

## Ernest Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* in Notebook VI.B.30

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The short lists of Chinese related material in Notebook VI.B.30 are derived from Ernest Fenollosa: *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* edited by Ezra Pound (1919) and abbreviated in this genetic transcription as *CWC*. Pound shared Fenollosa's admiration for the Chinese language as witnessed by his inclusion of the essay in his *Instigations* and his own collection of poems entitled "Cathay" with its opening acknowledgment.

In notebook VI.A page 511, under *Eolus*, Joyce had already made a brief note 'a true noun does not exist in nature (Fenollosa): any pronouns?' that he used at *FW* 523.10-11 (*Annotations* 4). A second unit entered immediately after it, was another Fenollosa jotting: 'phonetic theory is unsound' (*CWC* 385).

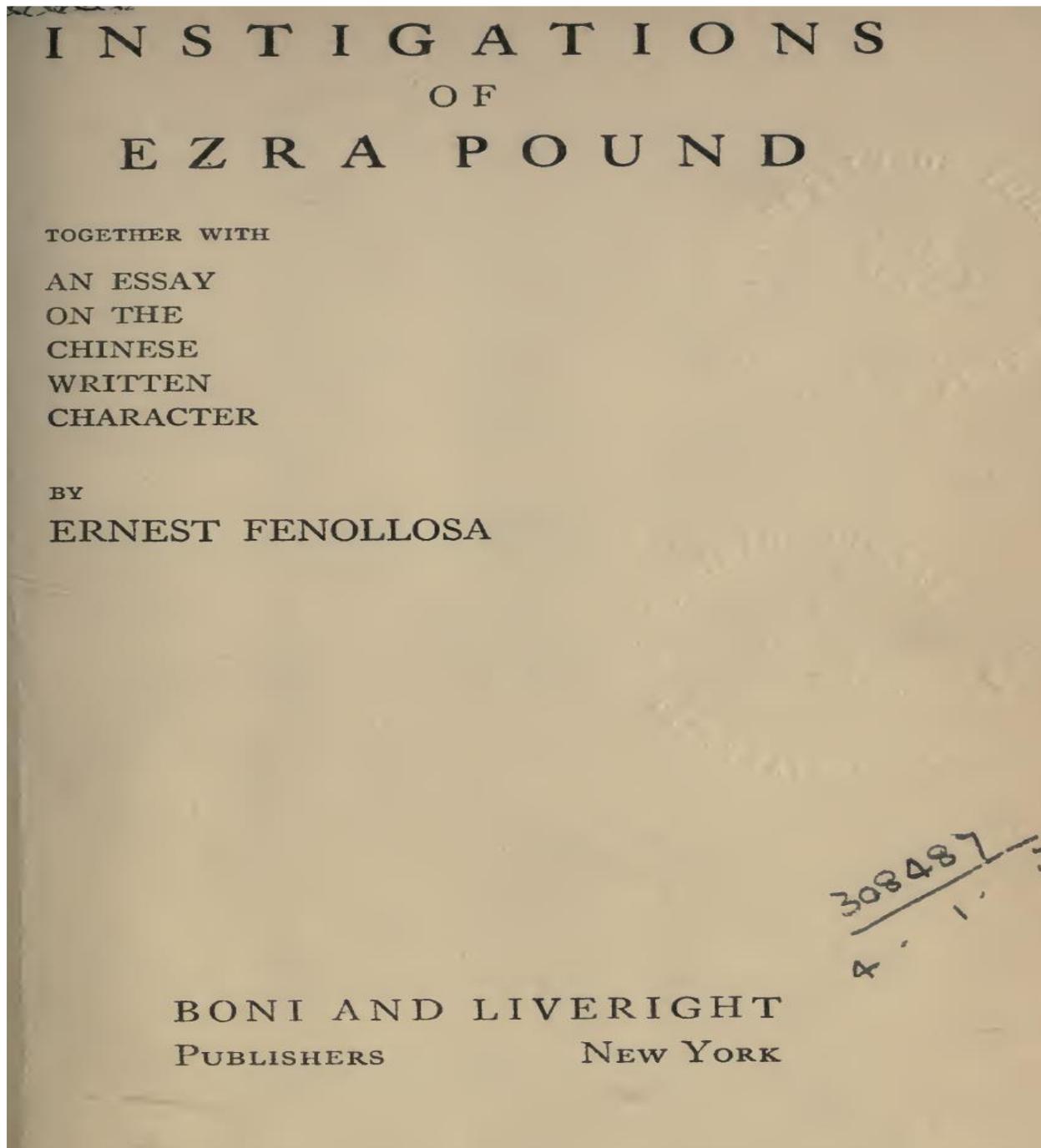
Rough entries in Joyce's hand start on page 060 in notebook VI.B.30 and end on page 063. Many of these notes written in green ink, are difficult to read, some are even illegible. Instrumental in the identification of the source was Paul Léon's rewrite of Joyce's jottings: he transcribed the last two pages of Fenollosa's notes (VI.B.30.062-063(a)) several pages further, on the notebook pages 072-073. As we have shown below, Paul Léon tried first to amend Joyce's entries (see the *Note* in VI.B.30.062(a) and (b)) and only later did he make a more complex transcription by adding new material from the source.

From the short Fenollosa index, Joyce crossed out for immediate use—in the Galley Proofs of Book III of *Finnegans Wake*—one page of his rough notes (page 062) and Léon's full rewrite. Apparently the cross-outs took place at two separate occasions, since Joyce used two different coloured crayons: a red crayon for his notes and a green one for Léon's. Furthermore, it seems that he reconsidered the importance of the note on the five forms of the first person pronoun (page 063) that he previously did not cross out, as on page 073 the note is crossed out in green as well.

Moreover, Joyce appears to have further developed the ideas he found in Fenollosa, "In Chinese the preposition is frankly a verb, specially used in a generalized sense[...] Conjunctions are similarly derivative, they usually serve to mediate actions between verbs, and therefore they are necessarily themselves actions." While using most of the notebook units below (Joyce replaced all the infinitive verbs that he had harvested from Fenollosa, with their –ing forms) he went much further and seems to have invented many other similar replacements. These can be clearly seen on the spectacular additions page (*JJA* 62:354) of Book III, Galley Proofs.

Because Joyce's notes on pages 062-063 differ slightly from Paul Léon's we have chosen to provide the source quotations for both sets of entries. The genetic information is provided only once: for Paul Léon's rewrite.

In the following genetic transcription we have used the 1920 edition of *Instigations of Ezra Pound together with An Essay on the Chinese Written Character* published by Boni & Liveright. This edition can be accessed online at: <https://archive.org/details/instigationstoge00pounuoft/page/n7>.



## VI.B.30.060

(b) **plant / sun } = spring**

(c) **S in / branches } = E**

(d) **<&> st[ruggle] / [rice/field } = M**

CWC 364: A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them.

The sun underlying the bursting forth of plants = spring.

The sun sign tangled in the branches of the tree sign = east.

“Rice-field” plus “struggle” = male.

“Boat” plus “water,” boat-water, a ripple.

## VI.B.30.061

(a) **no negations / in nature >**

(b) **v. t. = v. i. >**

(c) **not = to be lost >**

(d) **flesh = subs[t] >**

(e) **to be = to have / = snatch from / moon**

CWC 368-370: The beauty of Chinese verbs is that they are all transitive or intransitive at pleasure. There is no such thing as a naturally intransitive verb. The passive form is evidently a correlative sentence, which turns about and makes the object into a subject. That the object is not in itself passive, but contributes some positive force of its own to the action, is in harmony both with scientific law and with ordinary experience. The English passive voice with “is” seemed at first an obstacle to this hypothesis, but one suspected that the true form was a generalized transitive verb meaning something like “re-[368]ceive,” which had degenerated into an auxiliary. It was a delight to find this the case in Chinese.

In nature there are no negations, no possible transfers of negative force. The presence of negative sentences in language would seem to corroborate the logicians’ view that assertion is an arbitrary subjective act. *We* can assert a negation, though nature can not. But here again science comes to our aid against the logician: all apparently negative or disruptive movements bring into play other positive forces. It requires great effort to annihilate. Therefore we should suspect that, if we could follow back the history of all negative particles, we should find that they also are sprung from transitive verbs. It is too late to demonstrate such derivations in the Aryan languages, the clue has been lost, but in Chinese we can still watch positive verbal conceptions passing over into so-called negatives. Thus in Chinese the sign meaning “to be lost in the forest” relates to a state of non-existence. English “not” = the Sanskrit *na*, which may come from the root *na*, to be lost, to perish.

Lastly comes the infinitive which substitutes for a specific colored verb the universal copula “is,” followed by a noun or an adjective. We do not say a tree “greens itself,” but “the tree is green;” not that “monkeys bring forth live young,” but, that “the monkey is a mammal.” This is an ultimate weakness of language. It has come from generalizing all intransitive words into one. As “live,” “see,” “walk,” “breathe,” are generalized into states by dropping their objects, so these weak verbs are in turn reduced to the abstractest state of all, namely, bare existence.

There is in reality no such verb as a pure copula, no such original conception, our very word *exist* means “to stand forth,” to show oneself by a definite act. “Is” [369] comes from the Aryan root *as*, to breathe. “Be” is from *bhu* to grow.

In Chinese the chief verb for “is” not only means actively “to have,” but shows by its derivation that it expresses something even more concrete, namely, “to snatch from the moon with the hand.” Here the baldest symbol of prosaic analysis is transformed by magic into a splendid flash of concrete poetry.

(f) **Π verbal / noun**

CWC 373: In the derivation of nouns from verbs, the Chinese language is forestalled by the Aryan. Almost all the Sanskrit roots, which seem to underlie European languages, are primitive verbs, which express characteristic actions of visible nature. The verb must be the primary fact of nature, since motion and change are all that we can recognize in her. In the primitive transitive sentence, such as “Farmer pounds rice,” the agent and the object are nouns only in so far as they limit a unit of action. “Farmer” and “rice” are mere hard terms which define the extremes of the pounding. But in themselves, apart from this sentence-function, they are naturally verbs. The farmer is one who tills the ground, and the rice is a plant which grows in a special way. This is indicated in the Chinese characters. And this probably exemplifies the ordinary derivation of nouns from verbs. In all languages, Chinese included, a noun is originally “that which does something,” that which performs the verbal action.

## VI.B.30.062

(a) **ʼ<ly> by = to ca/in/ >**

Note: ‘ca/in/’ rewritten as ‘cause’. In Paul Léon’s hand.

(b) **ʼto = to f/u/l towards >**

Note: ‘ful’ rewritten as ‘fall’. In Paul Léon’s hand.

(c) **ʼin = remain >**

(d) **ʼfrom = follow >**

(e) **ʼbecause = [to use] >**

(f) **ʼand = to be / included >**

(g) **ʼand = be par/allel/ >**

(h) **ʼor = pa/rtake/ >**

(i) **ʼif = to permit**

CWC 374-5: Still more interesting are the Chinese “prepositions,” they are often post-positions. Prepositions are so important, so pivotal in European speech only because we have weakly yielded up the force of our intransitive verbs. We have to add small supernumerary words to bring back the original power. We still say “I see a horse,” but with the weak verb “look,” we have to add the directive particle “at” before we can restore the natural transitivity.

Prepositions represent a few simple ways in which incomplete verbs complete themselves. Pointing toward nouns as a limit they bring force to bear upon them. That is to say, they are naturally verbs, of generalized or condensed use. In Aryan languages it is often difficult to trace the verbal origins of simple prepositions. Only in “*off*” do we see a fragment of the thought “to throw off.” In Chinese the preposition is frankly a verb, specially used in a generalized sense. These verbs [374] are often used in their specially

verbal sense, and it greatly weakens an English translation if they are systematically rendered by colorless prepositions.

Thus in Chinese: By = to cause; to = to fall toward; in = to remain, to dwell; from = to follow; and so on.

Conjunctions are similarly derivative, they usually serve to mediate actions between verbs, and therefore they are necessarily themselves actions. Thus in Chinese: Because = to use; and = to be included under one; another form of “and” = to be parallel; or = to partake; if = to let one do, to permit.

## VI.B.30.063

- (a) **I = { ha/r/spear, emph / 5 & [mouth] = hd off / c[row]d / by sp[eaking] / to c[oncea]l = selfish / cocoon = egoistic / [E] self -- to [o]elf**

CWC 375: Pronouns appear a thorn in our evolution theory, since they have been taken as unanalysable expressions of personality. In Chinese even they yield up their striking secrets of verbal metaphor. They are a constant source of weakness if colorlessly translated. Take, for example, the five forms of “I.” There is the sign of a “spear in the hand” = a very emphatic I; five and a mouth = a weak and defensive I, holding off a crowd by speaking; to conceal = a selfish and private I; self (the cocoon sign) and a mouth = an egoistic I, one who takes pleasure in his own speaking; the self presented is used only when one is speaking to one’s self.

- (b) **older his word / the richer**

CWC 379-80: Our ancestors built the accumulations of metaphor into structures of language and into systems of thought. Languages to-day are thin and cold because we think less and less into them. We are forced, for the sake of quickness and sharpness, to file down each word to its narrowest edge of meaning. Nature would seem to have become less like a paradise and more and more like a factory. We are content to accept the vulgar misuse of the moment. A late stage of decay is arrested and embalmed in the dictionary. Only scholars and poets feel painfully back along the thread of our etymologies and piece together our diction, as best they may, from forgotten fragments. This anemia of modern speech is only too well encouraged by the feeble cohesive force of our phonetic symbols. There is little or nothing in a phonetic word to exhibit the embryonic stages of its growth. It does not bear its metaphor on its face. We forget that personality once meant, not the soul, but the soul’s mask. This is the sort of thing one can not possibly forget in using the Chinese symbols.

In this Chinese shows its advantage. Its etymology is constantly visible. It retains the creative impulse and process, visible and at work. After thousands of years the lines of metaphoric advance are still shown, and in many cases actually retained in the meaning. Thus a word, instead of growing gradually poorer and poorer as with us, becomes richer and still more rich from age to age, almost consciously luminous. Its uses in national philosophy and history, in biography and in [378] poetry, throw about it a nimbus of meanings.

## Paul Léon’s rewrite of Joyce’s notes

## VI.B.30.072

- (a) **<sup>s</sup>by = to cause >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: <sup>^</sup>+caused+<sup>^</sup> | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.28

- (b) **<sup>s</sup>to = to fall toward >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: <sup>^</sup>+falling towards+<sup>^</sup> | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.31

- (c) **<sup>s</sup>in = to remain, to dwell >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+remaining+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.29

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+dwelling+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.29

(d) **<sup>g</sup>from = to follow**

CWC 374-5: Still more interesting are the Chinese “prepositions,” they are often post-positions. Prepositions are so important, so pivotal in European speech only because we have weakly yielded up the force of our intransitive verbs. We have to add small supernumerary words to bring back the original power. We still say “I see a horse,” but with the weak verb “look,” we have to add the directive particle “at” before we can restore the natural transitiveness.

Prepositions represent a few simple ways in which incomplete verbs complete themselves. Pointing toward nouns as a limit they bring force to bear upon them. That is to say, they are naturally verbs, of generalized or condensed use. In Aryan languages it is often difficult to trace the verbal origins of simple prepositions. Only in “*off*” do we see a fragment of the thought “to throw off.” In Chinese the preposition is frankly a verb, specially used in a generalized sense. These verbs [374] are often used in their specially verbal sense, and it greatly weakens an English translation if they are systematically rendered by colorless prepositions.

Thus in Chinese: By = to cause; to = to fall toward; in = to remain, to dwell; from = to follow; and so on.

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+following+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.32

(e) **<sup>g</sup>because = to use >**

Not located in MS/FW.

(f) **<sup>g</sup>and = to be inc[l]uded under [one] >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+including+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.32

(g) **<sup>g</sup>— = to be parallel >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+parallel ^+parallaling+^ buttyr+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.24

(h) **<sup>g</sup>or = to partake >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+partaking+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 484.01

(i) **<sup>g</sup><of> if = to permit**

CWC 375: Conjunctions are similarly derivative, they usually serve to mediate actions between verbs, and therefore they are necessarily themselves actions. Thus in Chinese: Because = to use; and = to be included under one; another form of “and” = to be parallel; or = to partake; if = to let one do, to permit.

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+Permitting+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 |  
III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+/3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.35

## VI.B.30.073

(a) **<sup>g</sup>Spear in hand = emphatic >**

Note: Units (a) to (e) are bracketed and preceded by an ‘I’ as Joyce entered them in the rough version several pages before. See 063(a) above.

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+This bolt in hand ~~to~~ be my worder!+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.15-6

(b) <sup>s</sup>**five and a mouth = weak and / defensive >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+, mouthspeech allno fingerforce,+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 484.02-3

(c) <sup>s</sup>**conceal = selfish and private >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+, concealed a concealer,+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 484.14

(d) <sup>s</sup>**cocoon sign and a mouth = / egoistic >**

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+(ickle coon <in>icoocoon)+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.35

(e) <sup>s</sup>**<sef> self sign – speaking of / oneself**

CWC 375: Pronouns appear a thorn in our evolution theory, since they have been taken as unanalysable expressions of personality. In Chinese even they yield up their striking secrets of verbal metaphor. They are a constant source of weakness if colorlessly translated. Take, for example, the five forms of “I.” There is the sign of a “spear in the hand” = a very emphatic I; five and a mouth = a weak and defensive I, holding off a crowd by speaking; to conceal = a selfish and private I; self (the cocoon sign) and a mouth = an egoistic I, one who takes pleasure in his own speaking; the self presented is used only when one is speaking to one’s self.

MS 47487-192v, ScrTsLPA: ^+, a self the sign,+^ | JJA 62:354 | late 1938 | III§1A.13+/1B.4+/1C.10+/1D.13+//2A.14+/2B.12+/2C.14+//3A.11+3B.18+//4.8+ | FW 483.28-9