

learning much from the West and, in Cheek's words, now we may hope to "see in the decades ahead more Chinese intellectuals offering back from their perspective contributions to global governance, political theory, and world literature and arts" (p. 331).

The historical perspective we have on the earlier periods is obviously – and by definition – lacking in discussions of contemporary issues, much less in predicting the future, but our understanding of the contemporary is immeasurably enriched by a grasp of history. Making deft use of such concepts as print capitalism, ideological regimes, directed public spheres, establishment intellectuals (and today dis-established intellectuals), Cheek illuminates the processes by which China's intellectuals, often under the worst conditions imaginable, have adapted to and helped construct our modern world.

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Changing Referents: Learning Across Space and Time in China and the West

LEIGH JENCO

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Paralleling Leigh Jenco's recently edited volume entitled *Chinese Thought as Global Theory* (SUNY Press, 2016), *Changing Referents* also addresses her efforts to rethink how Chinese reformers received Western learning in the late nineteenth century. In essence, *Changing Referents* historicizes Jenco's dual social science and humanities oriented approach in *Chinese Thought as Global Theory*. *Changing Referents* also picks up from Thomas Metzger's *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (Columbia University Press, 1977). Metzger reassessed the frequently positive orientation that Chinese reformers expressed when they described Western learning as an alternative way of looking at the social, political, economic and cultural requirements of "modernity." Metzger presented the positive assessments of the West made by many of the late Qing Chinese reformers.

Focusing on late Qing and early Republican reformist thought, Jenco's volume explores how, and why, "non-Western" traditions of thought could successfully adapt to those aspects of Western social and political theory they found both promising and forward-looking. Building on Metzger and others, Jenco reverses the usual comparison between "local" Chinese applications and "universal" theory, which have automatically prioritized the latter over the former. Her new work demonstrates how Chinese views of their own experiences and ideas have their own indigenous systematic strengths.

Each chapter presents Chinese perspectives of the location of knowledge, its conditions of production and the ways in which its content or suitability is challenged, legitimated and sustained. Rather than meekly redressing "universal" Eurocentric knowledge with "local" Chinese forms, Jenco contends that the Chinese also mobilized their own body of theory, which challenged and often broke down the allegedly clear boundaries between Chinese and non-Chinese thought that most Euro-Americans have assumed.

The strength of the volume vividly comes to life in Jenco's assessment of late Qing reformist thought. She begins with Ming–Qing claims for the "Chinese origins for

Western knowledge.” She argues that the implications of the allegedly “Chinese origins” stimulated an unexpected dialogue between China and the West. Nineteenth century Chinese reformers could argue that “new” policies in the sciences and technology were not unique to Europe. Western learning, when situated within the domain of Confucian scholarship, legitimated both of them in their mutual quest for science and technology. To change with the times, affirmed the old and new. The “old” had once been “new.”

Jenco then turns to the “traditionalist” positions taken by Tan Sitong, Yan Fu and Liang Qichao to deal with “totalistic Westernization.” She shows how “meaning moves” through both their local arguments and Eurocentric conversations with each other. Tan Sitong’s stance on the “metaphysics of culture,” for instance, allowed him to criticize the *tilyong* (substance/use) dichotomy for “creating an overdrawn contrast between China and the West.” Instead Tan argued in favour of Western learning and “total Westernization.”

Similarly, Jenco shows how Yan Fu and Liang Qichao developed what we would today call a sociology of knowledge, by appealing to the “study of groups” (*qunxue*) in society. The call for political reform (*bianfa*) required, they contended, the social and institutional means to achieve such reform. Transforming societies in turn demanded a “social context to embody and produce the knowledge” required, which represented a curious circular logic. *Qunxue* thus provided the grounds for understanding the reasons for order or chaos, poverty or prosperity.

Moving into the Republican era, change in the May Fourth era, according to Jenco, increasingly favoured a vision of “culture as history.” The multi-cultural dimensions of space and time led to debates about “Eastern” versus “Western” culture and new ways of thinking about the past and the future. Chen Duxiu, for instance, appealed to the incommensurability of “old Chinese ways” and “new Western ways” for the inability to sustain the early Republic. “New Cultural” radicalism, on the other hand, provoked resistance to a Western style activism in favour of traditional quietism. Quietism appealed to Du Yaquan and Gu Hongming in the face of a battered European world after the First World War. Notions of change now included transposing a “Chinese future” onto a failed “Western past.”

Jenco concludes her account by describing the “old”/“new” debate among modern Chinese reformers and revolutionaries. Culture now operated historically and thus was subject to modification and reinterpretation. In the end, however, the past no longer offered reliable guidance. Jenco thus concludes that modern Chinese thought itself became a viable source of innovation. As a product of the clash of the West versus the East, the East’s own aspirations unexpectedly remained reasonably intact. Jenco thus rejects Joseph Levenson’s dismissal of modern Chinese thought as a depressing modern fate for Confucian China. For Levenson, “China” survived as a “local” Chinese form that was irrevocably superseded by the “universal” West. Setting aside Levenson’s appeal to a priori Western priority, Jenco instead favours explaining how simultaneous and interactive knowledge communities formed in late imperial and Republican China as outcomes of specific historical forces.

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