DESIGNS IN CHINESE COLOR:

CHINA IN THE GALLERIES OF MODERNIST LITTLE MAGAZINES, 1912-1935

by

GABRIEL ALEXANDER BOWLES

(Under the Direction of Jed Rasula)

ABSTRACT

From the outset, the Modernist preoccupation with China is a fantasy that curates a specifically aesthetic vision of Chinese culture entirely disengaged from the realities of the modern state. This study considers how the modern museum informs modern literature’s composition of an aestheticized China, constituting a communal viewing space in which Chinese objets d’art are collected in galleries, cultivating narratives of passivity and compliance that are mired in fantasies of Imperial China.

INDEX WORDS: China, Modernism, Poetry, Little Magazines, Museums
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Preface: Procedural Information Desk

The culmination of this project consists of equal parts serendipity and paperchase. While I was conducting research for another work that required a dig through the modernist little magazines, I noticed among the pages frequent occurrences of China in the poetry and editorials. I also observed that the poetry and prose referenced motifs similar to those accentuated in late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century museum exhibitions of Chinese art and artifacts. Over the following months, I began to maintain two separate stacks of notes: one for the aforesaid article and a rapidly growing collection of the China texts. As the latter pile started filling multiple expanding folders, I realized that there was something fascinating and troublesome connecting the pieces that was worth pursuing. I additionally recognized that the sheer volume of little magazines published during the modern era would make that pursuit untenable without functional boundaries to contain the field of my research. As most of the little magazines have yet to be digitized, the practical element of thumbing through thousands of pages demands qualitative limits. My own process led me to implement the guidelines that follow:

- **The Primary Sources:** The magazines that provide the source material for this study either purport—at least in their inaugural issues—to be primarily, though not exclusively, invested in literature or staffed with editorial boards guided by or comprised of significant modernist literary figures. I have not included seminal publications such as Arthur Stieglitz's *Camera Work* and its descendent, the typographically innovative *291*, or Kenneth Macpherson's film journal, *Close-Up.*
Instead, I established my source list from a number of studies on the history of the little magazine phenomenon, cross referencing the contents and indexes to verify that my research covered the most influential journals.\textsuperscript{1} While continuing work in modernist print culture will certainly demand future additions, the journals that made the final cut for this study are: \textit{Blast} (1914-1915), \textit{Broom} (1921-1924), \textit{Contact} (1920-1923), \textit{Contempo} (1931-1934), \textit{The Dial} (1840-1929),\textsuperscript{2} \textit{The Egoist} (1914-1919), \textit{The Glebe} (1913-1914), \textit{The Little Review} (1914-1929), \textit{The Measure: A Journal of Poetry} (1921-1926), \textit{Others: A Magazine of the New Verse} (1915-1919), \textit{Palms} (1923-1940), \textit{Poetry: A Magazine of Verse} (1912—), and \textit{This Quarter} (1925-1932).

- **The Time Frame:** Initially, a temporal delineation for research presented the largest conceptual problem. If a significant part of this work questions the categories erected by institutional narratives that powerfully inform its citizenry’s perceptions of the world, those questions extend to the issues of categorization advanced through periodization. While I was eager to include the years of modernist production that famously saw the publication of T.S. Eliot’s \textit{Waste Land}, James Joyce’s \textit{Ulysses}, and Ezra Pound’s first \textit{Cantos} in journal form, the justifiably extensive debates surrounding modernist periodization made me hesitant to temporally gird my research based on precepts that neatly sorted the


\textsuperscript{2} My research deals exclusively with \textit{The Dial} under the editorial guidance of Scofield Thayer and Marianne Moore, 1920-1928.
stages of modernism into a series of exact dates. Instead, I searched for historically sound beginning and end dates that could be easily extended if the results from further research demanded expansion. Harriet Monroe’s tenure at

_Poetry_, from 1912 through 1935, presented a realistic boundary. Since _Poetry_ began earlier than many of the other journals I considered and continued, with Monroe at the helm, well past most of their demises, the time frame during which _Poetry_ was under Monroe provided context for a study of the modernist journals at their pinnacle. The singling out of Monroe herself, is less about a focalizing editorial personality—by all accounts, Monroe was fairly receptive to the ideas of both her contributors and supporting staff—than about the fact that Monroe’s _Poetry_ survived intact through the modernist explosion.

- **The Qualitative Terms:** During my archival research, I searched comprehensively through the magazines looking, not only for whole poems or editorials that deal with China, but also images embedded in the larger text that specifically incorporate China or Chinese tropes. To distinguish between the generalized fetishism that critiques of Orientalism indict, I demanded that my primary sources expressly cite China or a phrase exclusively attributable to the country and impossible to associate with Asia broadly—a mere reference to jade or a lotus blossom would not be included. At present writing, I have found more than 350 poems and editorials in the journals ranging from 1912-1935 that meet

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3. The great postmodernist philosophers, in their endeavors to define postmodernism, come up against the difficult question of modernity and offer compelling explorations about why a discrete definition of the modernist effort is aesthetically, ethically, politically, and culturally troubling. For clarification that manages to be concise without being reductive, see Jameson, “The Politics of Theory,” 53-57.
Whenever I approach these poems, I find myself at a crossroads where a number of critical fields necessarily overlap; among them are museum theory, literary theory, cultural studies, and poetic history. The relationship between the modern museum’s China and the literary journals supports an exchange that involves myriad areas of inquiry in order to explain the path by which China’s presence in western museums is uncannily echoed by modernist literature—the experience of attending an exhibition mediated through language. If the museum’s physical site directly influences its patrons in terms of what and how to see, its conceptual framework transcends location and exerts its influence on representational forms. Modern literary engagements with China follow these models, and the dimensional space of galleries have textual analogues. As an epistemological intervention, the museum cultivates an approach to knowledge that extends beyond the physical space of a building. The museum’s power to form cultural memory owes much of its strength to its omnipresence in national capitals: even the unstable field of memory is rendered more concrete when supported by imposing architecture.

My exploration of the museum as both an abstract and material force in modernist engagements with China is indebted to a number of scholars whose in-depth studies proved invaluable. Tony Bennett’s *Birth of the Museum* and Susan Crane’s substantial scholarship on the history of national collections guide my theoretical considerations. Bennett’s focus on the evolution of the museum inspects the paradox at its core: while working towards an Enlightenment ideal of universal edification, it sought to contain the very objects it displayed.
by enclosing them within a proscriptive order. For Bennett, the western museum’s emphasis on the classification of that which is out of reach—both culturally and historically—reveals modern bureaucracy’s obsession with total control. When the museum’s classificatory tenets falter it is exposed and the “dream that the rational ordering of things might mirror the real order of things [is] revealed to be just that.” The tense interplay between ordered displays that trade in illusions of unity and a disordered real is—I would argue, especially germane to modernism’s use of Chinese culture as primary source material: this disconnect between the China extolled in verse and the political and social upheaval of modernist China remains in constant opposition. The conflict between these two versions of China perfectly exemplifies Crane’s contention that collections are never truly concerned with preserving the past, but involved with curating an adequate historical context for the present generation to make sense of its surroundings. Crane insists that the “culture of preservation is part of the historical present, and it is in this mode that we generally, as members of multiple collectives, perceive history.” In form and content, the poetry examined in the final section of this essay reflects the dream of universal order and progression, wherein Imperial China is set as a carefully balanced cornerstone to stabilize the shaky contemporary scene, a symbolic and impotent incarnation of a distinguished aesthetic and philosophical past.

Catherine Paul’s *Poetry in the Museums of Modernism: Yeats, Pound, Moore, Stein*, explicitly connects the museum and literature by equating the roles of curators and poets

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5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 126.
7. Crane, *Collecting and Historical Consciousness*, 176-77.
according to their equal emphasis on “digestion.” The prominence of consumption accurately describes the manner in which poets accumulate objects for their narratives and create imaginary worlds from a belief “in the power of material things to transmit ideas and so construct stories or scenes to link objects together.” Paul aligns poets—particularly those she examines at length in her work—with an aggressively curatorial slant: “some objects require description or linguistic representation: these objects include artworks encountered by the speaker.” If Paul leaves a gap between her positioning of poets as figurative guardians of the museum’s collections and their actual engagement with those museums, Zhaoming Qian offers a bridge. Qian’s historically rigorous literary studies of the connection between exhibitions of Chinese art and modernist poetry manages to reveal the extent to which the Chinese imaginary of everyone from Ezra Pound to Wallace Stevens to Marianne Moore was indebted to a flurry of Chinese arts and antiquities expositions. I have used Qian’s work—three book length studies on the influence of Chinese art upon the moderns—to both historically and conceptually ground my work. Qian’s own position on this interaction does not extensively consider the liability of institutionalization, instead deeming the modernist interest in China, both as visitors to the museums and as producers of their own work, a largely respectful gesture. While my criticism takes a different approach, Qian has provided a continual reminder that the moderns should not be generically censured as mercenary guards of institutional power, but considered as subjects that power acts upon, revealing its grip upon their work in diffuse and complicated ways.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
If harnessing the bulk of modernist prose and verse interventions with China proved organizationally demanding, the moment of gathering them together forcibly struck me. Interwoven throughout the magazines, the copious fantasies of China seemed to be a loosely bound if disconcerting incurrence. But when apprehended collectively, I saw that my preliminary fascination with these recurrent images was held together by a thread much less tenuous than I had initially supposed. As a gallery of poetic objects, they assemble a cultural vision so complete and insinuating that it erects a virtual China. While many studies expand upon issues of Orientalism or make post-colonial interventions, in this history I address the ways in which modernist poetry’s interaction with China is specifically formed by the modern museum and redistributed by influential literary journals whose very processes recapitulate the exhibitionary principles of the museum. The museum of literary modernist China may be ephemeral, but it presents a cultural narrative as powerfully comprehensive as any institutionally supported online exhibition funded by our national museums.
In the last weeks of 1913, F.T. Sung, an official of the recently formed Republic of China, visited Philadelphia where he met Ezra Pound’s father, Homer, and subsequently offered him a job. In a letter dated 04 January 1914, Ezra Pound ponders his father’s options: “China is interesting, VERY. Make sure which Chinese government is giving you the job and then blaze away.” A mere two weeks later, Sung was in London and made a similar offer to Ezra, who was evidently entertaining the idea: “We may yet be a united family,” writes son to father.

What I find most provocative here is less the actual possibility of Pound’s transfer than how this brief episode from the poet’s early history is a rare instance of an engagement with China as a viable political state. Pound’s practical inquiries deviate from the dream of China erected by western imagination, a fantasy that cultivates what Michel Foucault terms heterotopia. Central to the heterotopia’s mixture of the mythological and real are modern institutions that cultivate fantasy as though it contained a quantifiable topography, replacing material culture with the unreal. In this chapter, I argue that the modern museum, thanks to

12. Ibid.
13. See “Of Other Spaces” (22-27) in which Foucault explains the difference between utopia—as an entirely unreal space—and the mixed space of heterotopia, where the site of the cultural fantasy does occupy real space. Foucault emphasizes that the first principle of heterotopia is that all societies construct them. Foucault’s fifth principle is that heterotopia is not a free space that one can enter and leave, but has its own rules of inclusion and exclusion. My argument stresses the material consequences of this point, whereas Foucault says little about the specific political
its power as a cultural arm of modern bureaucracy, as well as its dominion over cultural
consciousness as a purveyor and exhibiter of global artifacts, influences print forms that
mirror the logic of a museum’s floorplan. The unreal China of galleries and exhibitions
displaces the real through a process that powerfully shapes modernist ideas of China and the
resulting dissemination of those ideas through the little magazines.

From meditations on the nobility of Imperial China and translations of T’ang Dynasty
Poetry to the production of Chinoiserie and exhibitions of Chinese pottery to displays of
Chinese people that emphasize the exotic, the depiction of China in modernist little
magazines reveals a heterotopia that uncomfortably intersects with the destitute political and
economic state of modern China at the end of 2,000 years of Imperial rule. Additionally,

there is almost no consideration of the turbulent history of Chinese immigrants in America
that precedes the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and informs the stateside political
atmosphere well afterwards. The poetry, essays, and prose spin overarching narratives that
remain nearly as flat and reductive as descriptions spelled out on placards alongside displays
in the Freer, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or the British Museum. The editor as a kind
of “curator” is perhaps no more fully exemplified than by the literati who molded the little
magazines, wherein figures as diverse as Ezra Pound, Jane Heap, Marianne Moore, William
Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Margaret Anderson and Harriet Monroe helped form the
missions and define the direction of their respective publications. Modernist poetry and,
more specifically in the context of this study, the modernist poetry and poetics of the little
magazines and its contributors, channels Chinese culture as exhibited in museum galleries
and curated collections. Whether it be Amy Lowell’s “Chinoiseries” in the July 1916 issue

and historical liabilities that are central to this essay: the similarities between the institutionalization and publication
and their roles in the construction of heterotopias.
of *Others*, which finds the poet rhapsodic over “a garden / With peonies, and tinkling pagodas, / And round-arched bridges / Over still lakes,”

14 or rapscallion Maxwell Bodenheim’s November 1914 evisceration of Chinese porcelain as “dreary symbols of those who painted you” in the *Little Review*, China hardly ever emerges as a contemporaneous, dynamic nation.15 Instead, China surfaces as a Neolithic clay pot, jade curio, Fu dog, gilt temple, silk lantern, Mandarin scroll or China doll.

I will examine the little magazines as portable companions to the institutionalizing force of the museum, the literary equivalent of museum guides that distribute the choices of the poet/curator and the cardinal motifs through which China is divided as a commodity. To sketch that logic, this chapter moves outward from the presence of China in museums and the literary journal, to the most frequent depictions of China collected in the modernist magazines.

**China in the Museum**

Jürgen Habermas writes that the earliest forms of public display were “closely bound up with aristocratic society,” showcasing Imperial power and wealth, tableaux of political and economic might.16 How China comes to have a place in the modern museum that narrates its history within an emphatically European context involves an intricate history of trade intertwined with spectacles of nationalism and conquest, global trade routes and territorial

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disputes. Suffice it to say that the efforts yielded such a surfeit of luxurious goods from so great a distance that China was—from the very beginning of its trade relationship with the west—susceptible to both physical colonization and imaginative exoticization. In salons of the European empire, an early model for the modern museum, China was identified as a supplier of mysterious and valuable objects for the European collector, rather than a country undergoing critical material and cultural changes commensurate with the West, marking the beginning of a European fantasy about China that remains difficult to shake.

In *Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett argues that as the museum moves away from its aristocratic origins and evolves to reflect the rhetoric of the democratic subject, the “space of representation comes to be reorganized through the use of historicized principles of display which, in the figure of 'man' which they fashioned, yielded a democratic form of public representativeness, albeit one which organized its own hierarchies and exclusions.”

For Bennett, who is critically invested in Foucault’s theorization of bureaucracy as panoptic, public space neither entails regal ownership, nor a center of authority that is identifiable, but

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17. For a detailed history of the early trade in the Far East, see Whitfield, *The Silk Road*; also, Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years In The Heart of Asia*.

18. For further discussion of the relationship between early forms of display, the advent of the English museum, and trade, see Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious*, 109-134.

19. The long history of trade between the West and China is, from the very beginning, inextricably tied to opulence and aesthetics. The first written documentation of the silk trade comes from a first-century Roman who describes the path to China as beyond the sea, “somewhere in Thin; and in the interior of that country, somewhat to the north, there is a great city called Thinae, from which raw silk, and silk thread and silk stuffs are brought overland” (Jacobson, *Chinoiserie*, 10). By the time Antoine Watteau, preeminent figure of the Rococo, imports Chinese motifs and transforms them into elaborate scenes for eighteenth-century Parisian court society, critical issues involving China and the importation of its cultural goods are instantiated (Ibid., 62). China is a vital producer of valuable goods emblematic of European royalty and privilege.

20. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 33. Catherine Paul likewise identifies the museum’s investment in hierarchies, emphasizing that position as one that becomes more aggressive in modernity: “The early twentieth century marks a turning point where curators became less interested in the display of copia—putting all their collections in their exhibition galleries for the public to see--and more interested in using selected objects to teach visitors about science, artistic taste, or the history of cultures” (15).
power belongs to society—a nebulous prospect when space is not neutral, but constituted to reform to support incipient arms of the power structure, although with less visible aggression than earlier models of institutionalized instruction. This transformation of bureaucratic space precisely affects representations of China as a political, philosophical, social and cultural force. While Western culture is undergoing democratizing shifts that allow for institutions like the museum to flourish and, historically, for private displays to be made public, the modern museum increasingly curated China as a metonymy for the state of Imperial bliss: Mandarins are gentry, a privileged birthright is a naturalized position, and ancient codes of honor and wisdom retain their transparency across centuries. In such a context, Chinese Imperial style becomes trendy, and the rage for Chinoiserie—a term specifically coined to differentiate between authentic Chinese objects and western objects stylistically informed by a broad perception of Chinese aesthetics—casts a shadow over the actual state of China. Consequently, western modernity invents China through imports that reference its Imperial past as a manufacturer of wholesale luxury goods that call to mind a unified ancient opulence to the exclusion of the nation’s modern complexities. Even actual Chinese art objects seem to be subordinated to western categorization and fetishized in the spirit of Chinoiserie as though they were products of an imaginary landscape. The difference between a fantastically wrought Chinoiserie and China is collapsed; any actual site of political and cultural vitality remains unaddressed.

The curation of China in modern museum exhibitions creates a stultifying series of effects that ultimately results in the importation of China as an atemporal and aesthetic image in the poetry and prose of the modernist little magazines. A modernist literary obsession with Chinese imports is rampant, inclusive of everything from jade to embroidered silk to
China dolls. Despite the variety of modernist journals, quite different in their individual ambitions, the China to which they refer largely reflects museum culture’s particular brand of Sinophilia, unsurprising since much of the interaction that the poets and editors of the little magazines had with Asia was, at least preliminarily, through exhibition space. When Pound began college at the University of Pennsylvania in 1899, alongside fellow classmates H.D. and William Carlos Williams, the first exhibitions of “Chinese art—ceramics, wood-carvings, ink paintings, and calligraphic objects” were unveiled at the University of Pennsylvania Museum, formerly known as the Free Museum of Science and Art.²¹ If Philadelphia offered the young poets some context for an institutional engagement with China, an even more definitive moment occurred for Pound at the British Museum after his move to London in 1908. One of the catalysts for his obsession with China was a series of lectures on Asian art given by Lawrence Binyon in 1909-1912. Binyon was a poet and art historian, and his exhibitions of Chinese and Japanese Paintings “provided the English public with their first opportunity to examine a large collection of Oriental masterpieces covering a period of some fifteen hundred years, from the fourth century to the nineteenth century A.D.”²² Binyon, who was so instrumental in the actual exhibiting of Chinese art, only underscored the grandeur of Imperial China, as Zhaoming Qian notes in Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams:²³

“Of all the nations of the East,” Binyon emphasizes in Painting in the Far

²². Qian, Orientalism and Modernism, 13-14.
²³. Pound, by all accounts, was transformed by his exposure to Binyon, as not only was his understanding of aesthetic history expanded, but Binyon also introduced him to Mary Fenollosa, whose husband’s notebooks were to spawn many of Pound’s ideas about Asian art (Qian, The Modernist Response, 10).
East—and presumably also in his lectures of March 1909—“the Chinese is that which through all its history has shown the strongest aesthetic instinct, the fullest and richest imagination.”

Binyon’s praise for Imperial China as a catalyst for the imagination is a Sino-fantasy where tapping into the ancient country has all the potential of a transformational ritual object.

Despite Binyon’s veneration, the British Museum continued—like a great majority of the modern museums that held or exhibited large collections of Chinese art—to categorize their holdings under the banner of decorative arts, a classification that foregrounds functionality and use value with very little emphasis on individually important works or masters. As a result, China’s presence in the most prestigious modern art museums continues to be fairly absent. Its spoils are housed in survey museums that store the enormous private collections of Colonialism’s legacy, where museum culture effectively rends Chinese Imperial history from modern China, enabling any investment in dynastic fantasy to be wholly separated from politically and socially dynamic communities. If museums purport to educate the public, then the version of China they present is both temporally and geographically collapsed: centuries of bronze jue wine vessels or blue and white in one room, objects contextualized by a narrative plaque on the wall clarifying not their particular place in Chinese history but in Colonial history. The force of such aesthetic

24. Zhaoming Qian, Orientalism and Modernism, 18.

25. The issue of aesthetic value versus use value becomes more complicated when confronting works authored by renowned figures, such as the Tang Dynasty poet and painter Wang Wei (701-761). Still, the emphasis remains on the circumstances surrounding production rather than a more complexly realized artistic heritage. Whether or not western museums should continue to privilege the latter as the pinnacle of cultural and creative significance is another matter altogether, and one frequently challenged in contemporary exhibition spaces.

colonization reinforces China as heterotopia, as a space wherein all material consequences of
history are subordinated to a representation that proposes variation and consideration of
multiple strata, but whose stock in trade is an imaginary landscape. Museum pamphlets
narrate ceremonial and Imperial history, emphasizing a Chinese identity codified through
external style and emptied of an internal, historically centered self. If, as Susan Crane
insists, this sort of collecting subordinates history to support the construction of our modern
identity, it comes at a price: any construction of a stable, transcendent identity requires that
the other one constructs themselves against remain calcified:

the 'fixing' of memory in the museum constitutes and apparent permanence of
the recollected, organized in static time and space. Memory of cultures,
nature, and nations is set to trigger memory in and for multiple, diverse
collectives. These memories then become components of identities—even for
individuals who would in no other way feel connected to these objects.

Retrieval and reassembly of the fragmented past through physical collection is pillaging if
the only connection a culture has with the objects are in their role as touchstones for
memories formed by institutional agendas.

27. Refer to Bennett’s Birth of the Museum for his consideration of heterotopia as the governing component of the
museum’s status as an institutional apparatus binding finite time to the cyclical where “terms of opposition are
familiar,” forming “part of the discursive coordinates through which the museum, in its nineteenth-century form,
was thought into being via a process of double differentiation” (5). Bennett understands “double differentiation” as
a critical moment in the formation of the modern museum, one that insists upon “a new space of representation for
the modern public museum” and, at the same time, “one of constructing and defending that space of representation
as a rational and scientific one, fully capable of bearing the didactic burden placed upon it, by differentiating it from
the disorder that was imputed to competing exhibitionary institutions” (1).

28. Crane, Museums and Memory, 3.
**China and the Portable Poetic Museum**

If we consider the processes surrounding the production of the little magazines akin to the ones followed in the staging of an exhibition—inclusive of selecting which textual objects to show and which to excise—the displays exhibited in the little magazines construct alternative hierarchies, wrenching China from its own past and appending it to the order of the west. The portable poetic museum's cultivation of China is conceptually aligned with the physical motions of the museum that collect, narrate, and display, while a bound journal enables those principles of collecting to be distributed widely, offering its own form of power as a satellite body of the physical museum. If one consequence of the democratic revolution is that the nineteenth century must come to terms with the collapse of visible hierarchy into panoptic bureaucracy as well as the shifts demanded by industrialization, the museum reflects these changes, expanding its mission to include the public, to educate the influx of urban masses.29 If modernism’s images of China were shaped by the museums, the journals, in turn, used the ideological project of the museum to their advantage. Paul believes that the moderns “saw much to be gained from museum culture in the shaping of their poems and the building of their audiences.”30 Modernist poets recognized that their own roles within the literary community simultaneously involved a consideration of their readership’s reaction to the work and the power for that work to transform perspectives.

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29. The 1753 founding of the British Museum by an act of Parliament and the 1793 French Decree that opened up the collections of the Louvre and guaranteed the public access to objects owned by kings, aristocrats, and the church, marked the beginning of the public survey museums. The connection between public information and nationalism begins with the French Republic, when Napoleon I brings back the spoils of war to be housed in those public museums and “[c]ollections which initially served as mementos of the past and evidence of present wealth [but] soon became objects of study, sources of patriotism, and a medium for post-Revolutionary propaganda”(Janes and Conaty, *Looking Reality in the Eye*, 2). The British Museum, though ostensibly public, continued to allow access only to aristocratic men until the mid-19th century (Ibid.).

While modernist visual artists maintained fairly hostile relationships with museum culture, museum curators and poets engaged the same issues: “How do we get people to come look at the things we have collected? How can we teach those people to appreciate what we have? What is the relationship between our treasures and the nation we represent? And how can we play with the principles of collecting and curating to create fresh ways of seeing?”

Practically, these questions differed for editors and poets from journal to journal, just as they would for the head curator of the Frye Museum of Art as opposed to the Guggenheim. Circulation and distribution varied and Poetry, with its inception in 1912 and its continued publication today, found an increasingly broader audience than Wyndham Lewis's Blast, which was retired after two issues and for whose fame largely rested on its association with Vorticism. However, taken as a genre, their effects and consequences studied as a whole, the little magazines' enormous influence on publishing operations, individual authors, and the contemporaneous art scene nevertheless cultivated a China that is strangely hegemonic, as aestheticized and commodified as any bit of Chinoiserie housed in the Getty.

This representation of China lies somewhere between art and artifact, a division Carol Duncan, in Civilizing Rituals, emphasizes as the essential separation between high art and anthropological evidence. While the former merits contemplation, the latter offers proof for appropriate categorization. Politically, these binaries exact themselves by offering two modes of interpretation: a cultural object is either valued for its encapsulation of a

31. Ibid, 2. Paul also recognizes that museums, especially “before the ideological shifts of multiculturalism and postmodernism—have functioned as straw institutions whose practices were wildly in need of reform” (9).

32. For detailed histories of the journals’ production and editorial histories, see Hamilton, The Little Magazines or Marek, Women Editing Modernism. Individual collections of writers’ and editors’ letters reveal the extent to which many of the major modernist poets effectively guided the agendas of the journals regardless of whether their names appeared on the masthead or not; cf. Sutton, Pound, Thayer or Parisi and Young, Dear Editor.

33. Duncan, Civilizing Rituals, 5.
westernized art ideal or valued for its encapsulation of a culture, the heterogeneous replaced by a single static embodiment. Duncan, in her indictment of such rankings of culture, notes that the “scale is built on the assumption that only works of art are philosophically and spiritually rich enough to merit isolated aesthetic contemplation, while 'artifacts,' as products of presumably less evolved societies, lack such richness.”34 Far Eastern Imperial cultures are the exception to this rule, Duncan asserts. I disagree with this, however, as Chinese art more often finds occupancy in museums that serve as catch-alls for the permanent collections of objects from Africa to South America to Asia. Even more frequently, Chinese art seems awkwardly placed in the categorical hinterland of “decorative arts,” a shifty term that implicitly aligns Chinese art objects with imports. Steven Conn attributes much of the trouble with placing Chinese art as a result of the fact that “Asian art cannot necessarily be placed into the same chronological, formal, or stylistic categories used to organize Western art. It also does not necessarily fit into the same categories of media. Ceramics are generally viewed as decorative art when made in the West but as high art when produced in Asia.”35 Such a reductive distillation of material history produces a temporal vacuum: this sort of institutionalization may as well be entombment.

It is, perhaps, only fitting that modernist poetry’s array of Chinese curios should seem taxonomic and inert. Many encounters with China were via museum exhibitions—critical when considering how the imaginary China relates to America’s uneasy relationship with its burgeoning Chinese population at the end of the nineteenth century.36

34. Ibid.

35. Conn, ”Where Is the East?”, 169.

36. Simone de Beauvoir, who visited China in 1955 and toured the Forbidden City (Zjinchéng) wrote: “The barriers have tumbled. The Forbidden City has become a public place; now everyone strolls freely through its courtyards, sips tea under its porches; Young pioneers in red neckercheifs visit the exhibits mounted in its hallways; certain
China that is exemplified in the pages of the little magazines, its exhibition of recurrent tropes that coincide with the objects displayed in galleries, acts as a type of highly distributable museum with editors collecting, appraising, organizing, narrating, and producing a text that unifies disparate parts under one masthead. Again, Paul notes that poets “literally teach their readers how to approach their texts: their notes, prefaces, and prose works function like the guidebooks, object labels, and docent-guided tour associated with museums.”37 The similarities, both ideologically and procedurally, between books and galleries become especially potent when extended to the little magazines; like museums, they house a number of individual artists and are required to arrange those pieces towards the larger aims of the journal. In my consideration of the museum as an episteme that contributes to the little magazines’ invention of China, I take a cue from Wolfgang Ernst’s “Archi(ve)textures of Museology.” Ernst identifies the degree to which the process of museum curation mirrors the processes of memory: “By mapping memory museographically, that is, by collecting, inventorizing, storing, processing, and transferring data, the museum has become part of an epistemological grid that turns museology into a field of research extending far beyond the limits of museum walls.”38 If the museum is an index, then museology considers the forces that contributed to the creation of that index. The

buildings have been turned into palaces of culture and libraries; in another part of it the government has its seat. Beneath this new life invading it the original meaning of the place remains unimpaired, I seldom succeed in forgetting.” I am continually intrigued by de Beauvoir’s memory for two reasons. First, we can see that even in its first year of opening, after over 550 years of functioning, much like the European Imperial salon, as a site of exclusion, it quickly becomes an exhibition that overtly promotes historic culture, while still maintaining a functional government and institutional office. Secondly, I think this offers a brief but trenchant meditation on how a simultaneous confrontation with the real and the mythical, demands a deeper consideration of the ethical liabilities of repressing material history in favor of fantasy (Cited in Grayling and Whitfield, China: A Literary Companion, 26).


museological lens, when applied to the little magazines, magnifies the fissures, sutures, and amputations made in the service of institutional discourse to the body of the text.

Here the museum is not metaphor, but, rather, such a powerful arm of the modern institution that it transcends its physical location, “could be virtually without objects (like the Renaissance studiolo), a cognitive field of ideas, words, and artifacts that narrowed to a fixed meaning only in its institutional inscription and crystallization.”39 The little magazine as a constantly mobile branch of the physical museum is a return to the original concept of the museum as a textual space rather than a physical space.40 Crane proposes that in addition to the architectural space of the museum, memory and the museum also intersect through an exhibition’s catalog, the “portable version” of the collection that further distills and selects what, exactly, should be retained and what interpretations are critical.41 A consideration of museum effects requires a reinstatement of the two physical sites that the museum is so successful at rendering invisible by collapsing them into an inseparable whole: container and contents. As a formative power in the creation of a Chinese fantasy that has wide-ranging effects, museum space has both literal and figurative connotations: its walls can be equally delimiting whether they be a steel frame or cloth binding.42 While some of the editors and poets of the little magazines visit exhibitions that focus on Chinese art and artifacts, the transformation of those visits into grist for poetic and editorial commentary cultivates an engagement with the East that further abstracts the already intangible experience of

39. Ibid., 18.

40. Ernst’s brief history of the museum is especially relevant to my discussion: “For a long time, in fact, the museum was not a place but a text, occupying a position in the discursive field somewhere between bibliotheca, thesaurus, studio, galleria and theatrum. Museology in this sense refers more to the disposition of things, the structural relationship that governs their placement, than to the positivity of collections as such” (17.)

41. Crane, Introduction, Museums and Memory, 2.
confronting culture within an exhibition; for the readers of literary journals, there is no literal
visit to the museum, of course, but there can be frequent engagements with the portable
poetic museum and its ideas and conceptions of culture.

The physical building of a magazine, much like the erection of a structure, bears the
marks of the people who decide how traffic should flow, what the entry points and exit
points should highlight, what the intermittent space should allow glimpses of. As a result,
there is a guiding hand from construction to distribution to consumption. In the little
magazines, any orchestration of physical space is transferred onto the textual field of the
page, and the contents of the journal trace a cultural, aesthetic, and linguistic story in the
same way the numbered circuit of an exhibition does, wherein each individual object is
subordinated to the installation. The trajectory of “collecting, inventoring, storing,
processing, and transferring data” that occurs in museum curation is twinned by the steps
entailed in publishing, and points to a multi-dimensional system wherein both the contents
and contexts of any periodical are an inextricable combination of the public and private.43

THE PERMANENT EXHIBITIONS

Made in China

If, historically, China’s place in the modern museum has been uncomfortably situated at the intersection between the fine arts museum, decorative arts exhibitions, and vast survey museums, the relationship between the modernist poets and China is equivalently tenuous.\textsuperscript{44} When Ezra Pound began his stint as \textit{Poetry}’s foreign correspondent and editor, which ran from 1912-1919, his position and influence began “opening the door for foreign contributions.”\textsuperscript{45} The emphasis on translation and foreign poetries is noticeably spare throughout the range of little magazines prior to 1912, but while Pound was at \textit{Poetry}, the inclusion of non-English European and Asian verse forms became increasingly prominent. Even after he retired from his official positions, \textit{Poetry} continued to pay considerable attention to non-English verse as well as the historical and cultural contextualization of these pieces. This trend is not exclusive to \textit{Poetry}, however, as translations of Chinese poems and poems inspired by Chinese antiquity gained increasing visibility beginning in 1909. The

\textsuperscript{44} Despite the continued ambivalence in the west surrounding the general context of which type of museum Chinese cultural production belongs in and its eventual categorization as fine art, Asian art still does not stand side by side with the Western masterpieces in the National Portrait Gallery or the Tate. A recent example of this continued confusion is a 2005 exhibition of contemporary experimental Chinese photography and Video, “Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video From China.” While the exhibit was organized by the Smart Museum of Art in Chicago, during its five month stretch in London—the first major showing of contemporary Chinese art at a UK museum—it was not housed in the basement of the Tate Modern, but at the Victoria and Albert, a museum in which the major collections are centered around European decorative arts and Non-Western artifacts. Such placement seems to borrow much of its confusion regarding where, exactly, to display Asian art works, from the past. As a result, I wonder if the aesthetic value of contemporary Chinese work—while gaining more and more attention as a representative of China’s economic and industrial explosion—will remain somewhat peripheral to western modern and postmodern traditions.

\textsuperscript{45} Wilhelm, \textit{Ezra Pound in London and Paris}, 100.
very same years, Lawrence Binyon gave his lectures on East Asian art at the British Museum that so preoccupied Pound. The narrative that organizes the galleries of Chinese and Japanese art Pound encounters at Binyon’s exhibition presages the gallery of aestheticized Chinese objects that he will incorporate into his poetry. In direct opposition to salient images of China as a location of modern unrest, or as a continent of unmanageable, abused immigrants, Pound’s China is tempered by recollection that takes its first prompts from the institutional space of the museum. China is framed and regulated, and the spectacle enacted through the exhibitions emphasizes civility and culture as a remedy for social disorder and political engagement.

Just as the growing presence of China in galleries seems to affect Pound’s own poetry, so, too, does it incite a nascent global sensibility across a range of literary journals. Translations of T’ang, Song, and Ming Dynasty Poets, as well as the submission of pieces that incorporate Chinese themes, break down along the compartmental lines of early museum exhibitions of Chinese art. In fact, I would propose that modernist treatments of China in museums and its textual analogues are never really liberated from the early “classificatory principles” of the anthropological museum that attempted an “illustration of certain general laws or tendencies”; specifically, that society is progressive and Imperial China marks a venerable stage in the history of that progression. China is a panacea with which to address the “splintering effects” of modernity, replacing fracture through displays that emphasize unity and teleology; in the museum, China “functions as a site in which the figure of 'Man' is reassembled from his fragments.”

47. Ibid., 39.
Latin American cultures, but omitted from the upper echelons of western European modernisms. And how could it not be? Temporally, the emphasis on China’s Imperial age makes it an impossible companion to contemporary life: it is a precedent, a model, but an unreal space when solely engaged in antiquated form. But, of course, Imperial China is a real place, and underpinning the seemingly abstract issues of China in exhibitions is a history of international commerce. Ronald J. And Mary Saracino Zboray, in their study of the Great Chinese Museum in Boston, open from 1845-1847, write that the exhibition struggled to overhaul the “fragmentary Chinese imaginary,” but they also admit its position “on the vanguard of mid-nineteenth-century international ethnographic and design arts exhibits” was closely tied to the Wanghsia Treaty of 3 July 1844.48

At the time, increased contact with East Asia demanded a new discursive construction of the racial 'other' to include the Chinese. Because they developed an enduring civilization, they necessarily complicated the ongoing discourse of alterity—of civilized (i.e. White) versus primative (e.g., Africans and Native Americans)—in contemporary debates over national self-definition. Moreover, Chinese products, carried often by Yankee shippers, were an integral part of coastal northeastern Americans' domestic environments.49

The poetic exhibitions synthesize and flatten two thousand years of Chinese History and artistic production so that it becomes one monolithic historical touchstone for modernist

49. Ibid, 272.
innovation, but tangled up in this collapse are issues of the commodification of an entire country and the dehumanization of its people.

Just when the margins and pages of the journals began to seem very much like the endlessly circulating halls of the British museum, I discovered a great deal of continuity. In fact, the little magazines engage China in a manner that consistently falls into two categories: Human Exhibition and Luxury Goods. Both categories have volatile political histories that are subtly pacified by continual aestheticization, creating less of a literary exploration of Chinese culture than a linguistic importation. While the considerations that follow just graze the surface of the primary materials retrieved, I have attempted to lay the beginnings of a foundation that could support the weight of an expansive critical study.

**The Human Exhibition: China Dolls and Mandarins**

While at *Poetry*, Pound solicited W.B. Yeats for work to include in the new journal. The 1916 publication of W.B. Yeats’s “There Is A Queen In China” (later “His Phoenix” in 1919’s *The Wild Swans at Coole*) corresponds to one of the predominant motifs in the physical museum that is transferred onto the pages of the literary magazine: the China doll. Alternately royal, tragic, delicate, and inspiring, the China Doll is primarily an inanimate object to be gazed upon, described physically and coded through the use of broad visual signs that read, at best, as specifically Chinese and, at worst, pan-Asian. From the 1916 Yeats poem: “There is a queen in China, or maybe it’s in Spain” where “praises can be heard

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50. Pound read aloud to Yeats and occasionally took dictation for the older poet’s correspondence during the years of 1913-1917. The opening image of “There Is A Queen In China” seems particularly germane here. Even if the Asian invocation is not directly the influence of Pound, it speaks to the nature of the China on the European scene: fantastic, Imperial, and blank. For a more detailed account of Pound and Yeats’s relationship, see Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound in London and Paris*, 133-135.
/ Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no stain."51 The insistence of exotic aristocracy and a purity that is literally porcelain white is undercut by an early dependent clause: such remoteness renders a geographical collapse—this queen could be from any foreign land.

“Vermilion Seals,” Elizabeth J. Coatsworth’s 1919 contribution to *Poetry*, trump Yeats’ single figure by offering a series of shorter pieces which reveal an entire shelf of China dolls. First in the collection are the tragic dolls: in “Light of Love” the muse’s death provokes the poetic narrator to insist that she be buried “in her cloak” and “her slippers”; in “The Curse” she dangles “On the cord dead,” she who was “of the wondrous lily feet” and “like a willow blossom”; in “Love Tower” she is “Dame Sik of the smoke-like hair / And willow waist” who “leapt from the top of the tower.” There is the China Doll who appears as a ghost with “white hands” that shine “in the gloom,” uttering posthumous words that flit about “like the bright quick fireflies.” There is the beautiful China doll who is the object of reverie: in “Spring In China” her “sleeves are scented wondrously,” with hair “unbound in the wind,” and who so provocatively inspires that: “Even the moon is so enamoured / That ere dusk he climbs the stairs of heaven to behold her.”52

The China dolls occupy a complicated gender space that simultaneously elevates woman to the all too familiar still and silent coveted object. Rarely do these dolls speak, nor do they become poetic narrators of their own desires and lamentations. In my extensive mining of the magazines, I have yet to find either a poem or editorial in which the Chinese female subject is embodied or allowed to speak without intervention. Such a move on the part of the poet would incite an intense and justifiable discussion regarding the of location, of

course, but to find, everywhere one looks, silent, beautiful, ornate, static objects instead of a changeable subject is striking. For all the elevation through aesthetic admiration, they are a disempowered lot, subordinated to the agency of the spectator, purchasable.

The male counterpart to the China Doll is the Mandarin. Part sage, part scholar, part official, the Imperial Mandarin is propped up as an ideal figure for the modern poet/scholar. The Chinese sage/poet appears as the subject of poetic consideration and, in translations, both as a character framed by the accompanying editorials and as writers themselves. In this context, as Imperial subjects reconstituted in the poetic galleries of modernism, they are often nobly situated prisoners of a cultural war—valuable spoils that are, nevertheless, strangely impotent, lacking contemporary vitality. The number of translations quickly increase after Pound’s version of Li Po’s “Exiles’s Letter” and To-Em-Mei’s “The Unmoving Cloud,” from the notes of Ernest Fenollosa, is published in the March 1915 issue of Poetry and July 1916 Others, respectively. Among them: Li Po translations by the infamous derelict and early Imagist Maxwell Bodenheim; Arthur Waley’s Translations of Po Chu-I; Waley translations of Wang Chi, T’ang Seng-ch’I, Ch’en Tzu-ang, Su Shi, Lu Yu, Wang Tzu-tuan, Hsü-ling and Po Chü-I; Amy Lowell’s “Chinese Written Wall Pictures,” a collection of Lowell’s interpretations of Florence Aycough’s translations of Li Hai-ku, Wang Ching-Seng, Ch’en Hung-Shou, Liang T’ung-shu, T’ai Ta-mien, Liu Shih-an, and Lun Kun; Witter Bynner and S.C. Kang-Hu’s translations of T’ang Dynasty poetry; Bodenheim, The Little Review (June 1917).

54. Waley, The Little Review (December 1917).

55. Waley, Poetry (January and February 1917).

56. Lowell, Poetry (February 1919).

The Chinese Poems of J. Wing translated by E. Powys Mathers.\(^\text{58}\) The list could continue to unfurl for quite a length; the list of poets it covers are both stylistically and temporally enormous. For instance, Amy Lowell’s “Chinese Written Wall Pictures” houses the fourth-century Jin and Liu Sung Dynasty shih poet T’ao Chien and the nineteenth-century Qing Dynasty poet Li Hai-ku within one collection. Such a wide-ranging poetic survey, just like the survey museum that it mirrors, risks spurious generalizations and reductions derived from the sense that one is, after all, finally getting something specific: verifiable examples, bonafide poetic objects.

The transfer of institutional forms of exhibition into linguistic forms of display are no more clearly demonstrated than through the frequent editorials that accompany the translations, creating the very same comparative narrativizing that exhibition catalogs produce. John Gould Fletcher’s February 1919 editorial in *Poetry* on Arthur Waley’s Chinese Poems negotiates these two extremes. As for the fantasy, Fletcher’s analysis constructs a particularly odd one. He takes Waley to task for possibly not “understand[ing] the depths of the oriental temperament, like many another western observer.”\(^\text{59}\) But Fletcher’s own depths are paradoxically shallow and monolithic: “The one quality that is common to all these Chinese singers is their absolute sincerity, their refusal to accept any make-believes about life.”\(^\text{60}\) But how can that quality, that unsentimental clarity that is “the elementary principle of the Chinese character”, engage in modernity?\(^\text{61}\) Admittedly, it cannot assert any agency in the modern landscape if the only noteworthy “Chinese

\(^{58}\) Mathers, *Broom* (November 1921).

\(^{59}\) Fletcher, in *Poetry* 7, no. 5 (February 1919): 276.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 274.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.
characters” speak at a vast distance from “the kingdom beyond the grave.” China’s greatness is impossibly mired in the past and, while admirable for an archaic civilization, when compared to Western exempla, its literary history falls short when ranked: “It is quite true that the Chinese have produced neither a Homer, nor an Aeschylus, nor a Shakespeare nor a Tolstoy,” though they do “at least have poetry—endless fields of it.” Barring Fletcher’s specious approximation upon the lack of a great Chinese poet—as a target it’s far too easy—what interests me here is the “endless fields” of poetry which spookily evokes an image of those endless rooms of Chinese antiquities in decorative arts museums that, while conveying the vast production of China, strangely flattens the individual character, seeks unifying tropes as opposed to differentiation.

This urge to generalize aligns more with the modern museum's emphasis on classification and taxonomy, narrative legibility and temporal articulation, a space—whether on the page or in the labyrinths extending from the atrium of the British museum—in “which objects were arranged in a manner calculated to make intelligible a scientific view of the world.” Thus the Chinese sage becomes exhibited—reverently but generically—very much like the Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Imperial pottery lined up, monochromatic beige porcelain and clay vessels blending into beige walls. The global museum consciousness is, finally, a false consciousness that catalogs and contains fluid concepts. In this system, Chinese culture is compacted and sequestered, deemed historically powerful but at the price of its

62. Ibid., 273.
63. Ibid., 276.
64. Ibid.
contemporary culture remaining almost entirely absent. Indeed, Harriet Monroe, in her own editorial on Arthur Waley’s translations, writes: “Waley teaches us more, probably, of life in China today than one could learn from an hundred travelers.” And while Monroe’s gesture is one of deference—Waley’s project, she believes, offers a sense of the great expanse of Chinese history, vibrant “when Europe was in chaos and China was the most civilized country on earth”—her declaration that “the Chinese change little” is a disarming apolitical claim to make in the year following the Beijing Centered May Fourth Movement. China becomes a part of a western collective memory, its massive historical, political, and geographic expanses become literary tropes, fantastic precedents that herald and inform a definitively Anglo-European modernism. The aesthetic heritage of Imperial China is thus separated from modern China and appended to a western narrative as ancient context for an enduring artistic trajectory. China is rarely considered within the context of its own twentieth-century political and ideological course; a course, it must be emphasized, that is a direct confrontation with the consequences of the very same Imperial state that western museums and literary establishments rendered fantasy. The forms of consciousness that would allow a more expansive consideration must be both temporally and spatially protean,

65. Here, the violent history of human exhibition quietly recedes into the decorative arts complex and allows comparisons and rankings to be made without the most objectionable cage. In “Archi(ve)textures of Museology,” we are reminded by Wolfgang Ernst that the “category of the universal interrelations of things (nexus rerum universalis), borrowed from Enlightenment thinking, became temporalized in nineteenth-century museology; the effect of historical progress in fact was an effect of such museal staging and framing. By providing the material traces of the past with historical significance, those objects were to be deciphered transcendentally” (20).


67. An example of this instance in the physical museum occurs in the directive for the Freer Museum, where founder Charles Freer did not intend for Asian art to be valued in and of itself, but “seen as a context for contemporary American paintings, it pointed the way for a new artistic movement, embodying the essential truths of both East and West. His solution to the problem of how to categorize Asian objects was in fact less a solution to the larger question than it was an idiosyncratic way of institutionalizing a particular vision of American art using a particular vision of Asia” (Conn, “Where Is The East?”, 172).
must allow an increasingly dynamic sense of Chinese history—both cultural and political—that allows for a trajectory of its own, not one stellar representative to fit somewhere in the gap between Aeschyulus and Shakespeare.

If the poetic exhibition of Chinese men seems to be a parade of sages, scholars, Imperial poets, and Confucian aphorisms collected and translated by poets, arranged by the editorial staff and contextualized with maudlin editorials, the inclusion of the Chinese man in the poets’ original works is oddly demeaning. For each and every reverent translation of Li Po, there is a poem that takes the figure of the ancient Chinese poet or wise man and brings it into modern verse with disarming results; the figure is exemplified and patronized, lauded and mocked. Pound’s “Epitaphs,” published in the June 1914 *BLAST*, demonstrates this strange blend of reverence and patronization:

Fu I.

"Fu I loved the green hills and the white clouds,

Alas, he died of drink.

Li Po.

And Li Po also died drunk.

He tried to embrace a moon

In the yellow river.

*Fu I was born in 554 A.D. and died in 639. This is his epitaph very as he wrote it.*

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Here the textual museum functions, not just as a space of pleasure or power, but it has the

ability to refashion history through T’ang Dynasty poets, exhibiting their influence through the representation of a physical object: here is a carving for a tombstone, etched irreverently on the pages of an experimental journal instead of a national memorial. It is fitting that the relationship between architectural space and print forms and their commensurate abilities to commemorate an imaginative history is explored in BLAST, as it was a journal blatantly aware of its function as a physical medium. "Assaulting the audience with pink covers” and “poster typography,” BLAST’s debut issue in June 1914 was as precise in its layout and use of physical space—the way the form could pacify or unsettle its contents—as any high modern museum. Blast demands physical engagement as though its pages and columns are corridors and vestibules. If "this type shouts at you," it demands the same amount of ocular exploration as a museum requires physical exploration. But despite this refabrication of form, Blast makes the same movements as the more visually conservative little magazines in terms of cultural curation: the particular is universalized and China becomes fodder, in this case, for the Futurist machine.

If part of Blast’s project is a textual violence that corresponds to the industrial world, then the stereotype in Morris Abel Beer’s “Old China,” published in Poetry’s July 1917 issue, is oblivious to that violence, grafting the Mainland onto a Chinese American

69. In “Make It Sell! Ezra Pound Advertizes Modernism” Timothy Materer writes: “Pound's modernism implies experimentation and originality, and it finds its natural expression in short-lived journals such as BLAST. Although The Little Review was designed as a conventional literary review, Pound turned it into an avant-garde one and so necessarily shortened its life” (25). Though Pound was not judicious about many things, he did seem to have a curator’s eye for which piece belonged in each journal, and was not altogether driven by “natural expression,” contrary to Materer’s view. In 1917 he wrote Margaret Anderson advising on the style of Dial: “Too arty paper arouses mistrust, people use it who have nothing but paper and a printing press. The plain exterior and the coloured label, are right (Bishop, “Re:Covering Modernism,” 307).

70. Bishop, "Re:Covering Modernism,” 296.

59. Ibid.
immigrant:

Hop Wah, the genial Chinaman, with steaming iron sings.

His heart is light because his little laundry shop takes wings,

And sailing o'er the silver skies, like birds in summer-time,

Through dreaming lanterned dells he strays as Bowery belfries chime.\(^{72}\)

Despite Beer’s attempt to address the contemporary, there is something socially and politically grievous in the importation of a fantasy character calcified in permanent meditation into the hard reality of an immigrant’s life. Essentially, it replaces the complexity of the Chinese-American position, which in 1917 was still shadowed by the racially motivated violence of the latter half of the 19th century, with an immobile, pacified stereotype.\(^{73}\) So is the Mandarin, when brought into the modern world, often propped up in demeaning performance, a yellow-face minstrelsy that has its origins in the late nineteenth-century Anti-Chinese Riots in America. In *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s-1920s*, Krystyn R. Moon notes: “Beginning with caricatures of Chinese immigrants as early as 1854, yellowface impersonations were a crucial way of circulating ideas of difference and inferiority, all of which supported anti-Chinese attitudes.”\(^{74}\) While yellowface often took its most potent form in songs, such as 1870’s “Nigger-Versus-Chinese,” or side-stage shows, the legacy of yellowface and its portrayal of

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73. To drive home the point, a better source with which to consider how genial the life of a Chinaman really was, see Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940*.

74. Moon, *Yellowface*, 47.
the Chinese as “innately foreign” and “unassimilable”\textsuperscript{75} casts a shadow on much of the modernist poetry that, even when summoning Chinese antiquity with great reverence, bares traces of the broad racial and cultural stereotypes that “had serious implications and supported the logic of exclusion.”\textsuperscript{76} Wallace Stevens’s “Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise” invokes yellowface in a 1917 dramatic parody of racial stereotypes, tying the history of blackface and yellowface together, with the opening stage directions: “The characters are three Chinese, two negroes and a girl.”\textsuperscript{77} The Chinese characters proceed to give instructions to the African-American characters, who remain silent throughout, via ridiculous proverbs. In a similar spirit, Emanuel Carnevali’s 1921 submission to \textit{Poetry}, “Sermon,” outright parodies the Mandarin image:

\begin{quote}
Chao-Mong-Mu freely laid his hands over the sky:
You do not know how to lay your hands over the breasts of your beloved.

Chao-Mong-Mu made the tree dance at his will:
You do not know how to hug a rough tree and say “darling” to it.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{78} Emanuel Carnevali, “Sermon” in \textit{Poetry} 19, no. 3 (Dec 1921): 141.
Stevens and Carnivali’s spoofs may be aimed at the sanctimonious curation of Chinese
Poetry and art in the pages of the modernist journals, but they manage to more visibly strike
directly at China and feed “off the audience’s notions of exoticism and primitiveness” in
their deployment. Such a move would be less ignoble if there seemed to be anything other
than caricatures of Chinese subjectivity within the pages of Poetry, The Dial, and The Little
Review in the first place.

In the modern poetry museum, the Chinese subject strikes a pose as broad as any
spectacle in the Human Exhibition that was a both part of the 19th century anthropological
museum and freak show circuit. Obviously, the freak show is the more patently exploitive
sub-species of these displays, in which a human “was transformed into a freak the first time
he or she stood on the exhibition platform,” providing the spectator with the ability to self-
define against an image of deformity or otherness, and “in such a context the average person
always came out ahead.”

The anthropological museum works subtly to produce similar effects upon the viewer. A sense of progression, working towards a “production of a deep
historical time” charts the movement from primitive to civilized as the “single narrative
which posits modern Man” at the evolutionary pinnacle. The absence of modern Chinese
subjects in these exhibitions—they are seemingly much more distant than the T’ang, Ming,

79. Moon, Yellowface, 59.
80. The relationship between poets and the Chinese museum has an early precedent: Emily Dickinson visited the
Great Chinese Museum and met the two human exhibitions—“living artifacts”—that the museum employed, T’sow-
Chaoong, who specialized in calligraphy, and Le-Kaw-hing, a musician. They were allowed to converse with
patrons and, evidently, they made an impression on Dickinson, though in her letters she “objectified them, precisely
because the museum setting accorded them communicative status akin to artifacts” (Zboray and Zboray, “Between
Crockery-dom” and Barnum,” 291).
81. For a more detailed discussion of the freak show, see Stulman Dennett’s “Freaks and Platform Performers” in
Weird and Wonderful, 66-85.
82. Dennett, Weird and Wonderful, 76.
and Qing China dolls or Mandarins of the Imperial dynasties and kingdoms—are reduced because the presence of a modern Chinese citizen is almost entirely absent in cultural engagements with China: they are practically nonexistent within the exhibition spaces or literary journals that are seemingly enraptured with China. And while the modernists largely venerate the artistic output of China, that, too, avoids a contemporaneous engagement. Moon notes that the after the anxieties of the 19th century, the Chinese Exclusion Act ushered forth a new series of portrayals that “maintained images of the Chinese racial inferiority and effeminacy” while allowing an important shift “from treating the Chinese as subjects of a problem to objects of desire,” thus evoking exoticism to reconfigure the Chinese experience into “a fantasy world that could be used as a criticism of modernization or could function as a form of escapism.” I would suggest the larger legacy of the Chinese Human exhibitions in representations of Chinese men and women in modernist poetry: aestheticized objects of desire that are impotent, unable to act, and unable to provoke politically and socially troubling questions. It is as if they are oxygen-deprived within the museum’s reinforced glass displays.

**Luxury Goods: Silk Robes and Chinese Silver Buckles**

Today, if you visit the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C., you can visit a handful of ongoing exhibitions dedicated to Asian Art. Among them, four focus on China alone: “The Arts of China,” “Black & White: Chinese Ceramics from the 10th-14th Centuries,” “Ancient Chinese Pottery and Bronze,”

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and “Chinese Buddhist Art.” The museum guide for “Luxury Arts of the Silk Route Empires,” an exhibition that considers the Silk Road a prototype for cultural and economic globalism, offers an exceptionally positive interpretation of its legacy:

Two thousand years before today’s ‘global economy,’ an exchange network linked the continent of Asia via the Silk Route. Between the first and eighth centuries of the common era, the empire and states of Asia often came into conflict as they competed for territory and other resources or sought to dominate their neighbors in religious and political arenas. Yet the sea and overland routes between China and the eastern Mediterranean—the Silk Route, or Silk Road—also fostered peaceful interaction, both cultural and commercial.  

Laying aside the fact that five galleries, rather modest in size, attempt the rather impossible task of glossing the cultural output and trade of China—a state of incredible physical flux—from the ancient period (4,000 B.C.E-200 C.E.) through the late Imperial Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the more pressing issue remains the implication that China’s cultural value lies in its commodified form, “cultural exchange” as a euphemism for “lucrative.” This curation effect finds its way into the modernist little magazines, throughout which a persistent fascination with China manifests itself as an obsession with imports. An actual list of the Chinese goods would be exhaustive but among them are golden lacquered bowls, Chinese prints, vermilion palaces, golden pagodas, Han bronzes, Sung paintings, one ancient Buddha of jade and coral with lapis-lazuli eyes, black pearls on a silver chain, green silk coats lined with fur, velvet shoes, and gold diadems set with pearls and rubies. Apparently,

88. Stuart, “Luxury Arts In Late Imperial China,” 2.
the language of commodity fetishism is a dialect of the language of evasion and, in this case, it evades the conflict and complexity of early twentieth-century China by transforming its landscape into a silk market. There is, it seems, no other way for the moderns to access China other than through its commodity form.

In *Blast*, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s “Vortex” and the futurist obsession with machines reaches back to include the Chinese “Shang and Chow dynasties” that “produced the convex bronze vases” and “the bronze war drum.” In bold, capitalized letters—indicative of the very graphic lines of Gaudier-Brzeska’s own sculpture—he announces that if “Maturity is fecundity” these dynasties were to the point in which “THE VORTEX WAS INTENSE MATURITY.” As China progresses towards the Ming, its citizens “forsook their work” and “found artistic ruin and sterility.” To be fair, Gaudier-Brzeska’s manifesto is not comparative in the sense that it places the West as an ideal; to be sure, “Vortex,” disputes the very notion of modernity as the apex that the anthropological museum would claim.

However, the survey of China, in the Gaudier-Brzeska, does align with more conservatively institutional views: the vital components of any story of China wanes as it comes closer to modernity. If China is an exemplum for the future, it does not, evidently, work for China itself, but only for the West and solely as a historical model that can catalyze the anxious psychogeographic landscape surrounding the Great War. For Gaudier-Brzeska, contemporary Europe is the “VORTEX of FEAR” where its “masterpieces” are “fetishes.”

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90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid, 158.
But his relationship to China only inverts that vortex of fear, and instead of having masterpieces that are fetishes, we are left with Chinese masterpieces that are fetishized.

In a strangely synaesthetic moment, Alfred Kreymborg’s 1921 “Decorations for an Imaginary Ballet” in *Broom* demands: “Sound the flat gold / of Chinese scales ; / let sound the red gold / of old gongs / and the light gold / of oboes.”⁹³ Appropriately enough, in an imaginary ballet, an imaginary China emerges, where even tones drone luxuriously. In the very next issue of *Broom*, Grace Hazard Conkling’s syrupy lament for love lost, “Cloisonné,” promises to retrieve memories for her lover, to “shape them” for his hands if he will take a keepsake she has just “finished / cool with enamel of hyacinth and sea-green jade.”⁹⁴ One would hope that if China’s artistic production was to be pulled off the museum stands and placed in verse as a the bearer of exotic depths, it would, at the very least, find itself in better poetry. For example, Carl Sandburg’s 1922 poem “The Rakeoff and the Getaway,” includes “a woman’s slipper / with a tarnished buckle, / a tarnished Chinese silver buckle.”⁹⁵ What “Chinese” infers is subtle, but it evokes enough to bear a repetition of the line. This is, I think, indicative of the very insinuating force of the fantasy of China in the museums of modernity. It becomes illustrative of luxury and hence a “style,” but skirts the edges of gauche display; the museum’s China is cultivated with such intricacy, is so deeply etched, that its fantasy landscape emerges through the employment of one adjective, the addition of one “sea-green jade” cloisonné bowl or the inclusion of “red jew’ls of Cathay.”⁹⁶

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⁹⁴. Conkling, “Cloisonné” in *Broom* 1, no. 3 (January 1922): 249.


Evidently, Amy Lowell’s mind has such exotic perambulations that its closest physical analogue is the Far East, where it “plays at ball in old, blue Chinese gardens.”

Whether it be in the salon of a Kensington house or the decorative arts galleries of the Victoria and Albert, the ideal reception room for either private house or public institution might be a “Chinese room / Where a Buddha sits in gloom” as in Mary Carolyn Davies “Portrait of a House.” Additionally, it could contain “the gilded Chinese dragons” of Arthur Ficke’s “Portrait of Theodore Dreiser.”

Hanging on the walls, would be preferably an “Old Sung Painting” such as the one Edna Worthley Underwood describes in her titular poem; only a page earlier she has confessed: “I love the blondness of old painted silk, / Like pure and patient pearls of yellow glow; / The tiny figures colored like to gems.”

Perhaps, in the gardens, a “tall pagoda, like a velvet flower.”

Arthur Davison Ficke’s “Dream of A Chinese Landscape (A Screen by Soga Shubun)” takes its cue from a Japanese Painting. And if Ficke’s China is one where “pagodas rise,” “monasteries dream,” “wild geese soar,” it is, admittedly, a “mortal world, [a] dream world” of “[b]eautiful transient illusion.” Implicit in Ficke’s poem is the revelation that his connection to Asia and China is colored by a series of lens that make any vision interior: this is China burgeoning in the dreamscape of a Japanese Screen artist, exhibited in Western art galleries, viewed by Ficke and then processed in the same terrain of

98. Davies “Portrait of a House” in Poetry 20, no. 3 (June 1922): 131.
fantasy that begins the sequence. Charles F. Richter similarly reminds us of the consequences of cultural interface when he writes of the “Chinese cult of mystery / Whose god is elephantine, monstrous, weird,” with idols “Carved out of wood or stone, the deity /Is everywhere, and everywhere is feared.” But feared, evidently, only upon “the limitless Asian plains”\(^\text{103}\)—the narrator finally recalls that “I saw one on a preacher's desk of late-- / The good man used it for a paper-weight.” Sacred or valuable objects imported and put to decorative use is a governing trope throughout. Wallace Stevens’s “Six Significant Landscapes” in *Others*, disconcertingly includes an image that is the epitome of the Chinese commodity:

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An old man sits
In the shadow of a pine tree
In China.
He sees larkspur,
Blue and white,
At the edge of the shadow,
Move in the wind.\(^\text{104}\)

Of course, the motif of the ancestral Chinaman recurs here, but particularly telling is the element of this poem that points to the influence of China in imports in the “Blue and white” coloring of the larkspur. “Chinese Blue and White” is perhaps the most famous of all exports made exclusively for the Western world—it is a motif and colour combination that

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the Chinese never produced for themselves, but solely for trade. That it works its way into the Stevens’ poem as a part of the natural landscape of the Chinese world, as two colors that signify the East, demonstrates the subtlety with which the fascination with Chinese goods so permeated the market that even poetic images intended to evoke nature, invoke, instead, a collection of table settings.

In the poem that follows, “Bowl,” Stevens once again conflates objects with subjects:

“For what emperor / was this bowl of Earth designed? / Here are more things / Than on any bowl of the Sungs, Even the rarest.” The specificity of the Sung bowl in Stevens’ poem is yet another incurrence of the Imperial, but the landscape of fantasy that Stevens employs extrapolated into purchasing power as trade became increasingly focused on antiquities that predated the nineteenth century. As early as 1922, when A.L. Heatherington wrote *The Early Ceramic Wares of China*, he noticed that there was a “rapidly growing body of collectors who [were] losing their interest in the more elaborate productions of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and collecting in their place the simpler types and the purer art exhibited in the wares of the T’ang, Sung, Yüan, and Ming dynasties.”

Perhaps the clearest distillation of a China that is only accessible through an assemblage of commodity forms is Allen Upward’s “Scented Leaves-From A Chinese Jar.” These “leaves” are thirty fragments that run the gamut from “the great emperor Kublai” to a seafaring myth inclusive of “the Junk of many pearls.” They collect scholars, emperors, scholars, and seamen.

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diamonds, goldfish, parrots, “robes of yellow silk embroidered with the Dragon,”108 “thrones of incomparable ivory” that have “ruled over the Middle Kingdom for four thousand years,” a “Garden of Friendship,” “vermilion letters on tablets of sendal,” “junks carrying lanterns,” and one “hall of ebony.”109 Upward, a close friend of Pound’s, believed that “to seek the permanent and the most advanced in the Eastern literary tradition, one must take the voyage to China.”110 It is important to note here that Upward’s “voyage” was aesthetic, not physical, the poet felt it unnecessary to connection the imagined historical site of China with its modern offspring. When Pound saw “Scented Leaves From a Chinese Jar” in Poetry, he noticed that “Upward’s images had distinct Chinese colors, which Pound had witnessed in the Chinese landscape paintings of the British Museum.”111 There is a reading of this series of events that is positive: Upward and Pound’s respective visits to the British Museum, Upward finding such inspiration to generate a series of poems, Pound’s recognition of the connection between the paintings in the museum and Upward’s images. But what I am concerned with here is the way in which China offers the modernists a new context that is of solely historical mythology. Both Chinese art and Chinese history becomes, finally, a

108. Verity Wilson notes that “[t]he dragon robe was used in China in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries as a hierarchical garment” (230). A garment that signified a complexly stratified system distinguishing the social and intellectual elite made the robes exceptionally fascinating to Americans and Europeans; so much so, that all Chinese coats began to be identified as “Mandarin” jackets (231). This monolithic fashioning allows the culturally specific, ambiguous, and particular to become generalized, a totemic fantasy of a cultural dreamstate: “Despite their commonplace nature and the ease with which they could be obtained, dragon robes represented for some Europeans the spirit of the East. Everything certain Westerners wanted to believe about China was embodied in these garments. At the very time that Chinese society was going through a series of disastrous dislocations, dragon robes were held up as symbols of an ordered empire, static and wisely ruled” (235). The importation of this fashion into the verse of the time constructs an equally problematic narrative, in which China is populated by a privileged and learned citizenry of Mandarins, devoid of an underclass. China’s early (and continuing) twentieth century political and social disruption and transformation is replaced by costume drama.


110. Qian, Orientalism and Modernism, 19.

111. Ibid., 20.
commodity wherein the cultural history of the Chinese is separated from modern China and reattached to the beginnings of Western art. It may be a voyage necessary to take, but it is a voyage that need not include the weight of history and its consequences, preferring the zones of fantasy and inspiration. In the American and European museums, the representation of China is an entire culture’s “memory objectified, not belonging to any one individual so much as to audiences, publics, collections, and nations, and represented via the museum collections.”

In *The Imperialist Imaginary*, John R. Eperjesi attributes the tension between static “cultural China” that is focalized through artistic representation and the dynamic developments of political and social China to the west’s inability to mediate between these two spaces:

The idea of cultural China has recently become both a symptom and a symbol of the center/periphery dramas through which representations of China and Chineseness are increasingly being (re)coded, and it provides an important mediation term between East and West, Orient and Occident, China and America, one that is sensitive to those emergent economic formations in the area of Asia/Pacific/America that cannot be grasped within easy binary frameworks.

Representation is an essential part of the fantasy of China, produced in the aesthetic and literary imagination, and empowered through its consumption by the spectator. If the museum’s political and social agency lies in the fact that it orders the past by locating authority in master narratives and consciously organized galleries, then the mu

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seum’s most salient component is the inability to contain multiple material histories, the flattening of all friction. What the museum gains in social, political, and cultural expediency is the power to represent monolithic concepts; this unremitting invocation of a “cultural China” contributes to a fantasy of China that, while ostensibly indebted to historical legacy, arranges a gallery of Chinese images that displace the social and political discomfort, in American modernity, with Chinese agency.

Inextricably tied to its position in the Museum, particularly the sub-category of the decorative arts, the presence of China in modernist little magazines and, by extension, the China fetishized throughout modernism, demands a consideration of several different histories and discourses: the influence of China, as represented in museums, upon modernists like Pound who were central figures in magazine culture; the museum as conceptual apparatus of a political and social agency that finds one of its instrumental arms in the journal. Finally, if one consequence of the French revolution is that the nineteenth century must come to terms with the transition from hierarchy to bureaucracy and the industrial revolution, the museum reflects these changes, expanding its mission to include the public, to educate the influx of urban masses. Chinese culture has been so patently drawn by modernity, the twin legacies of Confucianism and Dynasty so thoroughly marketed, that the only competing narratives inevitably addresses Tiananmen or the Mao Zedong legacy. With such thoroughly fantastic, radical poles erected—the glorious riches of the Imperial age versus the harrowing austerity of the Communist Chinese Party—it’s
little surprise that the cultural innovations in modernism and postmodernism largely remain outside of the museum walls.
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