

# CHINA CROSSROADS

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## Chinese Characters and the Limits of Poetic Translation: *Chinoiserie* in America's New Poetry Movement

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In the American New poetry movement, starting from Ezra Pound, there was an obsession with the ideographic structure of Chinese characters. A kind of "ideogrammic method" had been widely applied in the "Chinese style poetry" (Chinoiserie), and even influenced the formation of comparative poetics. However, the highest ideal of traditional Chinese poetics is to create a "World" or "Realm" (境) instead of an "Image" (象), or "Ideograph" (字). The "Ideogrammic method" had played a role in the early stage of American New Poetry, but as a misunderstanding of both Chinese written characters and Chinese Poetics, it might have hindered the development of comparative poetics. This talk will trace the origins of the "Ideogrammic method" and reflect on its theoretical fallacy.

[Wang Baihua](#) is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature and Director of the Comparative Literature Program at Fudan University. She is co-translator of Alfred Habegger's [My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson](#) (2014). In addition, Professor Wang organized the very first international Emily Dickinson symposium in China: "Emily Dickinson Dwells in China: Possibilities of Translation and Transcultural Perspectives" (2014) and also launched the "Emily Dickinson Collaborative Translation Project." Based on this project, she co-edited with Martha Nell Smith [Critical Chinese Translations of Emily Dickinson's Poems](#) (2017). She has also recently published [Collected Essays on Literary Relations Between China and Abroad](#) (2020).

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