Making the Political

Democratic political theory often sees collective action as the basis for non-coercive social change, assuming that its terms and practices are always self-evident and accessible. But what if we find ourselves in situations where collective action is not immediately available, or even widely intelligible? This book examines one of the most intellectually substantive and influential Chinese thinkers of the early twentieth century, Zhang Shizhao (1881–1973), who insisted that it is individuals who must "make the political" before social movements or self-aware political communities have materialized. Zhang draws from British liberalism, democratic theory, and late Imperial Confucianism to formulate new roles for effective individual action on personal, social, and institutional registers. In the process, he offers a vision of community that turns not on spontaneous consent or convergence on a shared goal, but on ongoing acts of exemplariness that inaugurate new, unpredictable contexts for effective personal action.

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Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao

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To PEC and LEJ (just another part of me)

Contents

Preface

In this book I examine the work of Zhang Shizhao (1881–1973), one of the most intellectually substantive Chinese thinkers of the early twentieth century. I do so to raise a series of questions about political action, targeting in particular the equation of collective action with political action prevalent in much contemporary democratic political theory. This book is thus not an intellectual biography, but an attempt to treat Zhang seriously as the theorist of politics that he – and many of his contemporaries – claimed he was. Readers who are not interested in or familiar with Chinese thought should nevertheless find the analysis significant, because it treats of an important problem rarely considered in contemporary Euro-American political theory: how can we as individuals take effective action to change social and political environments, when no self-consciously political community exists to legitimate or execute such action? Those who are interested in Chinese political thought will also hopefully find something of value in this book. The present study is the only extended examination of this influential political thinker in any Western language; it is also the first book-length attempt by a political theorist to critically engage *any* member of Zhang's transitional generation, whose work set the stage for Chinese political thinking in the twentieth century. By showcasing the often overlooked clarity and persuasive force of the arguments advanced in this era, I hope to offer a new perspective on modern Chinese intellectual developments even as I defend a compelling political theory.

This dual commitment to area-based and theoretical scholarship, to me, is one of the most fruitful ways to pursue the study of non-Western thought, given the historically entrenched parochialism of political theory. Far from being in tension with the self-reflexive examination of political life that political theory takes as its disciplinary mission, taking careful account of Zhang's work, his contemporaries' responses to it, and subsequent Sinophone scholarship on this rich era of Chinese

thought seems to be minimal criteria for taking that thought seriously as a basis for political critique and insight. Anglophone political theorists, unfortunately, have for the most part ignored the two millennia of rich debates and traditions of interpretation that have developed in Chinese scholarship. Chinese thought is usually considered – when it is considered at all – in terms of canonical Confucian works, which emerged from the seminal but distant Warring States period more than twenty centuries ago. This book hopes to offer a more dimensional picture of Chinese thought, by situating Zhang within a series of historical and ongoing discussions in that political discourse – some of which he decisively shaped, and most of whose contents have never been translated into English. I follow him and his interlocutors to pose new questions about community-building, political agency, and the dilemmas of disagreement that I hope will be of interest to more conventional political theorists.

This book has its origins in the study of modern Chinese political thought that I undertook with Professor Liu Linyuan while a student at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center in Nanjing, PRC, before I reached graduate school and before I ever took a class in political theory. This biographical fact is important for explaining why this book has taken the shape it has. I asked my first serious questions about politics and the cross-cultural exchange of ideas while reading the work of early twentieth-century Chinese thinkers such as Liang Qichao, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao. Although later I acquired the proficiency in Western texts required of any student of political theory at an American university, I persistently returned to these transitional Chinese thinkers, whose innovative cultural syncretism offered unparalleled resources for thinking about political dilemmas and possibilities. This book by no means marks the end of my efforts to understand their thought, but I hope it begins to demonstrate, to a wider audience of scholars, the value of that thought for political theory and practice more generally.

It would be impossible to thank everyone who has helped me develop and improve this project, but many people deserve special mention here. Ben Tsai and Emily Hantman first pointed me in the direction of early Republican thinkers and encouraged my reading of them as political theorists. My dissertation committee sustained faith in my work even when my own waned, and I learned from each member's own special strengths. Lisa Wedeen's careful attention to detail and argument have immeasurably improved not only the dissertation but also

my analytic skills. Guy Alitto's engagements with Chinese-language scholarship are a direct inspiration for my own, and much of what I know about Chinese history I learned from him. Jacob Levy provided emotional and professional support well beyond even the supervisor's call of duty. My original chair, Iris Young, was always ready to pose a challenge to lazy thinking or undeveloped arguments. She passed away in the middle of my writing the dissertation, but I hope that she would approve of those chapters that she never got to read.

Others who very generously read the entire project as it took shape include Chang Hao, who offered extremely sympathetic and insightful suggestions for revision. I hope this book lives up to those suggestions, as well as to the high standards Prof. Chang has set in his own work – which in my view offers some of the best syntheses of Chinese intellectual history with political theory available in any language. Reader reports from Peter Zarrow and Steve Angle, as well as two other anonymous readers, were unusually careful, thoughtful, and useful, pointing out not only where to clarify or qualify my arguments but also where to find resources for addressing these problems. While in Taiwan, Huang Ko-wu, Shen Songqiao, and Wang Fansen gave generously of their time to discuss political theory and Zhang Shizhao with me; so too did Lam Kaiyin in Hong Kong. Finally, my undergraduate mentor at Bard College, Kris Feder, deserves mention here for teaching me how to handle a large research project without going totally crazy, and for showing me the connection between clear writing and clear thinking.

My teachers at the International Chinese Language Program in Taipei, Taiwan, had a tremendous impact on more than my Chinese. Wu Zhicheng and Chen Yizhen engaged my research materials with diligence and insight. Chou Changjen and Yang Ningyuan have probably had more influence on my reading of Zhang and Chinese thought than anyone else, and I remain eternally grateful to them for sharing with me their intelligence, humor, and passion for Chinese thought. Once I returned to the US, Libby Anker, Perry Caldwell, Jen London, and Emily Nacol were willing to read large parts of my manuscript, and I owe much to their incisive comments. Sharon Krause offered encouragement at a particularly pessimistic time.

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The research and writing of this book were made possible by several Humane Studies Fellowships during the years 2000 to 2003 and 2005 to 2006, as well as a Summer Research Fellowship in 2006, from the Institute of Humane Studies. I wish to thank Elaine Hawley, Marty Zupan and all at IHS for their financial and intellectual support. A Blakemore-Friedman Foundation Grant sponsored my language study in Taiwan from 2003 to 2005, and a William Rainey Harper Dissertation–Year Fellowship from the University of Chicago supported my final stage of dissertation writing in 2006 and 2007. A postdoctoral research fellowship at the Brown University Political Theory Project in 2007 and 2008 gave me the precious gift of time to turn the dissertation into a book manuscript, for which I would like to thank the Project's director, John Tomasi. Finally, I would like to thank John Haslam, Carrie Parkinson, Rosina Di Marzo, and the ever-patient John Gaunt at Cambridge University Press.

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Finally, my family has for many, many years put up with my eccentricities and are largely responsible for my continual well-being. My parents have always encouraged my academic pursuits, even when I moved away to a distant foreign country. My sister Lauren and my husband Perry are my two sources of all that I find good in the world, and I would like to dedicate this book to them.

Notes on the text

In this book I use the *Hanyu pinyin* system to romanize Chinese names and words, except in the case of proper names better known to Anglophone readers in a different form (e.g. Sun Yat-sen instead of Sun Zhongshan). The appendices to this book provide a list of traditional characters for terms and proper names, as well as more information about my translation of key terms and phrases.

Unless otherwise noted, all references to Zhang's work are taken from *Zhang Shizhao quanji* (*The Collected Works of Zhang Shizhao*) (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2000), Volume 3, which I cite as ZQJ in the text. I refer to other volumes by adding a Roman numeral to the citation (e.g. ZQJ IV indicates the *Quanji*, Volume 4).

Zhang wrote in an era known as the "Republican" period, which refers to the post-dynastic constitutional republic of early to mid-twentieth-century China. All capitalized references to "Republican" mean the historical era or particular regime established in 1911, and all lower-cased references to "republican" mean the non-monarchical regime type.

Finally, all translations from the Chinese, including those from secondary sources, are my own unless otherwise noted.