

## Leigh Jenco

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#### The author

Leigh Jenco (PhD, Chicago, 2007; BA, Bard College, 1999) is currently Lecturer in Political Theory at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK. She was appointed Research Fellow, Political Theory Project, Brown University (2007-2008) and was formerly assistant professor of political science, National University of Singapore (2008-2012). She specializes in contemporary political theory, particularly democratic, interpretive, and comparative theory, and modern Chinese political thought. Her research seeks to demonstrate the theoretical and not simply historical value of Chinese discourses on politics, with a special emphasis on the intellectual innovations of the late Qing and early Republic (circa 1860-1935).

Her book, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (Cambridge, 2010), uses an influential Chinese thinker to throw new light on impasses within democratic theories of agency and founding. Zhang articulates an account of how individual moral effort can begin to influence the socio-political environment independently of prior agreement on common purposes—challenging the work of theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Hanna Pitkin and Iris Young, who seek refuge in an already-existing public sphere of action. Leigh's other publications include "'Rule by Man' and 'Rule by Law' in Early Republican China: Contributions to a Theoretical Debate," *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 69 no. 1 (February 2010); and "'What Does Heaven Ever Say?' A Methods-Centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 101 no. 4 (November 2007).

She is the winner of the 2003 Foundations of Political Theory Best Paper Award for "Thoreau's Critique of Democracy" (*Review of Politics*, Summer 2003), and the 2008 Strauss Award for Best Dissertation in Political Philosophy, awarded by the American Political Science Association.

#### The paper

This paper is one chapter in my current book project, tentatively titled *Changing Referents: Theorizing Across Time and Space*, which uses a series of Chinese conversations from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to grapple with the methodological dilemmas of interpreting across historical and cultural difference. The project therefore departs from many recent attempts to engage typically-marginalized ("non-Western") bodies of thought, in that these attempts usually take their goals and methodology from the very Eurocentric discourse they set out to critique.

This paper draws from a specific Chinese conversation which claimed "Chinese origins for Western knowledge" (西學中源 *Xi xue Zhong yuan*), a reformist idea which gained momentum beginning in the 1860s. Although dismissed by historical commentators as culturally chauvinist, instrumentally strategic, or simply naïve, the claim of Chinese origins

was actually invoked by radical reformers, not conservatives, signaling that it does something more than shore up Chinese parochialism. I argue that the claim actually helps reformers comprehend the differences presented by foreign knowledge as identical to those already authorizing innovation within their existing activity of knowledge-production. I follow them in exploring this question of how cultural otherness may or may not be different from the historical otherness already found in our existing canons of thought. I go on to argue that we must broach something like a China-origins claim if we are to see typically-marginalized (“non-Western”) thought as part of what *disciplines* our current theory-production, rather than serves simply as its target of inclusion. Doing so, we blur self/foreign binaries and enable future innovation of thought on radically new terms.

### **Preparatory readings**

Huters, Theodore. *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.

Jenco, Leigh. “‘What Does Heaven Ever Say?’ A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-cultural Engagement.” *The American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (November 2007): 741–755.

Jenco, Leigh. “How Meaning Moves: Tan Sitong on Borrowing Across Cultures.” *Philosophy East and West* 62, no. 1 (2012): 92–113.

Quan Hansheng, “Qing mo de ‘Xixue yuan chu Zhongguo’ shuo,” in *Zhongguo jindai shi luncong* 1, vol. 5, ed. Bao Zunpeng et al. (Taipei: Zhongzheng, 1956).

Zhongguo shixue hui, eds., *Yangwu yun dong*, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1961).