

## EZRA POUND, Cantos 52, 53 and 54

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Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely"

Pound is using Chinese history in the *Cantos* as one of his bases for building a new order in the West. As I see the pattern to date he first shows lines of Western development that are promising but are finally perverted by reformation thought. Then he focuses on aspects of Chinese development that are much more moral in the sense that they more closely express what he sees as immutable laws of nature. As the *Cantos* have progressed he has evidently thought the "decline of the west" is due to faulty ideology which can be corrected by understanding traditional Chinese values.

I want to focus on the first three Chinese *Cantos* to show what values Pound extols in Chinese society, and in the Chinese context how these values have influenced the growth of despotism in China. My point in departing from the poetry for a large section of this paper is to show how the values Pound extols have furnished an ideological base for Chinese despotism. In the first section of the paper I will deal with three *Cantos* as part of a scheme to set up a new order in the West. Next I will deal with the poetry of the three *Cantos*; then give some historic

material so the reader unfamiliar with Chinese history can compare how some western historians see it with how Pound sees it; and finally I will discuss Pound's failure as an epic poet.

## I

According to the Cantos the new order is to have its roots in a respect for the abundance of nature. This should amount to reverential awe. The second line of Canto 52 is, "And of the true base of credit, that is the abundance of nature with the whole folk behind it." Here Pound sets down one of his themes: People are happy when there is a *true* base of credit. As part of this true base of credit we are to have only, "goods that are needed .....deliverable things that are wanted."

After giving an introduction in which he explains how this "true base of credit" kept the Provence people happy, he gives one of the few lyric passages contained in the Cantos. Beginning with, "Toward summer when the sun is in Hyades....." and continuing to the end of Canto 52, he gives an account of the harmonious, ever repeating year in nonusurious China as it was in the golden age and as it has been since during benevolent regimes. This is a very important passage, and I will deal with it in section II for its poetic qualities, but for now it is sufficient to mention that these were times when man had respect for the abundance of nature. To Pound man, by his own free will, can build such a society, and much of the Cantos attempts to show how modern man can attain abundance and live in harmony with nature.

In Canto 53 Pound deals with the great emperors of antiquity to show which ones obeyed the mandate of heaven and won abundance for the people and which ones did not. First he talks about the mythological half-human emperors who taught the beginnings of civilization. Then he mentions the three sovereigns, Fu Hsi, Shen Nung and Huang Ti (I will try to give all Chinese names in The Wade-Giles romanization. That in parenthesis is Pound's French romanization.) Fu Hsi is supposed to have invented writing and a system of numbers, Shen Nung taught agriculture and Huang Ti is supposed to be the founder-hero of Chinese civilization, from whom all subsequent kings and princes are descended. To Pound all these men of the mythical golden age are great because they taught the people how to utilize the abundance of nature and not transgress the holy spirits.

Pound's way to gain abundance is to give, "each man land for his labour / not by ploughland alone / But for keeping of silk-worms." The man he is admiring, "Reforested the mulberry groves / Set periodical markets, and the result was, "exchange brought abundance, the prisons were empty. 'Yao and Shun (Chun) have returned' / sang the farmers / 'Peace and abundance bring virtue.' " And the people will respond to this:

And you will hear to this day the folk singing

Grow pear-boughs, be fearless

Let no man break twig of this tree

that gave shade to Chao-kong

he had shadow from sun here;

rest had he in your shade.

As civilization becomes more complex the way to insure

continued abundance is to have, "a prince who wd / fulfil obligation." and takes caution to see that, "cash move amongst the people." Chao-Kong, the surveyor of the land in the early days of the Chou dynasty, speaks for Pound:

Talk of the people  
is like the hills and the streams  
Thence comes our abundance.

To be Lord to the four seas of China  
a man must let men make verses  
he must let people play comedies  
and historians write down the facts  
he must let the poor speak evil of taxes.

On the next page Pound says:

Swine think of extending borders  
Decent rulers of internal order.

This is Pound's epigram on how to keep abundance once it is attained. One must not waste the product of nature by pointless conquest. One important aspect of the above passage is the relationship between art and society in the social order Pound is advocating in the Cantos. Among modern literary figures Pound has the reputation for being a teacher of artists and as vehement a promoter of Art as the 20th century has seen. William Butler Yeats and T. S. Eliot were two of his most famous pupils, and to this day much of T. S. Eliot's critical opinion consists of ideas he first picked up from Pound, Eliot's conception of western society and art since the post Elizabethan metaphysical school as being mainly a grand aberration of human nature being one of the most significant. Just as Pound has been an exponent of art at any cost as a teacher, so has this idea permeated his creative work and social thought. Thus Pound can accept any

social system which stimulates Art, and evidently as we can see from the above passage, he thinks he has found such a system in Classical China.

Abundance is to be found in submitting to the order of nature, "some fishin' some huntin' some things cannot be changed / some cook, some do not cook some things cannot be changed." Liu Pang (Lieou-pang), the founder of the Han dynasty realized this. He knew that abundance only came to him who dilligently works for it:

Lieou-pang stored food and munitions  
so that he came to be emperor, Kao,  
brought calm and abundance  
No taxes for a whole year,

'no taxes till people can pay 'em.'

Emperor Hsiao Wen Ti, reigned 179—157 B.C., knew that in a complex society even with the mandate of heaven man must work for his own livlilood. His chief minister, Chia I (Kia-Y.), "sent in a petition that they store grain against famine / and HIAO OUEN TI, the emperor published: / Earth is the nurse of all men / I now cut off one half the taxes." A little further on, the war minister of this Virtuous emperor says,

'Gold will sustain no man's life nor will diamonds  
keep the land under culture.....  
by wise circulation, Bread is the base of subsistence.'

Add to the above a quote from a later emperor, "Let artisans teach their sons crafts," and the reader can piece together from these three Cantos the way Pound feels man under the new order can live with the abundance of nature. Man is supposed to live as

close to the earth as possible. He is to be content with the basic necessities of life, and he is to fit into his proper place in the proper order just as parts in nature are subordinated to the whole. Pound infers that man will be more content as the ant in the ant hill who must work because he must. Pound would like the ant in Aesop's fable better than the grasshopper.

Pound's society is to be run by a benevolent hero despot who is both spiritual and political leader. On page five of Cantos 52—71,

In Ming T'ang HE bideth  
     in the west wing of that house  
 Red car and the sorrel horses  
     his banner incarnadine.  
 The fish ward now goes against crocodiles  
 To take all great lizards, turtles, for divination,  
 sea terrapin.  
 The lake warden to gather rushes  
     to take grain for the manes  
 to take grain for the beasts you will sacrifice  
     to the Lords of the Mountains  
     to the Lords of great rivers  
 Inspector of dye-works, inspector of colour and broideries  
 see that the white, black, green be in order  
 let no false colour exist here.....

'Ming T'ang' is the hall used by the Chou dynasty for sacrificing to 'Shang Ti', which I translate as 'Almighty Judge.' The fish ward and lake warden work to gather animals to use in divinations. For this the ancient Chinese used the cracks on tortoise shells and cracks on bones as oracles. The main point of this passage is that it is the function of 'Shang Ti's' representative on earth, the emperor, to communicate with his celestial relative so

he can keep his virtue and protect the abundance of the empire. He in turn appoints subordinates to surveil the people.

Up to this point Chinese society is pictured as a simple, harmonious paradise. Pound is advocating simple, primitive values that make man a part of nature—as a symbol using, intellectual animal, he is awestruck and can have mysterious intercourse with it, but when man sets up inspectors to see that no false colours exist, then the base is laid for mass repression. I take 'false colour' to mean any deviation. When the all-powerful inspector goes into the countryside after a poor night with his wife, or after he has been on tour for two months and wonders who is sleeping with her, I should imagine that all colors would look false. I imagine the inspector would take the people wearing false colors, cut off their noses and puncture their eyes so they will not be able to desire false colors. But to Pound's system such inspectors are necessary.

\* The last lines of Canto 52 are :

Call things by the names. Good sovereign by distribution  
 Evil king is known by his imposts  
 Begin where you are said Lord Palmerston  
     began draining swamps in Sligo  
 Fought smoke nuisance in London. Dredged harbour in Sligo.

'Call things by the names' is the first introduction to what Pound later refers to as *Cheng ming*, or *Ch'ing ming*. Pound wants thing to be named by more than arbitrary definition, but a right name requires right knowledge in an Aristotlian sense. In this passage Pound is saying to the English speaking world, that

we should begin benevolent government the way the Chinese and Lord Palmerston did. He is referring to the way organized Chinese society began with a change from a nomadic mode of living to an agricultural mode. The first Chinese settled in the tributaries of the Yellow river and the job of government was to organize the community against the river.

In Canto 53 the most important point with regard to rulers is that Pound wants to set up a mythology which teaches that all the arts of civilization were handed down from the apex of a hierarchial pyramid. The benefits of civilization are a devine gift, and when they are misused, evil befalls man. Cultivating the land is not enough. Due must be paid to 'Shang Ti' and the emperor must work for his own and the people's salvation:

The surface is not enough,

from Chang Ti nothing is hidden.

For years no waters came, no rain fell

for the Emperor Tching Tang (T'ang, one of the 5 sovereigns  
grain scarce, prices rising

so that in 1766 Tching Tang opened the copper mine (ante Christum)  
made discs with square holes in their middles and gave these to the people  
wherewith they might buy grain

where there was grain.....

Tching prayed on the mountain and

wrote MAKE IT NEW

on his bath tub

Day by day make it new  
cut underbrush,  
pile the logs  
keep it growing.

Died Tching aged years an hundred,  
in the 13th of his reign.

'We are up, Hia is down'

Immoderate love of women

Immoderate love of riches,

Cared for parades and huntin'.

Chang Ti above alone rules.

Tang not stinting of praise :

Consider their sweats, the people's

If you wd / sit calm on throne.

Hia! Hia is fallen

for offence to the spirits

For sweats of the people.

Pound also explains here why changes in rule come. Immorality breeds revolution. Waste is immoral. Thus when the emperor is wasteful or lets the people waste, the heavenly mandate is rescinded. According to Pound the ancient Chinese rulers and sages understood this :

.....Saith Tcheou Kong: True sage seeks not repose.

Hope without work is crazy

You forebear among the people

dressed as one of the people

Caring for needs of the people,

Old when he came to the throne

Observing the solstice.

Pound is rewriting in precis, dynastic history to show how his benevolent despotism is to be based on agriculture. What he does not do is study the history closely enough to find out that there is no benevolent despotism. When the Chinese system is not working, Pound attributes it to the fact that,

from that year was no order

No man was under another.

In Canto 54 Pound keeps developing the theme of the benevolent ruler operating under the mandate of heaven. For

the most part he lists only emperors he thinks had some quality of virtue. For example Shih Huang Ti (Chi Hoang Ti) is virtuous because he united all China, paid attention to the science of astronomy, presumably so the peasantry could plant the crops at the right time, and because he burnt the books which were used by the litterati to divorce themselves from reality. Pound barely mentions his son because he lost the empire. No virtuous man can lose his empire. Liu Pang (Lieou-pang), who later became the first emperor of Han, Kao Tsu, was frugal, "stored food and munitions;" thoughtful of the people, "no taxes till people can pay 'em'"; vigorous, "conquered the empire on horseback;" diplomatic, "went to kung fu tseu's tomb out of policy videlicet to please the writers and scholars;" and also had other virtues. This is why his reign, according to the poem, was a glorious one:

Thereon the men in the vaudevilles  
Sang of peace and of empire.

Hsiao Wen Ti (Hiao Ouen Ti) (179—157 B.C.) was another very virtuous emperor:

They ended mutilation as punishment  
were but 400 men in all jails  
Died HIAO OUEN TI, ante Cristum one fifty seven.  
After 23 years of reign, that pensioned the elders.

These are just a few specific examples. Even if the reader knows nothing about these men other than what Pound gives, it is not hard to pick out the ones Pound likes and why he likes them. In fact I imagine it is Pound's intention to just give bits and scraps about these men, rather than make them live as individuals. I think Pound hopes the reader who takes him to heart will

work to emulate the concrete examples of Poundian virtue. If we are unfortunate enough to see Pound's new order, maybe we will someday find an overseer on the state's corvee labor project for Mississippi flood control, leading a happy chant as he marches his charges down a road,

great works by oppression  
by splendid oppression.

The new society is to constantly be on guard against certain evils that have grown up in the past, mainly usury, waste, and immorality in a Poundian sense which I interpret as general disobedience to natural laws. It is these evils that caused the downfall of every Chinese dynasty. Hsia fell for, "Immoderate love of women / Immoderate love of riches....." The Chou dynasty fell because the 'rites' were not followed. As Pound shows the dynastic pattern, first heavenly portents such as a flood, a famine, a drought, an eclipse or an unusual comet warn the ruler of impending doom. So of the fall of Chou, Pound says:

and there were four years of dry summer,  
Rite is:  
Nine days before the first moon of spring time,  
that he fast. And with the gold cup of wheat-wine  
that he go afield to spring ploughing  
that he plough one and three quarters furrows  
and eat beef when this rite is finished,  
so did not Siuen  
that after famine, called back the people  
where are reeds to weave, where are pine trees  
Siuen established this people hac loca fluvius alluit  
He heard the wild goose crying sorrow  
Campestribus locis  
here have we fixed our dwelling

after our sorrow,  
 Our grandsons shall have our estate  
 The Lady Pao Sse brought earthquakes. TCHEOU falleth,  
     folly, folly, false fires no true alarm  
     Mount Ki-chan is broken.  
 Ki-chan is crumbled, in the 10th moon of the 6th year of  
                     Yeou Ouang  
 Sun darkened, the rivers were frozen.....

I take this passage to mean that famine came as a warning for the emperor to properly conduct the ceremonial rites. He ignored the warning and didn't lead the people back to abundance, so the empire was destroyed.

Han sank because the last emperors were run by eunuchs, the people were overtaxed and there was, "booze in the bamboo grove." The last emperor of Sui (ended in 618 A.D.), "sank in abuleia," or by thoughtlessness, lack of will power. Pound makes his moral clear in Canto 52, the introductory Canto of the series. In the modern West we have our own immoral elements which must be cleaned up if our heavenly mandate is to be protected. We must get rid of 'nescheks,' quite, "paying for a few big jews' vendetta on goyim." We must get rid of gold brokers who make profit, and we must understand the nature of money, which I gather Pound feels can be neither created nor destroyed.

Pound is not out to make a journalistic tract to sell what he is advocating but hopes to be a poet's poet. He hopes to show by example what is good and evil and work on the sympathetic nervous system rather than on the intellect. Pound can never be a popular poet. This is why, if he lasts, a large body of textual

commentary must grow up with the Cantos. I have mentioned that it is part of his scheme to set up a new order, in his own words, "make things new," In the Chinese Cantos he is not content to deal with an abstract benevolent despot as Plato does in the *Republic*. Instead he tries to show how the benevolent despot will act and just enough of how the malevolent one acts, so in the future would be wearers of Pound's crown-for-hire will know how to conduct themselves. He tries to show by example how these benevolent despots have a respect for the abundance of nature and what they did to guard against the evils of usury, waste and immorality.

## II

On the rhythm in the Cantos, Kenner has written,

The major theme is a dactylic chant, WOOL does not COME in-to MARKET, in sharply separate, almost spondaic syllables. Against this is played a slurred and softened speech, roughly dactylic again but muted to impede the natural movement of the dactyl:

the PEASant does not EAT his own GRAIN  
 the GIRL'S NEEDLE goes BLUNT in her HAND  
 the LOOMS are HUSHED ONE AFter anOTHER.

The total effect is of something throttled, blurred, stilled. The dactyl throbs beneath mutes. The air of Hebraic chant, systole and diastole is a further component in the elegaic feeling." p. 249, *Kenner*

I do not agree with much else Kenner says, but this bit on rhythm describes essentially what I feel about the subject. Compare the above with a passage in the very lyrical section of Canto 52 where Pound is writing about the rhythmic pulsating of the seasons in the golden age of Chinese pre history:



there is a cadence underneath ; the sounds are harmonious, and the way the mouth forms them in progression makes them come out rather smoothly :

HIEUN measured shadows at solstice

polar star at 34.4

Measured it in different parts of the empire

at Lang-tcheou was 29 and a half

Tsun-Y 340 and 8 lines.....

What I do object to in this passage and in the poem in general is so much from the Greek, Latin, Chinese and so on. It just so happens that I read some Chinese and can make some kind of sound from Pound's infernal French romanization, but it is easy to imagine what a tremendous barrier Pound is unnecessarily setting up between himself and his audience. It seems to me if Pound really had confidence in his originality and creative ability, he could express the same points in good, lucid English. I think Pound has made a serious mistake in what he expects the Chinese character to do for his reader. Likewise I think he is blowing bubbles in the air when he talks about the 'ideogrammatic method.' I am convinced the ideogram, (I think 'Chinese Character' is a less misleading name.), is essentially a symbol just as words in languages using a phonetic script. As such it is just about as susceptible to over-abstraction as an English word. At least one modern Chinese writer, T'ang Yueh, in an essay, "A Few Weak Points in Our Habit of Thought," feels the Chinese language is inaccurate, disorganized, fragmentary and overly metaphysical. Still, there is a sense of freshness to the Western reader whose nervous system responds out of curiosity. It is worth while to try to transplant this fresh quality into English.

The mistake is to impose undiluted foreign idiom onto native literature. I want to make a distinction between imposing from the top and infusing from the edges. What Pound is trying to do with language seems analogous to what he is trying to do in politics and economics: he is essentially an authoritarian imposing from the top rather than an artist content with doing his work and letting it sit side by side with that of his contemporaries for better or for worse.

### III

In the *Cantos*, Pound says simply Ch'in came and Shih Huang Ti united all China. Anyone who wants to take Pound seriously should ask where Ch'in came from, how Shih Huang Ti united the empire and what led to the book burning. The serious reader will also ask why virtue was not enough in China. I can not pretend to go into exhaustive detail, but the following interpretive outline may be helpful.

Ch'in had its beginnings in the 8th century B. C. when it moved into one of the Yellow river tributaries where there had been extensive irrigation and hundreds of miles of canals and ditches from prehistoric times on. In various tributaries rival states had their base. As time went on Ch'in exploited the declining Chou realms and gained the economically most important domains. After the break-up of Chou there was economic war between the rival states of the tributaries. The canals and public work projects could be used as weapons. For example, by diverting a river, you could flood a neighboring state.

But Ch'in's rise to power was not only due to its economic buildup. Its governmental institutions played their part in the rise to power, and Han succeeded Ch'in by adopting most of its institutions. Subsequent dynasties merely improved on these institutions in order to make them more effective. Here the ideological aspect of the system comes in; and in reading what Pound is saying about China, keeping in mind the overall theme of the Cantos—set up a new order from virtues I show here—, we must evaluate what Pound advocates on the bases of what scholarship can tell us about Chinese economy and ideology. Before we can accept Pound's poetically created dynastic cycles, we must know accouterments beset them. Pound is rather slovenly about describing them. But they must be described, at least in general terms, in order to understand the implications of Pound's message.

In the 4th and 5th century B.C. a new functional power relationship replaced the system of Feudal vassalage which was becoming more and more cumbersome. It was first introduced in newly conquered regions, and it gradually became more popular. With it taxes replaced loyalty tributes. Land tax ceased to be tribute in kind and in labour. Under a rational administration of land, the person came to hold land who in the best interests of the state could pay taxes. Land became salable, a commodity, and fiefs were no longer secure. Old nobles lost their land and sank in social standing.

Such an administration undermined the social status of the

nobility. Administrators and merchants became more and more important. Administrators became scholars and taught practical politics to their pupils. Confucious was just such a man as this. Of various competing schools, the Taoists were the only ones who did not furnish grist for the political mill. They were anarchistic and anti-rationalist.

At this time the scholars gained status only on the bases of performance. Later they were to be institutionalized into a class. But in these earlier times their position was quite different. They could ingratiate themselves with the lord, but the good politician sometimes had to contradict the lord. Thus they could not become "yes men." This happened later. They had to be keen, lively and farsighted.

During the days before the unity of 221 B. C., while the scholars moved into the court, the merchant had his base in the region. He gradually accumulated land and was influential in regional politics. There were two kinds of merchants. Luxury merchants who imported goods and peddlers on the local level. As the feudal system broke down for a time it looked as if merchants not scholars would be the mainstay of China.

I am not presenting the above review of social trends as a final interpretation, but I think it has a firmer grounding in the facts than the interpretation Pound is implying in his praise of China as a non-usurious society. There was usury in China in both this and later ages. Later a consistently anti-merchant policy developed, but I think it is useless to say China was any

better a place to live because later rulers decided to repress merchants. In fact it is just as possible to speculate that China would have been a better society had the merchant element gained more of a foothold.

The two pillars of the Ch'in state were its economy and a strong army. Exploitation of the economic possibilities led to a highly centralized political power that hated seeing unused land and unexploited people. The people were organized into units with collective responsibility. By the middle of the 4th century the new rationalized system began to pay off, and Ch'in began to terrorize the rest of China. In the next period other states formed alliances against Ch'in, but Ch'in played the same game and formed alliances of its own. In time the other states fell piece meal to Ch'in's blows, while it was adding semi-barbaric regions to its territory and developing the new terrain by an intricate system of irrigation. One policy towards the newly won territories was to exterminate the inhabitants and resettle Ch'in citizens. In one year 10,000 people were resettled in Shu, and the border wars became major wars of extermination. Finally in 249 B. C. the last remnants of the Chou house were exterminated, but Ch'in did not come to official power for 30 years.

According to some historians, this 30 year period was crucial for the development of Chinese institutions, and a little closer look at it might help explain that, "Kung is," not, "to China as water is to fishes." The emergence of the system did not go uncontested even among the top-most Ch'in officials. Lu Pu wei was a chancellor who arose from the merchant class to gain the

topmost administrative position. He exemplified a trend not entirely in line with events that led to the capitulation of Chou. He had ghost writers write a book called, "*The History of the Rise and Fall of Lu.*" Oddly enough it did not get lost as so many other books did. His book is not in line with orthodox Confucianism or Legalism, but propounds a rather pragmatic, liberal philosophy. The book explains the reason for Ch'in's go-easy period by giving the impression that there were two contesting views in Ch'in at the time. The one he belonged to came close to what we could call individualism. The book declares that nothing is more precious than human life, and the cultivation of the individual is heavily felt. This contrasts to orthodox Confucianism where the individual is cultivated only to serve society.

It is true that the *Lu Shin Ch'u Ch'iu* also ended up advocating one man rule, but it still represented a trend opposed to centralization and authoritarianism. In traditional China there have been systems advocating anarchy, but all advocates of rule have been for one man rule. Lu's one man rule was absolute in the symbolic sense, but not in the active sense. It was not the function of the ruler to be competent. That was for officials.

Finally Lu lost his power. He was banished, interned and finally committed suicide. Then the old trends in China dominated, and the merchants of Ch'in who gave rise to this line of thinking were silenced between 246 and 211. Such opposing forces as the above were annihilated.

This was not the only such crisis in Chinese History, but I think it is worth while presenting it to temper Pound's view that Chinese History is a series of good and bad despots, and that we owe it to emulate her good ones. To me it is inevitable that if we set up an analogous system and try to emulate the better Chinese emperors, we are also going to get our share of the worst.

In writing of Shih Huang Ti's book burning, Pound merely mentions 'fool litterati' as though these men were just doddering idiots who had to have their books taken away to keep them from wasting their time on cross word puzzles; but he forgets to mention that Shih Huang Ti (Chi Hoang Ti) allegedly buried alive 460 of them. Ch'in soon collapsed. Huang Ti's son, Huang Erh (Eulh) got the throne because the eunuch his father appointed as grand master of the household and tutor for the second son, plotted with the new litterati against the eldest son who was supported by the army commander. Ch'in's rule was so unbearably oppressive, that revolt broke out left and right. Liu Pang who later became emperor Kao Tsu of the Han dynasty led one of the revolts.

When Ch'in fell two men emerged as the main actors: Hsiang Yu and Liu Pang. Hsiang Yu represented the old feudal aristocracy, and almost set up a puppet emperor. But he was too ambitious and killed his puppet. He was a powerful, romantic military leader and attracted all sorts of knight errants.

Liu Pang was of lower decent. The final fight was a race to-

occupy the Wei valley and the capital. Liu was the first to enter. He knew how to occupy people and soon gathered an able following of military men and administrators. In the final moments Chao kao, Shih Huang Ti's eunuch, was afraid Erh Shih would make a deal so he did away with him and put a teenager on the throne, who in turn did away with Chao Kao. When Liu won the capital he was careful not to antagonize the population. He didn't let his troops enter the capital but accepted the surrender outside. The only thing he took was a copy of the Ch'in law codes from the archives. These later became the basis for the Han system.

At the beginning of Han, revolutions and wars had been sweeping China. The country had been reduced to a level incomparable with late Chou. Vast areas had been devastated, and the entire economy was out of gear. The social structure had also undergone violent changes. The old nobility came closest to filling the gap. One anecdote that shows the extent of devastation is about how difficult it was for the emperor to get four houses together for a tour of the country.

Han Wu Li, a later emperor, set up government monopolies in certain industries. The government needed capable men to run the monopolies, so Wu took in merchants as officials. He killed two birds with one stone by bringing yet another segment of society into government and also getting good men to run the monopolies. The scholars protested but overlooked the very core of the matter. The emperor procured trained men and also transformed powerful, free merchants into agents of the

government. He did not have to resort to suppression of merchants. In a very friendly way he eliminated the element of free capital. During his reign prices were stabilized, and an "ever normal granary" was set up. Grain distribution was taken out of private hands and made a duty of the government. None of these ideas was entirely new, but they were effected on a more rational basis than ever before.

The general trend during the first and second centuries was toward more and more central control. With Wang Mang, who Pound for some reason leaves out of his account, this tendency culminated. Then again came the rebellions. The peasantry did not accept centralization and was the first to rebel. Wang Mang's agricultural measures were the most short lived of all. Peasant rebellions contributed most to his downfall, but the merchants chimed in.

For a short time the Han dynasty broke up, but in 25 A. D. it was restored with the capital at Lo Yang. The latter Han was an alliance of a group of minds in pursuit of a common cause. A pluralistic approach was maintained for a long time, and as long as it lasted, there was a greater amount of peace and growth in prosperity than many other dynasties run by one vigorous man. There were no major internal troubles for a long time. There was a balanced society that made economic progress. No one man was so dominant he could set up a highly authoritarian regime. There was no Han Wu Li to do away with competitors. When Eastern Han finally fell it was because the regions gradually withheld their support. A long interregnum which lasted 300 years

followed the downfall of Eastern Han.

#### IV

According to his critics Pound is working on a modern epic comparable to *The Divine Comedy*. In the end he expects the "enlightened" reader to pause, survey, and say, "Look! we have come through." If I am not mistaken, the reader should then feel inspired to work toward a benevolent modern edition of a classical oriental despotism. As I see it this is the direction we are moving in without Pound's help. Thus what makes me shudder most is the idea that Pound may really be 50 years ahead of his time. His insight that Western Democracy with a totally rationalized machine age mode of production is bound to fail may be correct. He seems to be taking into consideration both the economic and ideological factors and stating that we need an ideology in keeping with economic reality. In a total economy this should be a totalitarian ideology. What Pound has not done, and this is unforgivable, is examine the psychological factors. His verse itself lacks psychological insight even when he praises what he likes: For example, "great works by oppression, by splendid oppression." His intellect disregards psychological reality by ignoring how total power perverts man. To me the epitome of this perversion is Li Shih, second emperor of T'ang, the filial son who served his father by making him emperor and his country by uniting it. Against his wishes he became emperor and was one of the best. But he had to murder his elder brother in order to keep from being murdered by him, and he had to banish both his sons before he died, I should imagine, of stomach

ulcers, I think Pound should have read possibly a little more Keats (For example, *The Cap and the Bells*, which deals with despots and perversion) and enough Samuel Butler to understand what a family despot can do. He would have done well to read between the lines in Chinese history and to reflect carefully on his Pisan cage experience where he was the oppressed without recourse. He should ponder on the society which has banished him as it has, and then rewrite the Cantos in this new light.