# Leigh K. Jenco

# Re-centering political theory: the promise of mobile locality

## Article (Accepted version)
## (Refereed)

http://eprints.lse.ac.uk

**Re-centering Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality**


In this post-universalist era, the idea of providing guidance for culturally different communities and individuals is rightly condemned as imperialist. Yet this very recognition of cultural limitations ironically encourages further Eurocentrism: fearful of making imperialist claims about political life that apply to all, many contemporary theorists carefully qualify the reach of the problems they examine and the applicability of the normative theories they propose. How may this vicious cycle be truncated? The emerging field of comparative political theory joins postcolonial studies, feminism and subaltern studies to suggest that more sensitively calibrated forms of inclusion may de-parochialize our political thinking, without replicating the homogenizing universalism of earlier centuries. Painfully aware that they are situated within the privileged cultural frames of the modern West, comparative political theorists identify their struggle in terms of understanding differently situated others, amidst power disparities created by colonialism, American hegemony, and the global flow of capital.

Many of these efforts insist, however, that we cannot displace, but only "provincialize," European thought categories (to use Dipesh Chakrabarty's phrase), for their persistent recurrence is presumed to be an unavoidable result of global colonial domination and of the Western theorists' own inescapable situatedness (Euben 1999, 12-13). Our task, in Fred Dallmayr's words, becomes simply "to steer a difficult path between global uniformity and radical cultural difference," in which mutual contestation but not a radical supplanting of categories or thought-traditions can take place (1999, 3). Ironically, Eurocentrism (by which I mean the cognitive hegemony of categories rooted in Western European and to a lesser extent American intellectual and historical experience) becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy on this view. As a destiny that can at best be negotiated but never fully overcome, it circumscribes

our access to alternative terms of inquiry. As a result, non-Western materials are invoked by these studies merely to pique our "sense of wonder" (Euben 2006, 197),  increase understanding of our own ideological positions (Dallmayr 1998, 7; March, 237), enhance our own cosmopolitan thinking (Godrej), or enlarge our canon of texts (Leslie).

In this essay I explore the consequences of engaging foreign sources of thought not by constructing a "third space" of dialogue or contrast, but by taking seriously the broader ambitions of their claims to wider-than-local significance. To do this we must re-conceive the "local" not as a cultural context that permanently conditions our understanding and argumentative claims, but as a particularized site for the circulation of knowledge. Two examples from Asian experience—indigenization movements in China and Taiwan, and the historical practice of Sinology by Japanese and Euro-American scholars —demonstrate the analytic purchase of this recalibrated notion of locality, as they belie the widely held assumption that necessarily parochial starting points circumscribe subsequent attempts to pursue inquiry on alternative or foreign grounds. The result is not simply self-reflexivity about the parochialism of our own debates—producing what we may call <u>de</u>-centered theory, already performed admirably by comparative political theorists, feminists, and postcolonial scholars, among others. I raise the more radical possibility of <u>re</u>-centering the constitutive terms, audiences, and methods of theoretical discourse.

Although Eurocentrism has long been critiqued in fields such as history, anthropology, and sociology, in this essay I primarily engage the emerging discourse of de-parochialization in political theory because the process poses instructive and uniquely poignant challenges for its disciplinary self-identity. The main reason for this is that the mission of political theory, an "unapologetically mongrel sub-discipline" of political science, is not primarily ethnographic, but normative and meta-analytic: otherwise diverse political theorists are "united by a commitment to theorize, critique, and diagnose the norms, practices, and

organization of political action in the past and present, in our own places and elsewhere" (Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips, 5, 4). Whether those commitments are centered around a series of shared questions rather than answers, a set of canonical texts, a disciplinary positioning vis-à-vis political science, or a trans-historical search for the good, the field's systematized reflections or "theories" do not seek in the first place to document or predict, but to gain ameliorative traction on the political realm they simultaneously inhabit, scrutinize, and help to define. Being self-consciously constituted by theory production, however, means that the field is open to a unique and paradoxical risk when it attempts de-parochialization: it is the theories themselves—the generalizations or insights disciplined by ongoing historical and contemporary conversations about what is or should be relevant to and constitutive of political life— and not the subjects of their analyses that demand redress. The simple inclusion of more "non-Western" materials (whether case studies, voices, or canonical texts) within its disciplinary purview is not enough to disturb this level of its parochialism.

Yet if it turns out that localized circulations of knowledge are not rooted but to a certain degree mobile, as I hope to argue, then differently-centered disciplines, canons, grammars of normativity, and audiences of address may threaten not only the texts but also the methodological traditions, audiences, and scholarly communities around which various schools of political theory have congealed. The result is that these alternative sites of knowledge may come to supplant even those theories, such as postcolonialism and various forms of cross-cultural comparison and inclusion, that ground contemporary methods of de-parochialization; even more radically, they may come to replace the academic conventions and commitments that originally marked the identity of both political theory, and, perhaps, "theory" as such.

My examination of political theory here, then, stands not as an exhaustive study of deparochialization so much as a uniquely charged entry point into wider dilemmas with

implications for theory-making in a variety of other scholarly fields. Simply by calling itself "political theory," of course, the practice proclaims its parochial origins and takes an existing disciplinary form as a given. But by accepting that its research findings may put its very self-identity at risk, re-centered political theory differs from other available alternatives. It does not produce merely knowledge about how historically excluded others can remind "us" of our own specificity, or trouble the finitude of categories implied by secular, rationalist social scientific approaches; rather, its knowledge becomes increasingly disciplined by resources, audiences, and concerns sited in other, globally diffuse communities that discourage return to a parochial starting point.

**Destabilizing the Local**

In claiming to offer a distinct approach to cross-cultural engagement that takes historically marginalized (often coded as "non-Western") traditions seriously as sources of theory-production, my call to re-center theory implicitly criticizes existing alternatives for stopping short of this more radical goal. In much scholarly literature on cross-cultural theorizing, solutions to the problem of Eurocentrism aim primarily to draw attention to the limits and contingency of those "master signifiers" inscribed within and by dominant (often coded as "Western" or "Europeanized") social scientific and humanistic discourse (e.g., Euben 2006). This effort, pioneered and articulated by postcolonial studies, defines Eurocentrism as the projection of "the West" and its disciplinary categories as a universal measure of knowledge against which all other life-worlds or cultures must be compared (Prakash, 1475 n.1; Chakrabarty, 29, 43). Confronting Eurocentrism so understood thus entails recognizing the closures, contingencies, and silences enacted within Europeanized discourse as its local categories become inscribed as universal ones. This kind of "critical work seeks its basis not without but within the fissures of dominant structures" (Prakash,

1486-1487). It thus aims more to mitigate what Fred Dallmayr calls the "bland universalism"
accompanying colonialism and first-world capital flows (Dallmayr 1996, 99), than to engage
foreign discourses as potential outside replacements for the problematic categories of
Europeanized knowledge.

Precisely because this confrontation with Eurocentrism aims at its "fissures" rather
than its alternatives, the critical stance that undermines the certainty of Europeanized
categories—and so enables the entry of more cosmopolitan renderings of human life-
worlds—also returns the theorist to the very audience and discourse whose terms originally
prompted the critique. Although addressing Eurocentrism on one level, it reconstitutes it on
another: the analysis chastens Europeanized categories only insofar as it continues to inhabit
them (Jenco). Those theorists who explicitly urge the inclusion of non-Western voices in our
debates about political life, including political philosophers such as Charles Taylor as well as
comparative theorists such as Roxanne Euben, ground this move in an understanding of
knowledge as local and rooted. In contrast to an older cosmopolitanism that promoted
indiscriminate tolerance or rootless eclecticism, this "new cosmopolitanism" is characterized
by its resistance to imperializing universalism, on the one hand, and its unwillingness to
sacrifice the "rootedness" of individual persons within their particular cultural backgrounds,
on the other (Malcomson, 233-235). In this way they can resist both functionalist
equivalences and universalizing ambitions—Archimedian vantage points that transform
localized insight into general, "universal" knowledge—and instead seek a new space for
communication across cultural differences (Benhabib; Euben 1999).

Many culturally sensitive political thinkers analogize this cosmopolitan negotiation of
rooted selves to a conversation, which takes place between differently situated interlocutors
to encourage mutual transformation—whether in the form of convergence, as for Bikhu
Parekh and Charles Taylor (1999), or of accommodation without strict consensus, for James

Tully and Fred Dallmayr (1996). Charles Taylor calls what emerges "a language of perspicuous contrast," in which rather than imposing "our" terms on "them" we "formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to human constraints at work in both" (1985, 125). Hans-Georg Gadamer and those comparative political theorists influenced by him such as Fred Dallmayr invoke a similar process that encourages a "fusion of horizons." These dialogic, supposedly mutually transformative encounters are conducted as often between texts as between people, and mean to facilitate mutual sympathy, grounded in the credibility of differently situated ways of life, as a means of combating universalist hegemony and hierarchical power relations (Dallmayr 2004; Euben 1999, 13). The dialogic approach further develops the postcolonial articulation of Eurocentrism by showing how critique can flow from both cultural locales without asserting the singular dominance that characterizes more "homogenizing" approaches.

There are problems with this position, however, despite its important role in correcting imperializing narratives fueled by unreflective, often Western-centric universalism. Pratap Mehta, speaking of the cosmopolitan viewpoint that underlies these and other approaches to cultural difference in political theory, has insightfully pointed out that its "hermeneutic potential is greater than its transgressive possibilities" (633). That is, the encounter with otherness has enhanced the interpretive richness of our self-reflections by making us ever more aware of the silences and contingency of "our" own sources of knowledge. But it has ignored possibilities for fundamental transformations in knowledge-production prompted not only by the inclusion of cases and voices that our own theories marginalize, but also from shifts in the very audience, language, and resources assumed in the production of intellectual work. Roxanne Euben's analysis of "Muslim and Western travelers in search of knowledge," for example, gathers Muslim perspectives not to set political theory on a new track addressed to Muslim audiences disciplined by their terms of debate, but to

make a tripartite argument notably independent of any particular Muslim viewpoint: that "the association of travel and the pursuit of knowledge is not confined to any particular cultural constellation or epoch"; that "knowledge about what is familiar and unfamiliar is produced comparatively," and finally that "the course and consequences of exposures to the unfamiliar are unpredictable" (2006, 15-16 et passim). Farah Godrej's plea for including non-Western perspectives within a cosmopolitan political theory, similarly, does not expect to advance political theory along non-Western lines so much as enhance the discipline's capacity for self-reflection. She recommends an immersive interpretive understanding of texts situated in non-Western cultural frames to thereby "disturb or dislocate our familiar understandings of politics," working from the assumption that "the very movement of [a] Western reader within the 'Western tradition' of political theory…may allow her to find familiarity in these [Western] texts that eludes her in the encounter with a non-Western text" (138, 139).

Godrej and Euben are representative, but certainly not exhaustive, of how the attempt to unmask Western universalistic ambitions through localizing or "rooting" knowledge in culturally specific contexts ends up effacing the ability of historically excluded traditions or debates to discipline our own inquiry. Despite the fact that these theorists all recognize such others as theory-producing, self-reflective beings—hence their inclusion within political theory and philosophy—they paradoxically prohibit the often long-standing strains of thought that lay behind their claims from <u>displacing</u> the very debates or categories in Western thought recognized to be problematic. Rather, frameworks of comparison confine theoretical claims to their communities of their origin, resulting in the paradoxical insistence by cross-cultural theorists that any project of inclusion cannot transcend its own origins in European Enlightenment thought. This is not only for the reason that European thought dominates global knowledge production—a key motivation for postcolonial theorists, whose project turns in large part on exposing the aporia of Western modernity in global settings—but

because the individual Western researcher is assumed to be rooted in her local, Europeanized categories to such an extent that his or her understanding of non-Western ideas is permanently constrained. Indeed, this embeddedness is seen by many, including Charles Taylor, as the constitutive problem of learning across cultures (1985, 130-131; Godrej, 158, 159), on the assumption that the only other alternative would be a "view from nowhere" that reinforces existing power relations by according the status quo a claim to neutrality (Euben 2006, 27). The starting assumption of these analyses is revealed to be precisely that we cannot transcend our own situated particularity radically enough to do more than, in Euben's words, "negotiate" these other particulars, as we "disclose commonalities in the cross-cultural production of knowledge" (45). As Anglophone political theorists, we are situated always-already within the putative tradition that constitutes political theory, and always-already outside of any other possibilities.

**A New Center for the Local, or New Local Centers?**

It seems that if we are to actualize the "transgressive possibilities" to which Mehta alludes, we must address not only the Eurocentrism that elides non-Western particularity, but also that which ignores non-Western generality—the Eurocentrism which fails to take seriously alternatives to Europeanized theory as a necessary or default source for critical intellectual analysis. The need to articulate and address this second form of Eurocentrism is particularly salient now that non-Western thought, formerly relegated by regimes of colonialism to the status of particularist belief or "tradition," is increasingly refashioned as a legitimate form of authoritative knowledge amid and against wider, global(ized) communities of argument. Although often mischaracterized as pure identity politics amounting to a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington), intellectual movements such as Kyoto school philosophy and New Confucianism do not always confine their claims to existing members, but often assume

that their inquiry names and resolves more general human dilemmas.[1]  Even those

movements such as Negritude or Islamic feminism, which work primarily to address the

concerns of a specific group, necessarily advance more general claims about how and on

whose terms their group relates to others that exist outside of it.

This global reality suggests that Western-trained scholars must learn to treat

engagements with foreign others as more than case-studies only, whose particularities present

evidence for interrogating the lapses of existing theories but not for posing original ones that

are relevant or meaningful to "us." At the same time, this move entails a paradox. We must

somehow simultaneously affirm the possibility that localized discourses can formulate more

widely generalizable claims, even as we recognize the internal diversity and external

contestability that, in global modernity, perpetually chastens any ambitions to universalism

and in some cases prompted the emergence of these intellectual movements in the first place.

One way of resolving the paradox may be to interrogate the notion of rootedness or

embeddedness that in many contemporary theories functions as a limiting device to excuse a

perpetual return to Eurocentric categories on the part of those who already work within them,

on the one hand, and to confine the wider ambitions of non-Western thought to local

application, on the other. Much contemporary cross-cultural theory interprets the condition of

local situatedness as the inevitable "rooting" of a researcher in the comprehensive cultural

background of his or her place of origin, but this is a conception that I will argue is both

unproductive and unrealistic. In this section I explore two kinds of phenomena—

indigenization movements, and the historical practice of sinology—that belie assumptions

that local knowledge situates the researcher in a way that creates an insurmountable and

necessary background condition for future knowledge production. These two phenomena

work from opposing directions, the first resisting foreign forms of knowledge on the basis

that they have comprehensively displaced native ones, and the second pursuing foreign

knowledge to displace existing native knowledge. Both urge a reconsideration of how locality—the very particulars invoked in new cosmopolitan thought to resist imperialist, universalizing ambitions—may actually constrain or enable us, and suggest more transformative ways political theory may engage globally diffuse thought. These considerations inform and further justify my subsequent proposal to re-center political theory along localized communities of knowledge, rather than simply assimilate them within our own self-critique.

We may begin by noting the exemplary irony in the fact that many of those who most insist on the inescapabilty of Europeanized categories (such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash, and their fellow subaltern studies scholars)  are themselves not of European or American cultural descent. It is their Anglicized (and often overseas) education, not their local contexts or countries of origin, that determine how and to what extent they participate in Anglophone academic debates—debates that by their own insightful admission seemingly render Indian, and much other non-Western, thought incapable of critical application to the present (Chakrabarty, 6; Mongia, 6; Prakash). The irony of their position can be tied to larger trends on the world stage that reveal important but often overlooked functions for local knowledge. The disconnect between scholar and subject that marks postcolonial and subaltern studies mimics the dilemma and the irony of other indigenization movements around the world, from Japan to the Philippines, which likewise challenge the dominance of foreign categories on native thought.[2]

These movements share a goal with the new cosmopolitan position outlined above, in that they engage "the putative generality contained explicitly or implicitly in the 'theory' of social sciences derived from the West by asserting the importance of, or proposing the total replacement by, the sociocultural specifics or traditions of indigenous (non-Western) contexts" (Chang, 223). Yet the problem these movements address remarkably belies the

common assumption of many comparative political theorists and philosophers that the connection between local cultural background and theoretical knowledge is insurmountably tight. Indigenization movements confront precisely the opposite dilemma: namely, when scholars from disparate parts of the world return to their native countries after receiving training abroad, they effectively become, in polemic terms, "vassals" of foreign research agendas who must overcome their condition by consciously reinserting nativist thought into their analysis (Yang, 19). This phenomenon does not merely confirm claims that Europeanized categories, due to colonialism and other devices of Euro-American dominance, are somehow especially inescapable for everyone in the modern world. Some indigenization movements, including recent variants on Taiwan and ongoing critiques by Japanese of the conflation of Chinese culture with "Confucianism" (ruxue; in Japanese, jugaku), respond to the long-standing dominance of Chinese—not Euro-American—thought on native scholarly production (Koyasu; Chen 2004; Chang, 239-244). Regardless of their target of attack, these movements demand greater responsiveness to native conditions by local scholars, on the basis of a presumed connection between scholarly research and its social, cultural or historical context. Ironically, however, these movements arose precisely because no necessary connection in fact exists between context and research (or researcher)—even if dilemmas, resources and traditions take on characteristic features when they are (as a matter of historical circumstance) localized, lending the "nativist" cause a sense of urgency and relevance.

These tensions between cultural context and academic research are dramatized by one particular example of indigenization, undertaken by Chinese philosophers to recover traditional forms of inquiry and knowledge organization. The debate over the terms for such a possibility has come to be labeled the "legitimacy" (hefaxing) of Chinese philosophy.[3]   As one of its most prominent participants, Zheng Jiadong, describes the debate, the issue centers

on if categories from Western philosophy should or even can be used to describe traditional Chinese thought—and if and how such thought can be validated as possessing claims to knowledge without recourse to such a label (Zheng, Part 1). An earlier generation of scholars often defended "philosophy" as a capacious and fluid category capable of meaningful application to the history of Chinese thought (Zhang, 2-3; Chen 2003). But recent participants, such as the philosophers Wei Changbao and Lin Anwu, have begun to argue that calling classical Chinese thought of whatever vintage "philosophy" is a form of "epistemic violence." They seek to develop, as an alternative, knowledge formation using "traditional systematics" (chuantong de tili) (e.g., Wei). These efforts include the revival of Chinese classicism and hermeneutic techniques (jingxue) associated with late Imperial debates over the interpretation of the classics, the identification of a Chinese cultural essence, and the renewed use of terms that originally structured traditional Chinese (primarily but not exclusively neo-Confucian) knowledge-classifications. Both sides recognize the value and relevance of so-called traditional Chinese thought (Zhongguo chuantong sixiang) for confronting modern dilemmas, counting on the pervasion of "Chinese" thought beyond the national borders once thought to contain it. The debate rests on to what extent the modern Western disciplinary terms of "philosophy" such as metaphysics, ethics, or ontology best articulate or can be made to develop that value.

In this case, contrary to the assumptions of much contemporary political theory and other variants of the new cosmopolitan position, locality does not function as a contingent particular evacuated of externally directed, universal ambitions, nor does it decisively determine the capacity of an individual scholar to produce theory along one line rather than another. The dual goal of the legitimacy of Chinese philosophy debate, after all, is to examine if and how it is possible for Chinese philosophers to overcome the overwhelming influence of the contemporary discipline of philosophy on their own ways of thinking, as well as to

examine and promote the value of Chinese thought for modern audiences, Sinophone and otherwise.

These goals suggest ways to inscribe locality in a way that points beyond Eurocentrism of the second sort, rather than reconstitutes it. First, as with the subaltern studies and indigenization scholars, the analytic capacities of these Chinese philosophers, as well as their ultimate intellectual products, are revealed to be matters more of scholarly training, (uneven) access to resources, and intellectual temperament than specific social/cultural backgrounds. These are not activities anyone, anywhere, is "born into," or conversely, cannot be trained to practice—as those who advocate the indigenization of Western disciplines (or, in the Japanese case, the identification of "Chinese thought" with "Confucianism") have discovered to their dismay. Far from portraying local particulars as confined or confining, this disconnect between location and intellectual production— specifically between thought traditions relevant to political or philosophical reflection and their spaces of origin—renders local particulars radically mobile. In fact, the ambition to formulate claims with applicability beyond the local context turns precisely on the mobility of both ideas and the discursive backgrounds that generate them.

Second, this mobility does not mean locality or rooted traditions do not matter at all, however. The other half of the Chinese philosophy debate turns on localized sympathies for, and understandings of, traditional Chinese thought that in general are far more alive in Sinophone communities (if not individuals) than, say, Francophone ones. The motives and resources for rescuing Chinese thought have indeed clustered, for a variety of historical, economic, linguistic and social reasons, in particular (albeit diasporic) locales—even as its participants often assume that the significance of their findings extends far beyond them (e.g., Mou et al.). The community's general agreement about what constitutes significant targets and methods of research is informed and facilitated by local concerns and historically

available resources, and is often but not always shaped by geographic immobility, linguistic accessibility, and path-dependent convention. This localized commitment ensures that these attempts at disciplined knowledge-production will remain relevant to and analytically rigorous within some human society, even as the tendency to ethnocentrism is persistently undermined by the broader ambitions of its discourse amid competing, globally diffuse claims to general insight.

Locality, in other words, is not some kind of permanent (albeit constantly penetrated) dwelling place that persists in shaping the entirety of its residents' theorizations, even if it does mark important sites for the circulation of knowledge. A more productive reading of locality, suggested by the ironic quandary of indigenization movements, might preserve it as significant for theory-making not because it decisively embeds us in one way of thinking over another, but because it often stands as a concentrated site of audiences, sympathies, and standards that generate particular kinds of reflections and render them viable in local (but possibly broader) contexts. On this view, we can accept that grounding in some context of localized discourse is necessary to ensure relevance and discipline (that is, to take advantage of the refinements of knowledge produced by the nexus of localized concern, access to particular resources, and so on), and to facilitate particular insight within always-uneven domains of vision, without assuming that such a context must be local to where we are or begin, geographically or conceptually.

If this is true, however, we would expect to find not only native thought production colonized by foreign forms, but also the reverse: culturally foreign others taking up native scholarly practices, concerns, and so on. This approach in fact characterizes much of Sinology, which remains remarkably indebted to indigenous modes of scholarship in pursuing general questions in the fields of linguistics, philosophy, literature and history (Honey). European, American and especially Japanese scholars of Chinese studies have

largely worked within or were informed by China's own self-reflective, scholarly tradition in the process of analyzing its thought and history. By engaging the scholarly heritages originally localized within Chinese elite discourse—the knowledge communities of the past who constituted that heritage, as well as those of the present who continue it—Sinologists take those academic traditions seriously as methodologically and substantively capable of advancing compelling knowledge claims. For our purposes, Sinology both demonstrates the possibility of a "mobile locality," as well as begins to indicate what a re-centered political theory may look like.

I do not mean to claim, of course, that Chinese studies in Europe and America is not, and never has been, immune to Eurocentric or political influence.[4] My point is simply to show that and how "localized" modes of processing knowledge can themselves come to discipline further inquiry in general and by erstwhile "outsiders," in ways markedly beholden to research agendas already established within those local scholarly communities. To take one example, much early and ongoing work by non-Chinese on China's textual products, including philosophical texts, proceeded in close dependence on already-existing Chinese forms of scholarship, such as text criticism (kaozheng), textual exegesis (xungu), and the study of ancient characters (gu wenzi xue). Bernard Karlgren's monumental Grammata Serica and its later revised versions, for many years standard references in the field of early and middle period Chinese phonology and paleography, are among the most well-known demonstrations of sinological indebtedness to Chinese forms of learning (Karlgren; Schuessler and Karlgren). Karlgren's phonological reconstructions built on and further developed Qing dynasty kaozheng and xungu scholarship related to classical Chinese rhyme categories based on early works such as the Shijing (Classic of Poetry).

Other early sinologists not only built on Chinese scholarship, but were recognized by the Chinese themselves as academic equals: the Scottish missionary and translator James

Legge (1815-1897) was so conversant with Chinese textual analysis that he was widely recognized as a specialist—in the sense of a classical exegete or <u>xungu</u> expert—by native scholars. The French scholar Paul Pelliot (1878-1945), among the first "professional" sinologists in Europe, rivaled some Chinese scholars in his command of traditional Chinese bibliographic materials as he produced annotations and commentary—traditional Chinese modes of academic expression—on Chinese sources (Honey, xv, 62). Their exegetical endeavors were more than "merely" philological; for the literati communities of Imperial China, such practices comprised relatively autonomous fields of expertise and genres of expression, in which scholars could debate tradition-constituting and society-informing values (Bol, 166; Makeham, 9). During the late Imperial and early Republican periods in which Legge and Pelliot wrote, these debates extended to such questions as: in which ancient sources of thought, if any, should we ground our political community? What is the relationship between contemporary reality and the historically situated insights of past thinkers? How can we validate textual sources as authentic transmissions from the ancient masters, and what does this say about their authority to guide us in posing and answering these questions? Being recognized as members of that exegetical community meant that Pelliot and Legge both contributed to, and were disciplined by, the standards and goals comprising the central concerns of exegetical scholarship.

Such reliance on indigenous sources and scholarly communities has resulted in not only new knowledge about China, but also attempts to refigure existing Western disciplinary practices. A recent example is the call by Taiwanese and mainland Chinese scholars for the creation of a "new discipline" combining philology (i.e., traditional Chinese text criticism), archeology and history to better interpret—or, in Li Xueqin's view, "rewrite"—ancient Chinese society on the basis of new textual and artifactual evidence, including recently excavated bamboo slips, bronze vessels, and silk manuscripts with writing in ancient

characters (<u>gu wenzi</u>) (Li; cited in Shaughnessy, 1). Their calls have been largely taken up by North American and European sinologists, who, in the judgment of American sinologist Edward Shaughnessy, "share much of the same perspective as their Chinese colleagues in terms of the fusion of history and philology" and look to Chinese paleographers such as Guo Moruo, Qiu Xigui, and Li Ling for foundational guidance.

None of these approaches, of course, precludes the application of contemporary disciplinary standards, but all suggest ways in which contemporary Eurocentric knowledge organization, typified in the disciplinary organization of most internationally recognized universities, can be challenged from alternative points of view. Arthur Hummel's (1884-1975) monumental historical work <u>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing [Qing] Period</u> (), produced in collaboration with Chinese scholars, offers another example. Rather than provide a narrative chronology, Hummel's work collates biographies of important figures in the form of what Chinese scholar Hu Shi has identified as traditional Chinese historiography (Hu)—a field that included much of what we would today call history of thought, political biography, local history, demography, cultural and political geography, and even security studies. Emphasizing the productive confluence of these now-distinct genres of knowledge in the biographical form of historically situated persons of influence, Hummel's work demonstrates how communities of knowledge that structure inquiry in a "local" context can become mobile, not through putative similarities to Western academic categories but through their indigenous refinement and definition of what becomes a shared object of concern.

Sinology in Japan before the Meiji era (1868-1912) particularly blurs the line in this way between its object and method of research, especially in the study of philosophy. In Japan and Korea, the study of China had begun much earlier than in Europe and North America. From the tenth century onward, Chinese philosophy and literature were less fields of study than actual direct means of organizing scholarship (He, Introduction, 2). Until the

nineteenth century, in fact, "Sinology" (Japanese: <u>kangaku</u>) described the study of Song and

Ming dynasty neo-Confucianism with no recognized distinction between these Chinese

philosophical imports and Japan's own schools of thought. Education in the Confucian

classics, for these imperial Japanese scholars, <u>was</u> education (Mehl, 49). The contemporary

scholar of foreign sinology Qian Wanyue characterizes this longstanding connection between

Japanese value systems and the study of Chinese art, philosophy and literature as a "mother

/son relationship, not a relationship of two different cultures." It was not until the Meiji

period that Western disciplinary techniques, and the articulation of nation-based identities,

inaugurated Japanese recognition of China not as a "mother culture" but as a "cultural other"

or "subject" of research (Qian, 10, 54).

Even during the modernization effort of this era, however, Sinology formed a central,

philosophical counterbalance to what many in Japan saw as overly instrumentalist Western

knowledge. These concerns prompted the creation of a short-lived Classical Training Institute

at Tokyo University in 1882, as well as varied articulations of a uniquely "East Asian"

identity that many argue overly subsumed Japanese scholarship within Chinese schools of

thought (Chen 2004, 221-225). The study of China had become largely academicized in

Japan after the end of World War II, moving away from "Confucianism" (<u>Rugaku</u>) toward a

so-called "scientific" version of "Chinese studies" (<u>Shinagaku/Chūgoku gaku</u>) (He, 6).

Despite this trend to positivism, however, contemporary Japanese scholars are not all

convinced that Japanese scholarship and philosophy have entirely overcome the influence of

Chinese thought, specifically Confucianism, on their practice. Koyasu Nobukuni has recently

argued that Japanese scholarship has unduly centered on Chinese contributions to

Confucianism to the detriment of indigenous Japanese innovations and applications (Koyasu;

Makeham, 90).

**Re-Centering Political Theory**

Both indigenization movements and the practices of sinology suggest that the real

dilemma for political theory as it confronts non-Western thought may not be how to avoid the

imposition of Western universalism or how to respect local difference, but how to take

differently-localized claims seriously as the constituents, and not simply the targets, of

potentially generalizable reflections on political (and other slices of) life. Many comparative

political theorists would presume that this more radical re-grounding of political theory is

impossible, despite the evidence adduced above. They often cite the Gadamerian insight that

existing understandings are negotiable but ultimately non-transcendable components of all

knowledge and learning. Even those scholars such as Andrew March, who urge us to take

foreign traditions seriously by engaging them on their own grounds, insist that "direct

argumentation from within an alien ethical tradition" is ill advised and unlikely to meet with

success (March, 238).  Similar views about the limits of understanding are also articulated

within the Chinese academic community. He Peizhong, drawing on his own research into

how foreigners study China, has repeatedly insisted that foreigners can offer an important

"outsider" perspective on Chinese issues but cannot themselves provide "insider" insights.

Only by studying what outsiders say about us can we learn more about ourselves, He insists,

partly because "they" have put "our" culture to such obvious use in advancing their own

civilization and scholarship (He).

It may be true that "Western" forms of learning shape the prejudices of these

"outsider" investigators and theorists as individuals, many of whom were thoroughly trained

in Europeanized academic disciplines before turning their gaze toward the others that those

disciplines, including political theory, have historically excluded. Yet it remains a largely

unanswered question— especially in light of attempts around the world to overcome what are

seen to be unduly pervasive foreign influences on native scholarly production—to what

extent those intellectual prejudices have anything to do with national or ethnic cultures rather than with training, institutional incentives, expectations, or intellectual resources. Although these latter conditions often channel intellectual effort into recognizable localized patterns (sometimes conflated with, but not reducible to, nationally defined "cultures"), the mistake is to think that the contingently local clustering of particular concerns, methods, and agendas confines a theorist of a particular ethnic or cultural background to those traditions of reflection her society happens to have produced. In an influential article Peng Guoxiang suggests the hubris—and contradictions—of a purely insider/outsider dichotomy like the one He Peizhong (and advocates of the new cosmopolitan position) presume when he asks, "Don't we, who are in the very middle of all this, sometimes not completely understand Chinese philosophy ourselves?...We do not want to excessively claim that researching our own history and culture is a special advantage, but ought to use truly 'original research' as the means of manifesting ourselves" (Peng). Peng acknowledges the capacity of original research by Chinese to speak for itself within an international community of scholars, just as He grounds the value of foreign China studies in the absorption by Westerners of Chinese civilization, but both fail to consider the broader implications at stake here: if work by Chinese scholars is intelligible and compelling to outsiders,  so too can Chinese scholarship itself constitute a basis for, rather than target of, philosophical and theoretical work done by non-Chinese—indeed, Chinese research on Chinese studies in Korea and Japan recognizes this very possibility by highlighting their contributions to Chinese thought.

Of course, most thinkers do come to see those traditions circulating in their place of residence as more relevant to their lives and concerns than other global alternatives, given that the former are often more tightly linked to the actual dilemmas of the society in which they live. These localized places may and often do evidence historically close relationships with the theoretical creativity of their (always-changing) residents, and these relationships are

important for connecting people to ideas and arguments they care about. It remains unclear, however, how, if at all, the fact of localized knowledge production can predict the presence of any given perspective in particular human minds, on the one hand, or decisively preclude the adoption and development of what are perceived to be culturally alien modes of thought, on the other.

This is not to ignore the very important power dynamics at work in structuring the access of scholars to one agenda or opportunity over another; rather, it draws attention to them as objects of reform, precisely by suggesting that knowledge production is tied more closely to contingent structures of power, inclination, and commitment than to inevitably overpowering cultural background conditions. The need to gain traction on such structures, in fact, specifies the project of re-centering as a multi-generational, inter-disciplinary, and collective effort to target not simply the research subjects of individual scholars, but also the modes and sites of training, constitutive practices, and target audiences of the entire disciplinary enterprise. Taking cues from sinology, we can think of ways to re-organize political theory around localized communities of knowledge, supplying to individual researchers the linguistic, historical, and cultural proficiency in particular thought traditions that constitute many of the individual "prejudices" that shape theorizing in the first place. These research initiatives need not be dictated necessarily by the nation-state territorialization that now organizes area studies, but by the concentrations of primarily scholarly audiences and concerns within—and across—particular regions of the globe.

This shift in focus does not mean to provide perfect insight into some indelible cultural essence; rather, it simply suggests that we facilitate access, by way of linguistic and other forms of training, to diverse fields of interconnected knowledge and schools of thought abiding in particular locales. Of course, postcolonial and democratic theorists have pointed out repeatedly how institutionalized regional divisions, such as those promoted by area

studies, impose on a hybrid and fluid world a particular "strategic geopolitical ecology" subservient to the interests of dominant (read: American) powers (Palat, 69). Edward Said, in particular, argues that the "area studies" of nineteenth and twentieth century European and American researchers had the effect of constructing "the Orient" into a category that "is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things" (Said, 59). We need not supply a full defense of area studies' particular disciplinary history, however, in order to make the less stringent claim that a focus on localized scholarly communities rather than texts or people offers important benefits to the field of political theory. This is especially true if, unlike contemporary critics of area studies, we recognize that and how scholars in those "areas" themselves draw and re-draw political, intellectual, and geographic boundaries—including those imposed on them by others. Localized debate does not entail a sacrifice of self-critique; it simply re-centers it by turning it to internal purposes. The study of "foreign sinology" (guoji Hanxue) in Chinese academic communities, for instance, interrogates boundaries by retaining Chinese civilization at the center of inquiry and evaluating the success of foreign and domestic boundary-drawing in those terms.[5]   Regionalized discourses by non-Westerners (such as variously deployed Japanese constructions of "East Asia" in the twentieth century) also demonstrate how boundaries can empower as much as dominate indigenous intellectual production.[6]

At the very least, such burgeoning scholarship on how regionalization discourses inform and enable knowledge from within those very same regions belies claims that a localized approach necessarily implies a unilateral reification of arbitrary boundaries, particularly those of nationalism, or that imposed or internal regionalized notions preclude critical engagement. As Taiwanese scholar Chen Kuan-hsing argues, these regional imaginaries can serve as critical "anchoring points" (212) for multiplying frames of reference to facilitate comparisons that bypass Euro-America as a necessary source of universal theory

(226). Reinscribing local particulars as sites of general knowledge-production, in turn, recognizes that local communities of inquiry and audience offer already-existing epistemological frameworks which themselves ground self-critique, rather than stand as passive objects of analysis.

Michaelle Browers' study of Arab civil society discourse demonstrates how the translation practices required for such an effort offer more than simply rough correspondences; translation in this ambitious sense is "not so much a hindrance to understanding as an opportunity for different understanding—that is, for political and conceptual contestation <u>in</u> Arab political thought." As Browers suggests, the very frame— not just the substance—of inquiry changes to make new sources of critique available <u>within</u> (not simply "about") particular streams of discourse (Browers, 8, my emphasis). Political theorists must join foreign colleagues to map knowledge differently, spending extensive time in a particular geographic region interacting with indigenous academics on their terms and in their language. These theorists do not only read canonical texts, but also treat scholars throughout the world like true colleagues by inviting them to conferences, reading their work, discussing their work with them, and engaging their findings in both native and foreign languages—much the way foreign scholars in American universities already do, by learning English and participating actively in Anglophone academia. Political theory would begin to resemble the diffuse knowledge networks found in area-specific fields, in which the dominant language of research and study is (often) not English and the main contributors are not North American or European.

**Re-centered Political Theory: Two Examples**

Two examples from recent scholarly work on Asian thought begin to illustrate (but by no means exhaust) what this re-centered political theory may look like. I have chosen to

analyze the work of scholars who are "Western" in terms of nationality and academic location because their position belies the necessity of their own Eurocentrism, and inverts the much more common direction of intellectual influence from the "West" to the "East." The first is Stephen C. Angle's recent book <u>Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy</u>. Although Angle ultimately grounds his argument in analytic philosophical discourse without directly problematizing "philosophy" as a field of knowledge-organization, his analysis is exemplary of re-centering in other important ways. Angle's primary goal is "to flesh out and push forward a contemporary Confucianism based on Neo-Confucian orientations" to their defining but contested goal of sagehood (<u>sheng</u>), understood as a character ideal that cultivates moral spontaneity in accord with the ethical-political principles of the Way (<u>dao</u>) (Angle, 26). He argues that a viable extension of neo-Confucian sagehood in the modern world is centered on reverence for harmony (<u>he</u>), interpreted as respect for the interdependence of self and world indicated by the neo-Confucian value of <u>li</u> (coherence). In elaborating his argument, Angle does not ignore counterarguments or insights from contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy, but he identifies their relevance in terms of the neo-Confucian ideals at issue, rather than as independently valuable or definitive paradigms of what "philosophy" or "moral character" should look like or be compared to (22-25). Writing in English but drawing more extensively on Sinophone sources than Anglophone ones, Angle problematizes the issue of audience by explaining that his argument addresses, in addition to his "colleagues in the West," "fellow scholars of Confucianism, and perhaps a broader Chinese audience as well." He notes his indebtedness to the Chinese scholars he engaged (in Chinese) while doing research at Peiking University and presenting his work at universities across China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (8, vii-viii). It is precisely by working within the internal threads of neo-Confucian tradition and engaging its contemporary advocates that Angle defends its unique contributions to the ideals

of the contemporary world. He holds that it can be taken seriously by everyone, "whether or not their ancestors could have been Confucians," but without suborning it to the terms or concerns of analytic political philosophy (179).

Although Angle does not address the possibility of how or if his project implies disciplinary displacement, other projects have come to interrogate the modes and foci of knowledge production within political science and philosophy. The elaboration of alternative "disciplines" to structure knowledge in different but productive ways offers another illustration of re-centering. Ingrid Jordt, a Buddhist yogi haun (i.e., established meditator) and anthropologist, shows how the phenomenon of Buddhist mass lay meditation in Burma reconfigures political legitimacy along Buddhist lines by authorizing the laity "to verify the activities of both sangha [Buddhist monastic community] and state" (Jordt, 212). In the process, participants in this movement develop new ways to verify the interior knowledge gained from meditation (such as if and to what degree political leaders, monks, and lay people have progressed toward nyanzin, or stages of insight) that in Jordt's view cultivates a distinct disciplinary enterprise. Likening this discipline to Western psychology or cognitive science, Jordt suggests that it poses compelling and heretofore unexplored connections between how ethical training such as meditation can cultivate particular beliefs and verifiable mental transformations in its practitioners (Jordt, 195). Although conventional political science has typically ignored interior mental states, Jordt argues that they are essential components for the "moral empirical theory of knowing, praxis, and being" in Burmese Buddhism and thus are at least partly constitutive of the political actions that contest and affirm the legitimacy of political rulers (61).

These two examples show how re-centering, although ultimately a collective and ongoing project, can begin to take shape when individual scholars address diverse communities of scholarship and participate in the production of knowledge in accord with

their disciplinary conventions. As Angle and Peng argue, these very local environments and resources that make such communities possible and relevant does not preclude their applicability (through some form of explicit or implicit translation) to the more general questions that circulate within the circumferences of other "local" communities, whether they be disciplinary, cultural, or intellectual. It is on the basis of precisely such resources, in fact, that local circumferences are often reconfigured—but without suborning them to dominant Eurocentric practice. Jordt's experience as an advanced Buddhist meditator and her careful attention to Burmese theorizations of meditation is another example: reconceptualizing in Buddhist terms what constitutes political authority includes not only identifying its particular components (including nyanzin discernment by the laity, as well as their recognition of leaders' pon, the accumulation of merit from past lives) but also reframing the very idea of "political authority" to work across and reflect the influence of multiple past and future lifetimes (2007, 183, 197). Jordt thus belies social science attempts to read the military junta in Burma in conventional terms, as a regime of purely coercive compliance beyond the reach of effective popular critique that takes the exclusive form of democratic voting and protection of human rights. Just as importantly, she also gestures toward an ambitious new frame for political life that ruptures both temporal and spatial boundaries that usually contain it, requiring explanation by way of the "native epistemology" of vipassana meditation that constructs political meanings in Burma (60, 191). Her project, like Angle's, affirms the viability of alternative non-Anglophone knowledge communities to pose questions about and solve contemporary political problems, even as both deny through example the inevitability of the hold of any particular kind of local thought (including and especially that of Europe and America) on the academic production of scholars in American and European universities and elsewhere.

The potential of such radically mobile locality is all the more possible if, over time, the training for political theorists no longer emphasizes conversance with a set of Euro-American texts, themes, and (almost purely) Anglophone conversations, but instead centers its students within other, equally rich thought traditions that, while demonstrating provisional relevance to political life, are guided by distinct concerns (such as sagehood or nyanzin), disciplined by particular canons (Zhu Xi's compilation of the "Fourteen Books" and its subsequent commentarial amendments, Buddhist sutras of the Theravada tradition), and addressed to other, possibly non-Anglophone or multi-lingual audiences (sinophone academia, the global Buddhist intellectual community). Acknowledging that other intellectual traditions throughout time and space have organized and analyzed knowledge very differently, the very notion of what it is we are doing when we do "political theory" will come under scrutiny from new, diverse audiences—perhaps culminating in the radical supplanting (rather than merely supplementing) of dominant streams of political-theoretic discourse by currently-existing alternatives. Angle's and Jordt's projects address multi-disciplinary and multi-lingual audiences, but each is centered in distinct communities of knowledge production that make their resulting insights possible even as they expose existing disciplines to risk.

**New Communities and New Disciplines**

Re-centered political theory, in sum, turns on the localized character of theorizing rather than claims about its essential character, origin, or inherence in persons of particular ethnicity. It is worth asking, however, if this approach will substitute one form of ethnocentrism for another, in the process "ghettoizing" knowledge into area-specific forms and discounting the value of comparative, cosmopolitan, or discipline-driven research (Godrej, 160; Wright). As Joseph Levenson, one of the most influential postwar historians of modern China, puts it, "-ologies" like Sinology "suggest not simply chapters in the history of

man, as parts of the proper study of mankind, but self-contained intellectual puzzles"
(Levenson, 508). For Levenson, disciplinary research is precisely what legitimizes solutions
to these puzzles as knowledge because it relates them to broader intellectual questions that
emerge from comparison with each other. Michael Freeden has recently characterized the
task of comparative political theory in similar terms:

> The crux of the matter is that when we study political thought in a comparative
> perspective, we are above all studying the nature of politics, long before we claim to
> study the thought and practices of a region, or state, or culture. That, I wish to
> emphasize, is the crucial point about how to approach comparative political thought.
> Experts as we may be in some area or local phenomenon, it is a mistake to cut
> ourselves off from the larger purview of what is the type of thought-practice we are
> investigating. That is to say, rather than seeing ourselves just as scholars of India, or
> the UK, or Chile, or Islam, we are investigators of human political conduct and
> discourse, who then rely on particular case studies. We all occasionally lose sight of
> that, wrapped up as we are in the details and the excitement of the small print of our
> scholarly enterprises (Freeden, 2).

There are important assumptions at work in both Levenson's and Freeden's claims about
how—and where—general knowledge about the "nature of politics" can be produced. The
presumption is either that an appeal to shared questions or comparison is necessary to
legitimize what foreign others think and believe as relevant to us in the first place; or that
comparison of "human political conduct and discourse" can proceed without being grounded
in a knowledge community that, when viewed from a more self-reflexive angle, would appear
as much a "case-study" as the Indian, Islamic, or other thought it scrutinizes.

Postcolonial theorists are sensitive to this kind of provincialism, leading comparativists like Euben to deparochialize political thought by focusing it on "certain questions rather than particular answers: What is the good life? What is the nature of legitimate authority? Of justice?" (9)   Yet Euben's portrayal of all knowledge as embedded ironically mirrors the self-reproducing Eurocentrism of Freeden and Levenson: like them she reduces the thought of foreign others to case-studies, fitting their work into an existing framework (in her case, a conversation rather than a discipline) that they can modify, but are given no opportunity to displace. All three thus elide the very questions that might rescue academic knowledge production from its deep ties to Europeanized theory:  What scholarly communities, grammars or teacher-student lineages—elaborated, reproduced, and enforced by whom, and how?—encourage the raising of certain questions or concerns (including those about cross-cultural engagement), and discourage others?  How might these knowledge communities come to discipline our actual reflections on and definitions of political life, rather than simply provide disparate "voices" or "case-studies" to remind us of our own specificity, or reinforce the belief that political theory is already dealing with questions that other communities share?

The answer lies in interrogating the assumption that we must either be engaged in reflection that culminates in general, intelligible knowledge about political life, or we are investigating local contingency. Participants in the "legitimacy of Chinese philosophy" debate again offer instructive alternative theorizations. As Peng Guoxiang has argued, focusing on Chinese thought or (more controversially) "philosophy," one is confronted with a tension perhaps between contemporary analytic philosophy and the Chinese area focus—the disciplinary criteria of the former may even make recognition of the latter impossible—but not necessarily between disciplinary rigor and the formation of shared knowledge, on the one hand, and the area focus on the other (). To assume the tension exists is to disclaim a priori

the possible existence of other standards of disciplinary organization—such as those celebrated by Wei Chengbao and Lin Anwu, discussed above—that exist within disparate regionalized communities. Here, the dichotomization between local and general only holds if "knowledge" is associated with that set of disciplinary categories currently enjoying institutional recognition in leading universities. Recognizing this impasse, some Chinese commentators have celebrated the non- or inter-disciplinary nature of area-based research as the only way in which these traditional forms of knowledge can be retained and deployed (Zhou, 12).[7]

Re-centered political theory banks precisely on the recognition that foreign communities of scholarship support rigorous research agendas that, while locally anchored, often do make wider claims about the modern challenges of a globalized world even as they remain open to internal critique. Recentering thus indigenizes, rather than "provincializes," European thought (including conventional political theory) and its methods of categorization. "Provincialization," as Dipesh Chakrabarty describes it, happens when we renew European thought "from and for the margins"; it addresses Eurocentrism not by rejecting European thought but by exposing its inadequacies in articulating difference (17). Such a process is only possible for the same reasons that make it necessary: namely, the belief that European thought constitutes the "intellectual existence" of everyone in the modern world, even if its categories remain inadequate and problematic for registering non-European experience (16). Re-centering political theory does not deny the pervasion of Europeanized thought, but it does dispute the conclusion that only European thought is, or can be, "everybody's heritage," as Chakrabarty claims, or that the viability of other bodies of thought turns on their capitulation to European categories of modernity. It simply affirms that Europeanized categories or traditions are as "local" as any others, without for that reason dismissing the possibility of their wider applicability.

Re-centering thus offers another kind of response to Eurocentrism by refusing European thought as an always-necessary medium of thought, translation, or critique, and Euro-American academic audiences as default communities of address. I have tried to argue that this second response to Eurocentrism is as urgently necessary as the first, but the possibilities for critique that each opens are distinct and sometimes in tension with each other. The first response urges attention to irreducible difference, attempting more cosmopolitan renderings of existing forms of knowledge production to counter the iniquities and occlusions of homogenizing universalism. Its audiences and much of its theoretical tools abide in Anglophone academia. The second confronts the possibility of generalizable claims emerging from local contexts as a means to explore methodological as well as substantive alternatives to Eurocentric inquiry. This second response banks on plural ways of knowing the world, but necessarily remains susceptible to the possibility that any given local discourse may operate on assumptions that suppress or ignore difference (or register it in different ways). The second response thus provides no guarantee that such alternatives will not degenerate into essentialism and relativism, but it broaches this risk both to facilitate more widely compelling alternatives and to recognize that remedies for parochialism need not emerge from within the terms Europeanized theory has already set out. Yet because the proliferation of legitimate centers of knowledge production entails increasing numbers of competing possibilities for differently-situated critique, these alternatives will nevertheless likely avoid collapsing into provincialism. Precisely because they advance general claims in a globalized world meant to apply beyond the boundaries of some designated in-group, they are drawn into wider fields of scholarly justification that demonstrate the possibility for cross-cultural critique to take place absent 'the West' as a universal term of translation—a possibility that Chen Kuan-hsing labels "inter-referencing" (226).

The process of de-parochialization may begin, then, from the insight that reflection on political life happens in a diverse array of times and locales, but there is no guarantee that what emerges after serious investigation of those reflections will look anything like political theory—or its cosmopolitan variants meant to address the fact of global political experience—now does. And why should it? The identity of political theory, both as a subfield and as a scholarly community, has been continually contested and transformed more than once over the span of its short existence (Gunnell). The challenge we now face in de-parochializing it perhaps bodes even more radical changes. Unless we persist in maintaining that mere existence within Anglophone academia automatically roots scholars within the particular tradition(s) and definitions that conventional political theory currently espouses, we are led to ask if knowledge exists for the sake of our academic disciplines, or if our academic disciplines exist for the sake of knowledge. Our findings may reveal significant overlaps with existing concerns in political theory; they may end up constructing new trans-local communities on the basis of shared concerns; but they may also raise the possibility, as the studies of Angle, Jordt, Peng, and others mentioned in this essay do, of intelligible, compelling, but largely overlooked modes of knowing in the world that reorient us to different traditions, languages, and audiences.

Precisely because these alternatives may aspire, just as political theory often does, to make claims that are both persuasive to outsiders and universal (or at least generalizable) in scope, we cannot now predict if or how political theory (or, indeed, any localized center of discourse) will serve as an appropriate ending point for these explorations. Other thought-traditions or scholarly lineages may reject "political theory" as a disciplinary initiative in favor of other ways to organize knowledge, read texts, or defend propositions, among other things. We cannot simultaneously maintain a commitment to taking those alternatives seriously while continuing to insist that political theory maintain disciplinary coherence, or

that its future development resemble in some significant way its present practice. We need not agree with every possible alternative, but we cannot rule out the possibility that one or more of them will convince some of us to start producing and valuing knowledge in a completely new way.

It seems that if we truly wish to affirm, on its own terms, the value of work grounded in non-Western contexts, we are also committed to recognizing that disciplines exist for knowledge, rather than the other way around. And that means we must be ready to do more with those "non-Western others" than add their voices or texts to our existing conversations, especially if our goal is to de-parochialize the <u>theories</u> of political theory, which are shaped by particular forms of training, languages, and intellectual lineages rather than simple episodic engagement. We must also open ourselves to the discipline of those complex and no doubt internally contested intellectual communities from which such voices and texts emerge, and allow their lines of argument and concern to lead us to unexpected forms of knowledge—at the risk of dissolving or replacing our own discipline(s), if not the possibility of critique.

---

[1] For example, Chris Goto-Jones (2009) argues by example that Kyoto School philosopher Nishida Kitaro's theory of "worldly history" offers a viable alternative to contemporary Western historiography, intended to be relevant not primarily in Japan but more urgently in crisis-ridden Europe.

[2] As Portia Reyes points out, however, subaltern studies is a particular kind of indigenization movement because—unlike related movements in Asia, including those Reyes examines in the Philippines—its practitioners write in the language of the colonized (English), adopt European intellectual discourse, and occupy academic positions within the Euro-American metropole (241-242).

[3] For a critical English-language overview of the debate, see Defoort. Zheng traces the historical roots of the movement to early twentieth century critiques of classical and imperial-era thought in China (Zheng, Sec. 2).

[4] China's position in Asia during the second world war, and its subsequent adoption of communism as a state ideology, assured both the nation and those scholars who studied it a central place in Cold War strategizing (Cumings). Yet ironically those very studies uncovering Eurocentric bias in sinological scholarship were only possible on the basis of additional, more carefully executed, area-based research, and often took place under the auspices of area studies associations and journals. Cumings' own article appeared in the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, a disaffected offshoot of the Association for Asian Studies (see Hucker).

[5] "Foreign Sinology" (that is, studying the study of China undertaken by non-Chinese foreigners) has been a serious focus of Chinese research for more than three decades; see (Yan, 6-10).

[6] In his analysis of Japanese constructions of "the East" (Tōyō) and "East Asia" (Tō'A), for example, Chen Weifen notes that "although [these concepts] took contrast/opposition with the West as their starting point, both were guided by the search for the particular cultural characteristics of East Asian locales and the possibilities for exchange among these cultures"—even *as* the constituent boundaries of "East Asia" tracked Japan's own imperialist agenda in the region (218).

[7] Historically, we find an example of this in study of Chinese thought in Japanese and Korean scholarly circles in the tenth century and after: here "sinology," closely linked to Confucian learning (ruxue), furnished its own criteria of scholarship, whose categorical

divisions closely followed those proposed by more traditional Chinese philosophers in the present (He).

## Acknowledgments

The ideas in this paper were presented in both English and Chinese to a variety of audiences at the Departments of Chinese Studies and Political Science, National University of Singapore; the Institute for Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan; the 2007 American Political Science Association annual meeting; the 2008 Midwest Political Science Association annual meeting; and the workshop *Confucian and Liberal Perspectives on the Family, State, and Civil Society* at the City University of Hong Kong, December 2010. I would like to thank participants at all those venues as well as those who were generous with their comments on this project, including: Jon Carlson, Jiang Yi-hua, Nicolai Volland, Zhang Zhejia, Tal Lewis, Farah Godrej, Emily Nacol, Andrew Rehfeld, and Loy Hui-chieh. In addition, I would like to extend special thanks to Chang Mau-kuei and Andrew March for particularly inspiring advice, and to Perry Caldwell, who helped to inspire the paper and bring it, after countless drafts, to fruition.

## Bibliography

Angle, Stephen C. 2009. Sagehood : The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benhabib, Seyla. 2002. The Claims of Culture : Equality and Diversity in the Global Era. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bol, Peter. 1996. "Review of Jo-shui Chen, Liu Tsung-yuan and Intellectual Change in T'ang China, 773-819." Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 55, no. 1.

Browers, Michaelle L. 2006. Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chang, Maukuei. 2005. "The Movement to Indigenize the Social Sciences in Taiwan: Origin and Predicaments." In Cultural, Ethnic, and Political Nationalism in Contemporary Taiwan. Ed. John Makeham and A-chin Hsiau. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chen, Kuan-hsing. 2010. China as Method. Durham: Duke University Press.

Chen, Lai. 2003. "Guan yu "Zhongguo zhexue" de ruogan wenti qianyi." Jiang Han Luntan 7.

Chen, Weifen. 2004. "You "toyo" dao "To'A," cong "jukyuo" dao "jugaku": yi jindai Riben wei jingjian tan "To'A jugaku/DongYa ruxue"." Taiwan Dong Ya wenming yanjiu xuekan 1, no. 1:201-232.

Cumings, Bruce. 1998. "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies During and After the Cold War." In Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War. Ed. C. Simpson. New York: New Press.

Dallmayr, Fred. 2004. "Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory." Perspectives on Politics 2, no. 2:124-144.

———. Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter. Albany: SUNY Press.

———. 1998. Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

———. 1999. Border crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Defoort, Carine. 2001. "Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy? Arguments of an Implicit Debate." Philosophy East and West 51, no. 3:393-413.

Dryzek, John S., Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, eds. 2006. <u>The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory</u>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Euben, Roxanne Leslie. 1999. <u>Enemy in the Mirror : Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory</u>. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2006. <u>Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge</u>. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Freeden, Michael. 2009. "Comparative Political Thought: Future Directions." Unpublished Conference Paper, 21st World Congress of Political Science. Santiago, Chile.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. <u>Truth and Method</u>. New York: Seabury Press.

Godrej, Farah. 2009. "Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other." <u>Polity</u> 41, no. 2:135-165.

Goto-Jones, Chris. 2009. "The Kyoto School, the Cambridge School, and the History of Political Philosophy in Wartime Japan." <u>positions: east asia cultures critique</u> 17, no. 1:13-42

Gunnell, John G. 1993. <u>The Descent of Political Theory: The Genealogy of an American Vocation</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

He, Peizhong. 2008. "Guowai Zhongguo xue yanjiu de fazhan yu yiyi." <u>Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan yuanbao</u>.

———, ed. 2006. <u>Dangdai Zhong wai Zhongguo xue yanjiu</u>. Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan.

Honey, David B. 2001. <u>Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology</u>. New Haven: American Oriental Society.

Hu, Shi. 1943. "Preface." In Hummel, <u>Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period</u>.

Hucker, Charles O. 1973. <u>The Association for Asian Studies: An Interpretive History</u>. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Hummel, Arthur. 1943. Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office.

Jenco, Leigh K. 2007. "What Does Heaven Ever Say? A Methods-Centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement." American Political Science Review 101, no. 4:741-755.

Jordt, Ingrid. 2006. "Defining a True Buddhist: Meditation and Knowledge Formation in Burma." Ethnology 45, no. 3:193-207.

———. 2007. Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Karlgren, Bernhard. 1940. Grammata Serica. Stockholm: Gothenburg.

———. 1957. Grammata Serica Recensa. Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.

Koyasu, Nobukuni. 2004. Dong Ya Ruxue: Pipan yu Fangfa. Translated by W. Chen. Taipei: Taiwan Daxue chuban zhongxin.

Leslie, Isis. 2007. "Internationalizing Political Theory Courses." PS: Political Science and Politics 40, no. 1: 108-110.

Levenson, Joseph. 1964. "The Humanistic Disciplines: Will Sinology Do?" Journal of Asian Studies 23, no. 4:507-512.

Li, Xueqin. 1993. "Zouchu yigu shidai." Zhongguo wenhua 7.

Makeham, John. 2003. Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. 2008. Lost Soul : "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Malcomson, Scott L. 1998. "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience." In Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation. Ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

March, Andrew. 2007. "Islamic Foundations for a Social Contract in non-Muslim Liberal Democracies." American Political Science Review 101, no. 2:235-252.

Mehl, Margaret. 2000. "Chinese Learning (kangaku) in Meiji Japan (1868-1912)." History 85:48-66.

Mehta, Pratap Bhanu. 2000. "Cosmpolitanism and the Circle of Reason." Political Theory 28, no. 5:619-639.

Mongia, Padmini, ed. 1996. Contemporary Post-colonial Theory: A Reader. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Mou, Zongsan, Carsun Chang, Junyi Tang, and Fuguan Xu. 1958. "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture." In Carsun Chang, The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought.  Vol. 2. New York: Bookman.

Palat, Ravi Arvind. 2000. "Fragmented Visions: Excavating the Future of Area Studies in a Post-American World." In Beyond the Area Studies Wars. Ed. N. N. Waters. Hanover: University Press of New England.

Parekh, Bikhu. 1999. "Non-Ethnocentric Universalism." In Human Rights in Global Politics. Ed. T. Dunne and N. J. Wheeler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peng, Guoxiang. 2003. "Hefaxing, shiyu yu zhutixing--dangqian Zhongguo zhexue yanjiu de fanxing yu qianzhan." Jiang Han Luntan 7.

Prakash, Gyan. 1994. "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism." American Historical Review 99:1475-1490.

Qian, Wanyue. 2007. Cong Hanxue dao Zhongguo xue: Jindai Riben de zhongguo yanjiu. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

Reyes, Portia L. 2008. "Fighting over a Nation: Theorizing a Filipino Historiography." Postcolonial Studies 11, no. 3:241-258.

Said, Edward W. 1978. Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books.

Schuessler, Axel, and Bernhard Karlgren. 2009. Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i.

Shaughnessy, Edward L. 2006. Rewriting Early Chinese Texts. Albany: SUNY Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1985. "Understanding and Ethnocentricity." In Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1999. "Conditions of an unforced consensus on human rights." In The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights, edited by D. A. Bell and J. R. Bauer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Tully, James. 1995. Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wei, Changbao. 2004. "Zhongguo zhexue de hefaxing xushi jiqi chaoyue." Zhexue dongtai 6:7-9.

Wright, Arthur. 1960. "The Study of Chinese Civilization." Journal of the History of Ideas 21:233-55.

Yan, Shaodang. 2000. "Wo dui guoji Zhongguo xue (Hanxue) de renshi." Guoji Hanxue 5:6-18.

Yang, Guoshu. 2008. "Xinli xue yanjiu de zhongguo hua: Cengci yu fangxiang." In Huaren bentu xinlixue yu huaren bentu qihexing, edited by G. Yang. Taipei: Wunan.

Zhang, Dainian. 1982. Zhongguo zhexue da gang. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chuban she.

Zheng, Jiadong. 2001. "Zhongguo zhexue de hefaxing wenti." Zhongguo zhexue nianjian (2001). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan.

Zhou, Fagao. 1965. Hanxue lunji. Taipei: Zheng zhong shuju.