed to Professor Liberty Hyde Bailey. Bailey advised Hu that the rules for sonnet composition were too restrictive to express Hu's ideas, and that he should try other poetic forms.⁵² Hu subsequently joined the Tome and Tablet, which met once a week, and the Manuscript Club, two of the many literary societies at Cornell, to become more familiar with English poetics.

In 1914 Hu enrolled in Columbia University after graduating from Cornell. At Columbia Hu earned a PhD in philosophy under the pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey (1859-1952). Hu Shi's world was shaken in early 1915

48 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji (I), Hu Shi zuopinji* 34 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishers) 胡適留學日記(一), 胡適作品集34 (臺北:遠流出版, 1986), pp. 3-79; pp. 204-208.

49 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji (I), Hu Shi zuopinji* 35 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishers) 胡適留學日記(一), 胡適作品集35 (臺北:遠流出版, 1986), pp. 52-55.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 237-242.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

when articles began appearing in English newspapers condoning Japan's military and political encroachment in China. Hu reacted by writing letters to the *New Republic*, *Post-Standard*, the *Outlook*, and the *Ithaca Journal*. A confirmed pacifist, Hu did not believe in violence or war. Hu was searching for a way to contribute to his country's development when Shakespearean Professor Joseph Q. Adams Jr. questioned him in February 1915 on China's lack of higher education, and warned that if China wanted to create a new civilization, new literature, or new knowledge, educational reform would be imperative. Hu agonized over how best to achieve these goals. He realized acutely that China needed not only a navy and an army, but universities, public libraries, and museums.⁵³ He came to the conclusion that education, which would require language and literary reform, would be the key to modernizing China. In March of that year, Hu and his compatriots studying abroad formed a special group that decided to mobilize to "save the country."

Hu became interested in writing poems in the vernacular, and wrote his first English poem in free verse in July 1915, before attempting to write Chinese vernacular free verse. The poem, entitled "Crossing the Harbor," resembled Carl Sandburg's "The Harbor," which appeared in *Poetry* magazine in March 1914.⁵⁴ Sandburg's poem, written in free verse, begins with images of ugliness and poverty, which are juxtaposed with the sun over a "blue burst of lake" and free-flying gulls. Hu's poem begins with rain and wintry wind on a lake and ends with "a sphere of radiancy," the Statue of Liberty. Interestingly, the same March 1914 issue of *Poetry* magazine also contains a poem by Sara Teasdale entitled "Over the Roofs," which Hu translated in 1919 as *Guan bu zhule!* (關不住了!). Hu explained in the preface to the second edition of his collection of poetry, *Chang shiji* (*Book of Experiments*),

53 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji* (1), *Hu Shi zuopinji* 36 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishers) 胡適留學日記(一), 胡適作品集36 (臺北:遠流出版, 1986), p.5.

54 Ibid., pp. 120-123. Sandburg's "Harbor" was one of his *Chicago Poems*: "Passing through huddled and ugly walls,/ By doorways where women haggard/ Looked from their hunger-deep eyes,/ Haunted with shadows of hunger-hands,/ Out from the huddled and ugly walls,/ I came sudden, at the city's edge,/ On a blue burst of lake,/ Long lake waves breaking under the sun/ On a spray-flung curve of shore;/ And a fluttering storm of gulls,/ Masses of great gray wings/ And flying white bellies/ Veering and wheeling free in the open." Hu Shi's "Crossing the Harbor" was written on a February night in New York: "As on the deck half-sheltered from the rain/ We listen to the wintry wind's wild roars,/ And hear the slow waves beat against the metropolitic shores;/ And as we search the stars of Earth/ Which shine so startlingly/ Against the vast, dark firmament,--/ There--/ Pedestalled upon a sphere of radiancy, One Light stands forth pre-eminent./ And my-comrade whispers to me, "There is 'Liberty'!"

the first book of its kind to be published in China, that after ten years of struggling with old poetry forms he had spent “the last three years playing with a variety of syllabic experiments, gradually achieving something of a naturalness.”⁵⁵ He considered his translation of Teasdale’s poem to be a “new era of success” in his “attempt at new poetry.”⁵⁶ He added that “this type of poetic syllabification is not the old style of 5, 7 words, and is not the syllabification of Chinese *ci* (詞) or *qu* (曲) poetry, but is vernacular poetry (白話詩).⁵⁷ The March issue of *Poetry* magazine that contained “Harbor” and Teasdale’s poem also contained an article by Amy Lowell on “Vers Libre and Metrical Prose.” The fact that Hu wrote his poem in free verse similar to that of Sandburg and chose Teasdale’s poem to translate, indicates that he probably read the March 1914 issue of *Poetry* magazine.

Throughout 1915 Hu Shi experimented with increasingly freer verse forms in Chinese.⁵⁸ Hu and his peers discussed methods for facilitating the teaching of literature in China, and analyzed the use of Romanization, Korean *hangul*, and Japanese *kana*. Hu claimed that “classical Chinese (漢文) truly is a half-dead system of writing; it is inappropriate to teach it using methods for a living language.” Unlike Fenollosa and Pound, who extolled the Chinese ideograph for its pictorial components, Hu lamented that the meanings of ideographs might be discernible, but the pronunciations were not. Furthermore, the student of Chinese must memorize the semantic etymology of each component to understand the overall meaning of the ideograph, an enormous task. Hu considered the idea of making the study of etymology mandatory, but thought such an approach would prove infeasible. According to Hu, devising a grammar had also been tried to no avail; Ma Jianzhong 馬建忠, author of the *Mashi Wentong* 馬氏文通 (*Basic Principles for Writing Clearly and Coherently by Mr. Ma*) had already written a grammar that had failed to achieve the objective of helping the Chinese masses to become literate.⁵⁹

In September 1915, on occasion of the departure to Harvard University of Hu’s friend, Mei Guangdi, Hu wrote a rambling sixty-line poem in classical Chinese on the momentum of Western scientific and literary advances, and on the futility of trying to stop the tide of change. On literature, Hu stated:

55 Hu Shi, *Changshiji*, *Hu Shi zuopinji* 27 (Taipei: Yuanliu Publishers) 胡適嘗試集, 胡適作品集, 27 (臺北:遠流出版, 1986), p.42.

56 Wong Yoon Wah, *Essays on Chinese Literature: A Comparative Approach* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1988), p. 35.

57 Hu Shi, *Changshiji*, *Hu Shi zuopinji* 27, p. 43.

58 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji* (1), *Hu Shi zuopinji* 36, pp. 135-139; pp. 154-158.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-177.

China's literature has been withering and decaying for a long time. It has been a hundred years since anyone vigorous has arisen. There's a new tide that cannot be stopped. It is time for a literary revolution.⁶⁰

The following month, a female friend of Hu Shi recommended he read Noguchi Yone's *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry*, which had made a tremendous impact on Imagists in England the year before with its introduction in English to Japanese *hokku* and Noh drama. Hu noted that the book was elegantly written and easy to read, but was so self-important that he found it unpleasant.⁶¹

Hu's friends were highly critical of his ideas on poetic revolution, and ridiculed his efforts at language reform. This response caused Hu to search for paradigms for language reform that fellow Chinese could accept more readily. He began delving into China's own past for examples of "living language," arguing that when Confucius or the great poets of the Tang period wrote, the language they had used was alive at the time. Hu also studied the language in popular novels such as *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 (*The Water Margin*) and *Xi You Ji* 西遊記 (*Journey to the West*), arguing that they also represented literary revolutions. On July 22, 1916, Hu initiated a virtual war of words with his friends, Mei Guangdi and Ren Shuyong (任叔永), when he sent his first vernacular (*baihua*) poem to Mei in response to the latter's criticism of Hu's ideas on a new, living literature. The poem discusses changes in Chinese character usage through history, and claims that literature can also be dead, as in the case of Latin, or alive, as is the case with contemporary literature. Hu ended his poem by saying that "literature must have a revolution; you and I both have responsibility for it."⁶²

Mei Guangdi responded that Hu should not be influenced by the vulgar, common poetic movement then current in the West, or try to cheat his fellow countrymen by plagiarizing the worthless new tide. Mei defined this "new tide" in literature in terms of "Futurism, Imagism, Free Verse."⁶³ Mei later elaborated on his criticism of the promoters of New Culture. Of the *baihua* movement he said, "The so-called colloquial poetry is merely the offal of *vers libre* and recent American Imagism, both of which are nothing but two mere ramifications of the Decadent movement."⁶⁴

Undaunted, Hu drew up his eight conditions for a literary revolution (八

60 Ibid., p. 196.

61 Ibid., pp. 210-211.

62 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji (1)*, *Hu Shi zuopinji* 37, p. 56; pp. 67-74.

63 Ibid., p. 81.

64 Wong Yoon Wah, *Essays on Chinese Literature*, p. 30.

不主義)on August 21, 1916. The points mirror Pound's "Don'ts" and Lowell's "Imagist Credo":

I advocated using the vernacular to write poetry, but a great many of my friends were against my idea. Actually, everyone has their own will; there is no need to force them to agree. I also needn't abandon advocating the vernacular just because there are some people against it. Other people don't have to use the vernacular to write poetry, either. Writing vernacular poetry is just one part of my program for a "new literature." As I said in a letter the day before yesterday to Zhu Jingnong (朱經農), there are about eight important points for a new literature:

1. Don't use classical allusions.
2. Don't use clichés and hackneyed expressions.
3. Don't write in couplets or parallelisms.
4. Don't avoid colloquial words and phrasings.
(Don't dislike using the vernacular to write poetry.)
5. Pay attention to grammar. This aspect is about form.
6. Don't groan and moan if you are not sick.
7. Don't imitate the ancients.
8. What you say must have substance. This aspect is about the spirit (content).⁶⁵

A second diary entry also dated August 21 is part of a letter that Hu wrote to Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), then editor of *New Youth* magazine. The letter was published in the October 1916 issue of the magazine, and contained the above eight points.

An undated clipping from the *New York Times* appears in the December 26, 1916 entry of Hu's diary after the above eight points for literary reform. The article is a reprint of the preface to Amy Lowell's "Some Imagist Poets," called the Imagist Credo. Hu Shi noted that most of the points advocated by the Imagists resembled his own.⁶⁶

Although Hu Shi did not acknowledge directly the influence of the Imagists on his ideas, Mei Guangdi was not the only critic well aware of the similarities between Hu's eight points for literary reform and the modernist literary program promulgated by Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. The botanist Hu Xiansu (胡先驕, 1894-1968) noted that "In America and Europe there are Imagists...In Hu Shi's *Book of Experiments*, poems such as 'The Blue Sky' are products belonging to this category....Without concern for beauty, they

65 Hu Shi, *Hu Shi liuxue riji (1)*, *Hu Shi zuopinji* 37, p. 96.

66 Ibid., p.162.

absorbed all kinds of ideas into their works....some of the bad poems are:... Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems*."⁶⁷ Later, Professor Liang Shiqiu (梁實秋) made similar comments.⁶⁸

Initially, Hu's program for literary revolution made very little impact. Then Chen Duxiu tried reprinting the article in *New Youth* magazine in January 1917 after moving his publishing office from Shanghai to Beijing. He and Hu Shi revised the title to the less controversial, "Some Tentative Suggestions for a Reform of Literature," Hu rearranged his eight points, and Chen added an article of his own on literary revolution. The response this time was overwhelming. Hu had ignited China's modern literary renaissance.

V. Conclusion

When Hu Shih again visited Cornell University in 1927, he was lauded as "the leader of the Chinese Renaissance." His mentor, Professor Martin Sampson, said of Hu that "of all Cornell graduates since the University was founded, Hu Shih is undoubtedly the one who has had the greatest influence on the largest number of people." The article explains that Hu

is doing for China what Dante and Petrarch did for the European revival of learning...He is ranked among the greatest of living Chinese....Hu Shih...began...to urge his associates to write, in the vernacular....Through this means, his influence is reaching many millions of people.⁶⁹

This glowing tribute is matched by T.S. Eliot's description of his mentor, Ezra Pound, in the introduction to Pound's *Literary Essays*: "Mr. Pound is more responsible for the XXth Century revolution in poetry than is any other individual."⁷⁰

Hu Shi and Ezra Pound were two of the greatest literary geniuses of their time. Both recognized that literary forms from foreign languages could transform the societies in which they lived. The fact that they modified and adapted those forms to meet the needs of their own cultures rather than copy them outright, underscores their foresight and ingenuity. It can also be said that the *zeitgeist* inherent in transnational cultural interactions brought together the imperfect translations of Noguchi and Fenollosa, and the creativity of

67 Wong Yoon Wah, *Essays on Chinese Literature*, p.31. The *Chicago Poems* include Sandburg's "Harbor."

68 Ibid., p. 32; p.44.

69 Anonymous, "Noted Chinese Coming," *Cornell Alumni News*, Vol. XXIX, No.22 (Ithaca, N.Y.), March 3, 1927, p. 265.

70 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: A New Directions Book), 1968, p.xi.

Pound and Hu to give rise to two literary revolutions: the modernization of English poetry and literature, and the Chinese *baihua* movement.