

Ezra Pound's Interdisciplinary World: An Interview with Roxana Preda

¹LI Wenting ²Roxana Preda

¹Sichuan International Studies University, China

²Sichuan International Studies University, China;

²The University of Edinburgh, UK

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Abstract: This academic interview delves into Roxana Preda's scholarly journey as a senior scholar in Ezra Pound Studies, reflecting her interdisciplinary approach that aligns with Pound's diverse interests. Preda explains her motivation for dedicating years to studying Pound and discusses her digital platform, "*The Cantos Project*," illustrating its role in advancing Pound research. The conversation explores the deep connections between Pound's poetics and various disciplines, such as translation, painting, sculpture, music, and economics. Preda highlights the profound interplay between Pound's translations and his poetic creations, also examining the influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti on his artistic theory and practice. Preda probes into the symbiotic relationship between sculpture and Pound's innovative poetics, revealing how sculptural artistry infuses his work. She explores the musical echoes within Pound's writings, signaling possible analogies between Igor Stravinsky's musical innovations and some of the *Cantos*. The interview also discusses Pound's forward-thinking economic insights, providing fresh perspectives on his contributions to the field. Preda's deep appreciation for Chinese culture is evident as she explores Pound's engagement with it in *The Cantos*, reflecting on the nuanced ways his American identity intersects with Chinese themes. She concludes by offering invaluable research advice for Pound scholars in China, guiding them through the varied landscape of Ezra Pound studies.

Keywords: Ezra Pound; interdisciplinary research; The Cantos Project; China

Notes on the contributor: LI Wenting is an associate professor at the School of English Studies, Sichuan International Studies University. Her research interest lies in contemporary translation theory, English translation of Chinese classics, and translation history. Her email address is liwenting20026@163.com.

Notes on the interviewee: Roxana Preda is an associate professor of English Literature at the School of English Studies, Sichuan International University, and a senior researcher of American modernist poetry at Sichuan International Studies University. Her core field is modernist poetry, with a special emphasis on the poet Ezra Pound. Her email address is roxanapreda@icloud.com.

Prof. Roxana Preda is a senior scholar of American modernist poetry at the University of Edinburgh, specialized in the work of Ezra Pound. She is the author of *Ezra Pound's (Post)Modern Poetics and Politics* (2001); *Ezra Pound's Economic Correspondence 1933–1940* (2007); *Ezra Pound and the Career of Modern Criticism* (2018), and *The Edinburgh Companion to Ezra Pound and the Arts* (2019). Between 2013 and 2018, she was the president of the Ezra Pound Society. During that time, she launched and edited the society quarterly, *Make It New*, a periodical where both established and young scholars can publish their findings on a virtual common platform. Roxana Preda's current project focuses on the comprehensive digital re-annotation of Ezra Pound's life-long poem, *The Cantos*. This ambitious endeavor, titled "The Cantos Project," aims to shed new light on Pound's complex poetic opus by providing detailed academic commentary and contextual analysis. The project has progressed significantly, reaching its midpoint with canto 66, and continues to evolve as more cantos are annotated.

As a visiting scholar at the School of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures at Edinburgh University, from February 1, 2023, to July 31, 2023, I had the privilege of engaging in numerous meetings with Roxana Preda. Her expertise in Ezra Pound studies and her extensive work on digital annotation greatly informed my own research. Our collaborative discussions in Edinburgh deepened my understanding of *The Cantos* and enriched the academic discourse surrounding Ezra Pound's work. In this interview, taken on March 3, 2025, at SISU in Chongqing, Prof. Preda explores Pound's poetics from an interdisciplinary perspective, navigating the intersection of translation, painting, sculpture, music, and economics. This comprehensive approach has given us a clear understanding of Pound's poetic innovation sources.

LI Wenting: You mentioned that you fell in love with Pound's poetry when reading his works over 30 years ago. Do you still remember what attracted you most deeply?

Roxana Preda: Yes, I do remember my beginnings well. I had just graduated from university and started teaching secondary school. It was one of my habits to take a book to read on the long bus rides through my city. One day, I took this slim volume of Pound's *Selected Poems* (1957) along, having decided for some reason that I was going to check it out. I distinctly remember turning the pages – there were only short poems at first, and I was quite unimpressed; but then, I got to the first canto and saw the difference: complexity, beauty, storyline, mythical figures; now, that was indeed different. Then, canto II decided it for me: here was an encyclopedic poem, interesting, mysterious, and difficult. I could indeed imagine spending a great deal of time figuring it out. That was exciting!

LI Wenting: How did you determine to take Ezra Pound studies as your life-long academic career?

Roxana Preda: There were several points of decision in my life journey. First, choosing a topic for a Ph.D.: I decided on Pound because I felt that there was food for the soul, the imagination, and the emotions in his work. The alternative I had then, studying James Joyce, would not have been as emotionally rewarding. I felt Joyce to be extremely cerebral – long term, the dryness was going to be too difficult for me. I am not saying that this is indeed the case – I am saying that this is how I felt back then.

After I finished my dissertation on Pound and postmodernism, I sensed that I had not finished what I wanted to say. Postmodern understanding of economics was a rather hot topic at the end of the 1990s, and I felt I had discovered it too late. So, at the suggestion of my mentor, Prof. Leon Surette, I decided to explore Pound's economic correspondence. It was not the same thing, but it was a satisfactory substitute. My edition established

the concept, something that I am still very proud of to this day. It did a lot to “put me on the map.” Pound scholars trusted my edition and used it in their arguments.

For myself, around 2003–2006, I decided to leave Pound alone for a while. It was imperative for me to widen my range, so when the opportunity to teach American literature in Edinburgh offered itself, I grasped it. I spent a decade just teaching American poetry and fiction of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as literary theory – that gave me a wide perspective, a way to embed what I knew about Pound into the wider contexts of modernist poetry in the U. S. and Europe. I saw that whenever I introduced Pound’s work in my classes, my students were electrified, fascinated, and elated. I suppose I unconsciously communicated my enthusiasm well! However, I tried to keep my distance and remember my reasons for teaching, which were to widen the lens, extend my knowledge, make sense of literary history, and potentially find other interesting authors to study in depth. But then, something like destiny struck softly: in 2010, I decided to attend a small conference in London, where I met old acquaintances that I had not seen for a decade. They all recognized and greeted me as if they had seen me just the previous week; this was a surprise, as I had expected them to forget me after such a long time. Walter Baumann invited me then to the next EPIC, which was to take place in London the next year.

That conference and his constant friendly support made me turn toward Pound once again. This time, I saw him with new eyes: I was not a beginner or a student; I was someone with research, publication, and teaching experience, a mature professional by now. The conference in 2011 was a turning point for me. I decided to create “The Cantos Project,” and after some inner deliberation, I contacted the Ezra Pound Trust at New Directions to get the permissions, as Pound’s work is still under copyright. Negotiations lasted for over a year: it was only by 2014 that I was able to set up the website and work on annotation. At the start of 2016, I also received funding, so I happily spent the next five years of my life exploring the poem and creating the critical apparatus for 64 cantos. Meanwhile, professional opportunities presented themselves: Ezra Pound Society chairing, conferences, new books, and articles. These years (2014–2021) were the most productive of my life.

LI Wenting: Massimo Bacigalupo praised “The Cantos Project” as “the most important recent contribution to Pound Studies (Su & Bacigalupo, 2022, p. 387).” Could you please introduce the design idea and resources of this platform so that more researchers could learn how to use it?

Roxana Preda: “The Cantos Project” website is best compared to a house (Preda, 2016). When you open the homepage, you are at ground level, looking at the façade. Two rows of doors are facing you. At the top, say, on the roof or in the attic, there is the main menu ribbon, with resources that help readers cope with the poem *as a whole*: publication history, secondary bibliographies, reader resources, a list of abbreviations, and even a bookshelf with links to books that served Pound as general sources of the poem.

Then, if the reader chooses to go inside the house, s/he needs to click on one of the doors. If, say, someone is interested in Canto 40, s/he will click on *Eleven New Cantos* (31–41). We are now in another space devoted to that particular installment of the cantos, published in 1934. An overview page, like an entrance hall, will have a list of links to individual cantos on the right, just like a row of rooms. At the same time, just in front, it will have information about the *Eleven New Cantos* as a whole: a publication history with excerpts from correspondence and a secondary bibliography devoted to the section.

Then, we might choose to take another step inside the house and click on one of the links to cantos on the right. We get into another hall, which I propose to call the “title page” of the canto. As previously, we have

general information concerning it, this time a calendar of composition, pages from illustrated editions, audio readings, and a secondary bibliography listing all available commentaries on the canto in journals, articles, book sections, and websites. Looking to the right, we might see the *poem* with annotation in pop-ups; a *Sources* page, listing and linking to the specific books that Pound used in the canto, as well as drafts from the archive, where available; a *Companion* – a webpage that has just the annotation; and a list of *References* I used in my work on the canto. This list is not the same as the bibliography on the poem's title page. I use some of the existing exegesis in my annotation, of course, but I also use other, more general, or tangential information as well, such as digital resources and illustrations, which are all listed on the *References* page. Readers just need to remember that I am limited to showing just 12 cantos in free access. That was the condition stipulated by New Directions. So, at the moment, only Cantos 54 to 65 have the text with pop-ups in free access. For all the rest, readers have the companion pages.

All in all, my goal in “The Cantos Project” is to provide a digital research environment that can serve as a virtual classroom for the individual reader/student/researcher who would like to understand and study the poem. I do recommend everyone register and log in to the site. It is free and easy to do.

LI Wenting: Fuzzy boundaries among disciplines have become a trend in today's academic research. Ezra Pound is undoubtedly a pioneering figure in interdisciplinary creation. Could you please introduce the ways Pound was involved in interdisciplinary research?

Roxana Preda: Pound was a poet, but he had the curiosity and the will to knowledge of a scholar in the humanities. His poem cannot be understood by having sole recourse to literature. It is not enough that readers be literary scholars: what is needed is to be intellectuals, people proficient not only in languages and literatures but also in the arts, history, economics, philosophy, and politics. This is necessary, as epics are not simply narrative poems but stylized accounts of individual societies. When Pound made the decision to write “a long poem,” he soon realized that he would not be able to go on just on the basis of literature. He needed a political perspective; he needed to know how societies work, hence to decide on a conceptual angle. Pound's politics is rooted in Italian thought: Dante Alighieri's *De Monarchia* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Later, the *Da Xue* played a great role in his geopolitical views, and the first traces of it occurred as early as canto 13, written in 1923. In matters of economics, Pound chose C. H. Douglas's theory of Social Credit (Douglas, 1935), first started around 1918, which has a lot of resemblances with what today is called the theory of “basic universal income.” In matters of history, Pound was a so-called “historicist,” someone who is not only interested in “what happened” but in how events become meaningful in patterns of recurrence; moreover, he wanted his readers to see how economics underpins peace and war, empire, and colonialism. Finally, though Pound dabbled for a lifetime in European medieval philosophy, he also saw himself as a Confucian. In time, just by writing the poem along the lines he had chosen, he acquired more knowledge about the world and forced the reader to go along. By doing that, he created a poem that looks like an encyclopedia or an academy, what he jokingly came to call the “Eziversity.” He included in it geographical, historical, economic, and political knowledge about Europe, China, and the United States, relating them constantly to one another. The result for the contemporary reader is exciting and uncomfortable at the same time. Pound forces the reader to step up, make an effort, and explore whatever subject of interest awakens his curiosity. He reminds all of us that literature is just a part of the humanities and that if we wish to understand it well, we need all the other parts.

LI Wenting: Pound drew upon translation as a wellspring for his poetic creation. Could you please introduce the progress of Pound's poetic translation?

Roxana Preda: There are three principles that seem to me unique to Pound as a translator and poet: first, providing the original text next to the translation, or even refusing to translate, so that the reader is forced to confront the raw source; second, translating only the essence, the gist of a text, parsing and simplifying the original to increase the speed of reading, prune the original's textual details to transmit just the most important message; third, choosing a specific text to be translated with the purpose of correlating it with others, in other languages. In all three instances, Pound shows textual, and more specifically, poetic innovation. He uses foreign languages in his poems so as to create the feel of authenticity, staging a one-to-one encounter with the foreign language for the individual reader; then, by translating the essentials, he modernizes the original, bringing it either to our time or else to a universal, atemporal level that takes out the time markers from the original (occasionally putting in others) – in this way, we can identify our modern consciousness much easier with the texts of the past; and thirdly, he correlates elements across languages and cultures which have historically developed separately from each other. At present, the internet is doing the connecting and correlating for us. Technology, however, can't do it all: it connects us mainly in terms of various novelties, technical or otherwise, travel, and entertainment. An individual has to dig deeper if s/he seeks other sorts of knowledge. You might remember my struggle with Canto 89, when I asked for your help about Pound's reference to "Ching Hao" in connection with *The Book of Documents*. There was no information about him in any English language resource on the internet. You told me it might be the Ming scholar and politician Hao Jing (1558–1639). Your resource was the Chinese-language Wikipedia.

Comparing our present situation with Pound's, we might realize he had other realms of correlation, seeing how interested he was in the essential books of a culture. He connected us in moral principles, in emotions, wisdom, history, politics, and economics. At every turn, he gave the concrete example, seldom the abstract principle. If the reader wants the theory, s/he needs to remember the concrete instance and correlate it with others on her own. *The Cantos* is an edifice of analogies; if we know it even moderately well, we realize that no culture has a monopoly on wisdom and/or invention. The experiences of humanity are remarkably similar, even if they are encoded in different cultures and languages. I think that the ultimate goal of Pound's translation activities is this tremendous work of correlation. Let me give you an example. Recently, I wrote an essay on canto 93 for a forthcoming volume of *Readings in the Cantos*. This canto was born out of an accident, yet a telling one: just as a joke, Pound told his son-in-law, Boris de Rachewiltz, who was an Egyptologist, that if he, Boris, could find a Confucian of the Nile, he would give him a canto. Boris did not look for one, of course, but he did publish a little book, an Italian translation of Egyptian inscriptions, calling it *Massime degli antichi Egiziani*. Reading it, Pound discovered a remark of an ancient pharaoh, Khati: "A man's paradise is his good nature" (de Rachewiltz, 1953, p. 18). This aphorism seemed to him in the spirit of Confucius, so he wrote the canto, as promised. There is no exact Chinese equivalent of Khati's maxim in canto 93 itself, but while working on my table of the Chinese characters in the whole poem, I came across this phrase in canto 99, which Pound related to Khati: "tien/ t'ang²/ hsin¹/ li³⁻⁵" (Pound, 1996, p. 722); he does not translate it, leaving the reader to go to the trouble and find, as a personal discovery, that the words mean "heaven's temple is in the heart" – how is that for an equivalent? Now, of course, a Chinese-educated person might quarrel with the textual

presentation, say, for instance, that “tien” should be “t’ien¹” in the Wade/Giles transcription that Pound was using at the time. But you see my point: humanism is not just a concept invented in Europe – it goes across the whole spectrum of humanity, both historically and geographically. In translation theory, we are often too deep in questions of technique or cultural politics to be mindful of such principles. For Pound, Confucius was a humanist – he openly defines him as such in his *Guide to Kulchur* (Pound, 1938); he was elated to see in Khati, someone who lived much earlier in another country, a similar guiding principle for living, feeling, and thinking.

LI Wenting: Dante Gabriel Rossetti was one of Pound’s favorite translators, poets, and painters. You analyzed his influence on Pound in your book *Ezra Pound’s (Post)Modern Poetics and Politics: Logocentrism, Language, and Truth*. Do you agree that Rossetti contributed to Pound’s view of ekphrasis?

Roxana Preda: I think that Pound, while openly acknowledging Rossetti’s influence, wanted to separate from him very early in his career. He translated Guido Cavalcanti in 1911, especially to provide an English version of his poems in a more modern language than Rossetti did in 1861. Pound wanted to get rid of Victorianism and Catholicism, as well as of the complex diction he felt were the hallmarks of Rossetti’s poetic style. Whereas ekphrasis was tremendously important to Rossetti, who was both a painter and a poet, the form was seldom used by Pound unless of course you regard his practice of analyzing Chinese characters as ekphrastic. Pound developed his own imagist approach, separately from Rossetti. I think that whatever practices Pound had of relating his poetry to the visual arts, they were made rather in the intercourse he had with his contemporaries, especially those nearest to him, Wyndham Lewis and Gaudier-Brzeska. Later on, I think Brâncuși’s art also played a role, as Pound was immensely impressed with the sculptor’s work. But here too, Pound proceeded against the usual ekphrasis: he did not describe the art object or attune it to his poem; rather, he presented Brâncuși’s integration of the art object into nature as an act of aesthetic and religious synthesis. The poetry is thus doubly integrative, almost ritualistic: nature welcomes the man-made object into itself as a sort of altar in the forest, a gate to transcendence; the poem is the magic formula that admits us into this realm.

LI Wenting: You elaborated on the influence of some sculptors, especially Constantin Brâncuși, on Pound’s aesthetics in your article “Constantin Brâncuși, Vorticist: Sculpture, Art Criticism, Poetry” (2019), which was one of your most popular articles in *Academia*. Could you please explain what inspirations Pound drew from sculpture for his poetic creation?

Roxana Preda: Oh, that is a wide subject that can be seen from many angles. It was the topic of one classic of scholarship, Donald Davie’s *Ezra Pound Poet as Sculptor* (1964), which is still read today. Pound indeed preferred sculpture to painting, and maybe ultimately this had personal reasons. He had deep affection for a young French sculptor he met in London around 1913, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Pound remembered for a lifetime how happy he had been in long conversations with Henri before WWI. Then, the young man volunteered to go fight for France in the war and was killed at the front in 1915. Pound was so shaken that he wrote a little book, *Gaudier-Brzeska. A Memoir* (1916); in form, it is a prose rehearsal of literary collage, the method of *The Cantos* – gathering bits and pieces of everything Pound knew about his friend: memories of conversations, letters, art manifestoes, reproductions of artworks (Pound, 1970).

There are two main things that Pound learned from Gaudier, especially from his Vorticist manifesto published in *Blast* 1. One of them was to think of form, whether artistic or natural, in terms of mass and line. Pound could and did apply this principle to *The Cantos*. In the poem, mass counts: whereas the general method

presents a subject in bits and pieces that the reader has to bring together into a comprehensible whole, “mass” is a criterion of value: a passage which is longer, more coherent, presented in a more elaborate way impresses the reader differently than a knot of tangled short allusions. Thus, the coherent, longer passage is placed strategically and can often delineate what is most important and meaningful in the canto. Then, the line: in my annotation, I have discovered that a canto may have several blocks of text that are fundamentally different from each other. An arbitrary, functional line may separate these blocks from one another and thus create a sense of methodological coherence to the poem. We are not totally lost; it’s as if we go from one chapter to another, separated by single lines. I have included a commentary of Canto 36 in my *Cantos Project* that discusses exactly such a case. The form of this canto is just an example – there are plenty of others: separating blocks of text by individual lines is a method Pound uses often. Cantos 21, 35, and 40 are other examples, just as interesting.

There is a second thing that Pound learned from Gaudier, namely, to adopt the gaze of an artist to every sort of form, but especially to Chinese characters. Pound remembered in his *Memoir* that Gaudier would say: how can lexicographers not see that 馬 is a horse (Pound, 1970, p. 48). Pound was thus encouraged to scrutinize sinographs with focused attention and look for visual clues. In his late cantos, he used such analysis to create poetry. An example is this one, in canto 74: “plowed in the sacred field and / unwound the silk worm early / in tensile 顯 / in the light of light is the virtù” (Pound, 1996, p. 449). You see the “silk” and the “sun” in the xian³ character; also 具, the character for “virtue,” which Pound often used in other contexts. He was neither precise nor strictly philological with Chinese characters but took his inspiration from what he saw.

LI Wenting: Did sculpture provide Pound’s creation with any other inspiration besides Gaudier’s influence?

Roxana Preda: Pound’s affection for Gaudier is of course just one of the reasons why sculpture became meaningful to him. Another way to look at it is the special view a piece of sculpture elicits. A viewer needs to go around the object, and with every step or change of position, the sculpture becomes different, as if one does not experience a single entity but a multitude. This teaches a literary person the virtues of limited points of view. Every such point yields an interesting aspect that cannot be generalized. This small-scale knowledge, vision, or awareness is certainly true, but in a special, limited way. This leads to a prismatic concept of knowledge as made up of limited perspectives; further to the impossibility of generalizing or reaching an epistemic finality. In *the Cantos*, this approach leads to fragmenting a topic and presenting details of it spread out across poems in further supplements, analogies, and parallels. For instance, Pound was fascinated by the love story between an Italian noblewoman, Cunizza da Romano, and a poet, Sordello; they lived in the 13th century, a generation before Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri. Pound introduced the subject in Canto 6, which he revised in 1929. He also presented other details of the story in Cantos 29 and 36. All these instances are side views of the subject, just like those we gain when moving around a sculptural object. We need all these limited perspectives to form a comprehensive idea of the story, not in an objective way, but as Pound saw it. Moreover, the story is not isolated, but for Pound at least, vitally connected to Cavalcanti and Dante. He makes these correlations in canto 36, where he wraps up the topic.

LI Wenting: You mentioned that Russian composer Igor Stravinsky had affected Pound’s poetic rhythm. Could you elucidate their relationship?

Roxana Preda: Well, the relationship between Pound and Stravinsky has not been explored at all. I personally think it exists, but I would need to study the traces in much greater detail. My hypothesis is that

Pound oriented his own poetry towards the great innovators of the modernist age, Picasso and Stravinsky. The latter became important during the 1920s, when Pound made friends with the American composer George Antheil, who was an intense admirer of the Russian composer.

Stravinsky made great changes to the way music was conceived and written. Usually, musical pieces had a key signature (say, D major or C minor) and a time signature, like, say, 4/4 or 6/8, which would apply to the whole piece. That of course didn't mean that the key (or tonality) would stay the same; it would certainly wander, but it would return to the initial signature and thus reassert its dominance. Similarly with the time signature: stating it at the start did not mean the composer could not change it within the same piece; but then, the new time signature would govern a section of the piece, and after the section was concluded, the composer would return to the original one. Put very simplistically, Stravinsky changed the key and the time signatures of a piece very often, sometimes several times in a bar. In his orchestral pieces, Stravinsky would also layer tonalities and rhythms: each group of instruments would play in different keys and would have individual rhythmic notations. I think that Pound tried to apply these practices to poetry, as he could see with his own eyes the Stravinskian way Antheil re-notated his opera *Le Testament de François Villon* in 1923 (we can see it too, by the way, the score is available in a wonderful edition published by Robert Hughes and Margaret Fisher in 2011) (Pound, 2011).

An awareness of key can be created in a literary text by the handling of poetic tone, especially when it runs against what we expect. Similarly, the rhythm of a poem can be used to characterize a person, like a unique stamp. My preferred instance of this is in Canto 21, where Pound makes the splendid patron of the arts, Lorenzo de Medici, talk about his wealth in a reduced vocabulary and short, half-formulated sentences. Pound contrasts this tonality and rhythm with a passage from a letter by Thomas Jefferson: long, elaborate sentences, elegant wording, slow, stately movement of complex phrasing. Pound thus uses rhythm to change our clichés about people: we are accustomed to think of Lorenzo as a flamboyant art patron, not a penny-recording accountant; we know that Jefferson was a politician “in the neck of the woods,” a faraway colony at the other end of civilization, yet he writes like Frederic the Great in dialogue with Voltaire.

LI Wenting: You edited and annotated *Ezra Pound's Economic Correspondence 1933–1940* (2007) and did thorough research on Pound's economic views. Have you found some of Pound's economic views quite forward-looking?

Roxana Preda: A difficult, complex question, but really, what we most want to figure out today. Pound's economic views are still alternative but very relevant. While he was alive, they got him into terrible trouble: he was reviled for them; ultimately, his whole poetic reputation was destroyed because all his peers asked aloud why he could not stick to poetry, which he knew best, and staked his literary reputation on some crank economics that nobody but a handful of people agreed with. Pound's continuous harping on “usury” and his elevating the economic knowledge to a crucial position for the modern intellectual annoyed plenty of people who knew nothing of the subject but were perfectly able and willing to say that Pound was and should be as ignorant as they were.

You ask if Pound's economic ideas were forward-looking. I think they were and still are since they interrogate how financial and social values can be distributed with justice and not hogged by corporations, banks, or individuals who know how to work the system. His main animus was against central private banks and the

creation of fiat money, i. e. , money created by simple writing into an account, with no backing in something tangible. During Pound's lifetime, money was officially backed by gold, a limited quantity commodity that hampered economic growth. Pound was against it, saying that there was simply not enough gold in the world for economies to thrive: the currency of a nation should be backed by its real wealth, i. e. by commodities to be found and produced on its territory and any form of renewable, natural resources. If you happen to be informed about the newest discussions about money these days, you may have heard that the dollar is fiat money and has been for a while. The group of nations calling itself BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are now discussing the possibility of creating a new currency based on commodities to be found in their countries. Gold can be such a commodity, but not the only one, as in the old gold standard system. You see then that Pound's idea of basing money on commodities deliverable and wanted (which he referred to in canto 52) is quite relevant to financial reform in the contemporary world, similar to discussions around the idea of "universal basic income," which Pound's mentor in economics, Clifford Hugh Douglas, called "national dividend" (Douglas, 1935, p. 111).

At the same time, Pound was against the intervention of banks at all levels of society. He called the banking system in liberal societies and the debt economy it creates "usury" and wished to find ways out of it. The truth is that usury in our time is even more pervasive than in Pound's own. We are in a debt economy, and Pound saw that with great clarity. He even connected usury to the decay in the quality of food (canto 45), which, as far as prophecy goes, is astonishing.

LI Wenting: So, in more general terms, what was his main interest in economics, apart from usury? Was there a tighter connection between economics, as he saw it, and a certain type of politics?

Roxana Preda: Professional economists do not like to connect their object of study to politics; they say economics should have nothing to do with a political ideology. I find this difficult to believe, as I agree with Pound that economics is indeed one of the decisive factors in political interactions. Political impulses and beliefs are also at the basis of how we view economics, the issues we decide to focus on. In matters of politics, Pound defended Mussolini, and this made him a Fascist in the eyes of everyone. However, a more balanced, in-depth study of Pound's politics in its relationship with his views on economics is needed. Pound's thinking was also influenced by Confucian political principles – he saw them in action by writing his summary of Chinese history – this has never been analyzed in detail, to my knowledge. Only David Moody has mentioned this side of Pound's politics, as far as I know (Moody, 2007–2015).

Pound thought that the system of money creation in liberal societies automatically led to the state forming debts to private banks and implicitly to a conflict between financial and governmental power, where the financial side has an unfair advantage. He made this a topic in Cantos 37, 88, and 89. If the state has debts, they must be repaid out of taxes, with interest. So, if the state gets involved in wars, does bad international deals, scatters its funds everywhere in useless expenses, and grows a bloated, corrupt bureaucracy, it is the normal person who ultimately suffers. Questions of national debt, therefore, worried Pound a great deal. He would turn in his grave if he knew that the national debt of the United States is now around 36.564 trillion dollars (March 2025), 123.10% of its GDP ("National Debt of the United States," 2025). The annual interest in 2025 alone is \$952 billion, which is projected to grow to 13.8 trillion over the next decade (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2023). One might think that these parameters do not affect us. Yet they do because whenever a state wants to save

money, not only does it raise taxes and create inflation to cope, but it also reduces the services it renders to the population: culture, education, pensions, health, police, social housing, etc., all suffer. Implicitly, just by looking at the national debt numbers, we get an approximate idea of the living standards in a country.

LI Wenting: Some scholars doubted Ezra Pound's knowledge of Chinese culture and supposed that the admirer of Pound, the poet, would be a bit disappointed by his haste and waste in dealing with the Chinese Classics. How do you view this point?

Roxana Preda: I think that Pound made a very serious, prolonged, and intense effort to both learn the language and understand the classics of Chinese culture over the years. He first read Confucius in translation around 1913, when he was 28 years old. He did not cease learning till the end of his life, in conditions that were very difficult, with no teachers, no guides, no classroom, and not even a radio that could have given him an idea of how Chinese sounded. I think he went as far as he could and provided very useful entry-level knowledge for the Western reader. The idea of writing a summary of Chinese history in nine cantos at the very center of his poem, his decision to quote from the classics in almost every canto written after WWII are acts that seem to me courageous and extremely valuable for education, opening the mind of Western readers towards zones of knowledge that are difficult and completely unfamiliar to them. I don't suppose Pound envisaged a Chinese reader shaking her head at the superficiality of his knowledge – I think he felt that Western readers needed to be introduced to Chinese culture. We know he was right in this, as the situation has hardly improved since the 1930s when he started learning for real. It is only very recently that I noticed China making a definite effort to increase its soft power around the world. What would Pound have done if he had had the online resources we have today? Thinking of his energy and will to learn... he would have sailed much farther, and who knows how many would have been able and willing to follow.

LI Wenting: When you started annotating Cantos 52–71, you asked yourself several questions, such as “Why did Pound structure the telling of the China cantos the way he did?” “How ‘American’ was he in telling China's story?” and “What was the significance of these cantos to the poem as a whole?” (Camacho Roldán & Preda, 2022). Have you found the answers to these questions now?

Roxana Preda: Well, I have a set of answers in my pocket, yes, but they look very eccentric. I have elaborated on them in two lectures I gave recently, one at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in Edinburgh (2021) and the other at the University of Salamanca in 2022. These talks have helped clear my ideas and made me realize I have to study the subject more. Some ideas are still speculative, others have coagulated to more certainty.

One such idea is that Pound wanted to create a global poem, not one about a community, a society, or a region like traditional epics do. The first 30 cantos (1930) are focused on Europe. The middle cantos, 31 to 71 (1940), have a strong American component that is presented in its connection to Western Europe. We know that in 1937, Pound wrote no cantos but was deep in the study of James Legge's critical edition of the Confucian four classics. Why the sudden interest? My hunch is that he was preparing for the Asian component of the poem, and he chose to focus on China, which he regarded as essential. Starting with Canto 49, Chinese culture and history acquire a very strong profile and detail. A history of China was necessary to provide a foundation for a Western reader who knew nothing; Pound wrote it in cantos 52–61. And since he always related elements, images, stories, histories, and moralities, he chose to follow his story of China with the story of the emergence of the

United States by following the Chinese history cantos with ten others devoted to John Adams, one of the American founding fathers. Well, he could have stopped there, but we know that actually, in the late cantos (74–116, published 1948–69), Pound did not simply choose to “return” to the West. He did, in principle, but now he had another very strong component deriving from Chinese classics that he kept combining with cultural elements from the rest of the world. This seems to me extraordinary; prophetic, really, as China was not introduced from a position of subordination; quite the contrary, it was brought in on an equal footing, and sometimes from a superior position, as a corrective to the West. There is no one who could have done this in the 1940s and 1950s; I think that Pound is unique in his approach, even among poets, who, following his footsteps, opened themselves up to Chinese poetry and translated some of it. His gesture, as an American intellectual, is now even more astonishing, seeing how difficult and adversarial Sino-American relations have been postwar and become in our time.

LI Wenting: I really appreciate your interest in Chinese characters and Chinese culture. You even made a searchable table of the Chinese characters Pound uses in *The Cantos*. What would you suggest Chinese scholars should contribute more to Ezra Pound studies?

Roxana Preda: As far as I can see from my own position, I find that Chinese scholars have embraced Pound’s early work, like *Cathay* (1915), and engaged much less with the middle and late Cantos, where significant exegetical work still needs to be done. There is also a certain hesitation on their part to engage with details of Chinese writing in the current editions we use. In my work on the table of Chinese characters, I have come to question their positioning and size and, occasionally, their choice. These need to be verified and adjusted, I think so that the meaning of polyglot passages becomes clearer. Scholars in the West are also very hesitant to address these questions and do some interpretation work in carefully chosen passages, not in an extended, detailed study. Thus, issues of text editing, source study, archival research, general interpretation, and authoritative translation all need to be bundled together so that our knowledge can be pushed forward in these difficult instances. In my annotation work, I have often come across situations where my own skills had to be supplemented by those of another scholar. Therefore, I think that for the late cantos, a collaboration between a Chinese and a Western scholar is best. We have to admit to ourselves that our knowledge is limited and needs the help of another; we cannot all be like that scholar extraordinaire, Achilles Fang, who could correct not just Pound’s Chinese but also his Greek and Italian. I think Pound, too, would have liked to see collaboration flourish – after all, his poem is a plea for humans to talk to each other and dare to defy the obstacles of foreign languages, distances, and histories.

LI Wenting: Professor Preda, Thank you very much for this conversation.

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