



## The Middle East Turns to China

By Sebastian Rees

Excerpted from <https://www.albawaba.com/> 2 October 2019

Early in 2017, children in the Gulf states tuned in to the premiere of a novel animation series. Kong Xiaoxi and Hakim, a 26-episode cartoon series, was co-produced in China and Saudi Arabia and broadcast on public television in both countries. It tells the story of Hakim, a Saudi Arabian teenager working in his family's restaurant. Hakim's family restaurant faces stiff competition from a Western backed rival, the Raman restaurant. Yet before Hakim loses hope in the prospects of the survival of his family restaurant, he meets Kong Xiaoxi, a Chinese teenager who offers his help. Kong helps Hakim's family, using traditional Chinese cooking methods, to turn the restaurant around and help beat its rival.

Designed to promote cross-cultural awareness, Kong teaches Hakim traditional martial arts from China, whilst Hakim teaches Kong about life in Saudi Arabia. Though intended for an audience yet to reach political maturity, Kong Xiaoxi and Hakim provides powerful symbolic insights into the expanding role China plays in the Middle East.

It indicates that China sees itself in the region as an agent of assistance, willing to aid regional powers to reach their potential rather than keeping them weak and divided. It suggests a new period of cultural engagement between long detached world regions. Where once people and politics in the Middle East looked West for inspiration and support, in recent years they have increasingly shifted their gaze eastwards.

Most importantly, it shows that China is seeking to turn its enormous financial investments, increasing diplomatic role and close relations with partners in the region into a deeper form of cultural influence which resonates not with political and economic elites but everyday citizens of the region.

It attests to perhaps the most important development in Middle Eastern international affairs this century - where once people and politics in the Middle East looked West for inspiration and support, in recent years they have increasingly shifted their gaze eastwards. In the so-called 'Chinese century', commentators ought to focus on the Middle East as a key theatre for the realisation of China's increasing global ambitions.

China's increased role in the Middle East and North Africa has been the product of the opportunism of Chinese firms and officials and the pro-active choices of regional powers, but it also relates closely to the choices of other global powers. Most importantly, China has capitalised on the relative decline of American power in a region where the United States once reigned supreme...

*(continued on page 6)*

## From Berlin to Shanghai via Eritrea: Ellen-Ruth Wolfsohn Powers' Saga

Edited by Linda Detmers

*[I was going to school in Oregon, and my sister lived near my mother, so she did the interviewing in 1983. I didn't write down my sister's questions so there are some redundancies. My mother wrote the section on Eritrea on her electric typewriter in 1983 after she recorded the interview.]*

### In Germany

I was born [November 21, 1921], as you know, in an upper middle-class family in [Berlin], Germany to my parents Bernhard Wolfsohn [b. May 19, 1889] and Elise Hahn Wolfsohn. I was an only child. I lived in an elegant home that was built for our family. It included our living area and also quarters for our domestic help. My father was a jeweler, and my grandfather was a doctor. My parents divorced when I was 5, and my mother remarried Adolf [Nachmann on the passenger list] Renzer, a naturalized German, who was originally Polish. My stepfather never accepted me, so I never shared a father-daughter relationship with him.

The first part of my childhood went relatively quiet at least as far as politics were concerned. My first remembrance of politics was when I was around 12 years old and there was going to be an election. As election time neared, I remember my mother mentioning that she did not feel that it was important to go and vote, since Hitler could not win anyhow. This probably explains why I have been so adamant about exercising my right and privilege to vote ever since I became a citizen of this country.

In the beginning of Hitler's regime we were not aware of anything going on, with the exception of his first week in power when we heard shooting all night long. Although nothing was published or admitted at the time, we heard through the grapevine that he had given orders to shoot anybody who did not agree with his plans at the time, whether they were old friends or communists, who he had been fighting all these years. He reversed the policy of naturalization and ordered all non-Germans to leave the country or go to a concentration camp. I remember the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in my school and at home.

Our life did not change very much immediately. We lived in a Christian neighborhood. I went to a Christian school. My friends, with the exception of one girl who was half Jewish, were all Christians. Although we were Orthodox, observed the Sabbath and the high holy days, and all the other holidays, and since the synagogue was quite a way from us, we walked every Friday night there, and back every Saturday. We had a little synagogue that was about 15 or 20 minutes from our house. I don't exactly remember when it was closed down, but it seems that, after a few years, people kept disappearing. Windows were broken. I don't know just exactly what went on, but I do remember that all of the sudden the synagogue was not there anymore, and the only ones we could attend were halfway across Berlin.

Being teenagers, even during those stressful times, we did have parties, although they were mostly farewell parties, and, of course, the circle of friends became smaller and smaller. Some emigrated,  
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**FROM THE EDITOR**

Following up on my article in the last Points East, I notice that the Jewish online magazine Tablet continues to publish a slew of articles, often by fellows at the Hudson Institute, in support of President Trump and SoS Mike Pompeo's campaign to vilify China.

Here are a few examples:

- On 20 April, it published "China Queen Diane Feinstein Used Her Power to Push Most Favored Nation Status for the CCP's Corrupt Dictatorship. Why" by Lee Smith, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and former senior editor at the Weekly Standard.
- On 26 April, Smith was published again, with an article entitled "The China Rethink."
- On 19 May, Michael Lind of New America had an article published "The China Question." Instead of lambasting China, he criticized "America's pro-China elites."
- On 12 August, Michael Doran and Peter Rough, both senior Hudson Institute fellows, had their article "China's Emerging Middle Eastern Kingdom" published.
- And on 16 September, Lee Smith's article "America's China Class Launches a New War Against Trump" appeared along with Atlanta tax attorney Michael P. Senger's essay "China's Global Lockdown Propaganda Campaign."

While it's certainly the magazine's right to publish whatever it chooses, I have to ask, "What gives?" China and Israel have quite decent relations in many fields. And what has China ever done to our people other than to be hospitable? Why this intense loathing of the PRC in a Jewish publication?

In this issue, you will undoubtedly enjoy the saga of Ellen-Ruth Wolfsohn Powers and the happy-ending story of Abigail Windberg, a Kaifeng Jew now living in Israel. And to stir you up, we offer two political analyses, one culled from the Jordanian online journal Al Bawaba and the other from the left-wing American journal Jewish Currents.

Let me conclude by wishing all our Jewish readers a healthy, happy and non-contagious 5781!

**Anson Laytner**

**Points East**

Anson Laytner, Editor

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*Points East* is published three times a year, in March, July and November. Deadlines for submitting material to be included in these issues are January 15th, May 15th and September 15th.

**FINANCIAL REPORT AVAILABLE**

SJI members interested in receiving a copy of the annual financial report should send a self-addressed envelope to: Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, 1252 W. College Ave., Jacksonville IL 62650 USA.

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## A New Cold War Threatens Chinese Americans

By Peter Beinart

Excerpted from <https://jewishcurrents.org/a-new-cold-war-threatens-chinese-americans/> 30 April 2020

...Even before Donald Trump began calling the novel coronavirus that causes Covid-19 the “Chinese virus,” his administration had adopted a strikingly confrontational stance toward the world’s other superpower. During the 2016 campaign, Trump accused China of “raping” the United States. In 2018, his administration’s National Defense Strategy labelled Beijing a “strategic competitor.”... The two nations, declared Henry Kissinger last year, are in “the foothills of a cold war.”

History teaches that cold wars exact a terrible toll on those Americans whom other Americans associate with the enemy. They narrow definitions of national loyalty, sometimes almost overnight...

American Jews once experienced this firsthand. Seventy years before Tan lost his job, another American scientist, Frank Oppenheimer, was forced to resign from the University of Minnesota, where he had taught physics. Oppenheimer, too, had run afoul of the loyalty tests created by a cold war. In the 1930s, with the capitalist world in depression, he had briefly joined the Communist Party. By the late 1940s—with relations between the US and Soviet Union growing bitterly hostile—that association made him unemployable in the American academy. It was not until almost a decade later, after the hysteria of the early cold war eased, that he got a job teaching physics again.

There are obvious differences between the claims of disloyalty leveled at Chinese Americans today, which center on their professional ties to their ancestral homeland, and the claims of disloyalty leveled at American Jews because of their role on the American left. But in both cases, people like Tan and Oppenheimer are only the most dramatic victims. Less noticeable are those who contort themselves in order to pass the loyalty tests that Tan and Oppenheimer failed.

In a Washington Post op-ed published earlier this month, former presidential candidate Andrew Yang suggested combatting charges that Asian Americans are disloyal through brazen displays of patriotism, including wearing red, white, and blue. “We Asian Americans need to embrace and show our American-ness in ways we never have before,” he urged. “We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will

do our part for our country in this time of need.”...

These exercises in cold war patriotism—which consciously or unconsciously display loyalty at other people’s expense—also have ugly precedents in American Jewish history. In 1949, a mob yelling slogans like “N— loving Jews . . . Go back to Moscow!” attacked a largely Jewish crowd returning from a concert sponsored by the Civil Rights Congress in Peekskill, New York. But because the Congress was an alleged communist front, the Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee, fearing the taint of disloyalty, refused to champion the victims’ cause.

Even as the red scares of the 20th century targeted American Jews, they also made it harder for them to challenge American policies at home and abroad. In eras of hyper-nationalism and politically-induced fear, it’s hard to demonstrate allegiance to your country and challenge it at the same time. This is the dilemma Chinese Americans face now. To prove their patriotism, they face pressure to mute their opposition to the very cold war policies that threaten them. Jewish American history provides a lesson in what is lost when the targeting of a minority group during a cold war goes largely unchallenged.

THE COLD WAR that transformed American Jewish politics came in two parts. The first followed the Russian Revolution in 1917, when Woodrow Wilson’s government—fearful of revolutionary sentiment at home—launched a campaign against those who, as Wilson had put it in a 1915 Congressional address, “have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life.”

Jews—an immigrant population with leftist inclinations—were particularly vulnerable. In his introduction to *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary Reader*, the historian Tony Michels notes that in 1920, Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs won 38% of the Jewish vote—ten times his percentage among Americans at large. The Yiddish communist newspaper, *Di frayhayt*, boasted a higher circulation than the *Daily Worker*, the official publication of the Communist Party USA.

Thus, Jews suffered disproportionately when Wilson signed the 1918 Aliens Act, which enabled the deportation of any non-citizen accused of membership in an organization that sought the violent overthrow of the US government. Hundreds of leftist immigrants were deported—among them the Jewish anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berk-

man—even though, according to historian Richard Fried’s *Nightmare in Red*, “most were guilty only of radical views.”

This first cold war devastated the Jewish—and the broader American—left. In 1919, the House of Representatives refused to seat Victor Berger, a German Jewish socialist from Milwaukee. In 1921, New York expelled five socialists from the state legislature and gerrymandered Meyer London, the socialist congressman from the Lower East Side, out of his seat. In the 1920s, Michels writes, “the Socialist Party found itself in disarray, the Communist Party was stuck in near isolation, and the bulk of organized labor was pushed into retreat.”

The Great Depression—which exposed the instability and inhumanity of unregulated capitalism—revived the American left. And between 1935 and 1939, when the Communist Party USA pursued a popular front against fascism, communists and socialists gained entry into a wide array of progressive groups. But all this set the stage for an even more brutal backlash starting in the late 1940s, when the wartime alliance between the US and USSR collapsed.

Like the first cold war that followed World War I, this second cold war—which came after World War II—created loyalty tests that Jews, disproportionately, could not meet. In 1949, New York State barred anyone who had engaged in “treasonable or seditious acts or utterances” from teaching public school. Over 200 New York City teachers resigned or were fired. In 1951, a 56-year-old Bronx house painter named Benny Saltzman, who had immigrated from Poland almost 40 years earlier, was ordered to be deported because he had been a member of the Communist Party in the 1930s. In 1953, three Jewish professors at Philadelphia’s Jefferson Medical College were fired for having joined the Party as students. In 1955, after being blacklisted in Hollywood for his alleged communist ties, the actor Philip Loeb committed suicide.

Not everyone targeted during the Red Scare was praiseworthy, or even innocent. Some communists, including some Jewish communists, did spy for the USSR. The Communist Party USA, in its slavish devotion to the Soviet Union, often betrayed the progressive ideals it claimed to espouse. But by the late 1940s, distinctions between leftists who supported the Communist Party and those who did not mattered little. The second cold war redefined patriotism in ways that made fundamental critiques of American capitalism—even from leftists



with staunch anti-Stalinist credentials—harder to voice. And since Jews had been overrepresented among the Americans inclined toward such critiques, it constrained and inhibited American Jewish political life.

...The second cold war, historian Deborah Dash Moore has observed, led to “the decline of a viable Jewish left in the United States.” As Fried comments in *Nightmare in Red*, it “narrowed the range of selection open to associations, utterances and ideas . . . the collective result was a significant slowing of the momentum of [progressive] changes in a number of areas of American life.”

Most American Jews survived the second cold war—as they had survived the first—with their freedom and livelihoods intact. Collectively, Jews in the 1950s continued their climb from the immigrant ghetto into the middle class. But inclusion came at a price. By enforcing a constricted vision of patriotism, the Cold War forced Jews to temper the radical dissent that had been a defining feature of American Jewish political life.

IN RECENT YEARS, Chinese Americans have experienced a whiplash similar to the one that leftist American Jews experienced after World War II. In 2006, almost twice as many Americans felt favorably toward China as felt unfavorably. As late as 2014, the Obama administration announced that China would join a select group of countries whose citizens could visit the US for up to ten years on a single visa. Lured by Chinese talent and money, American businesses and universities took advantage of this permissive political environment to build connections across the Pacific. And, very often, the people they turned to build those connections were Chinese Americans. “If you go back five or ten years,” explains Frank H. Wu, the incoming president of Queens College, “every American university wanted a connection with a Chinese school. They turned to their own ethnic Chinese faculty to help them do this.”...

But since Trump took office, American attitudes toward China have dramatically soured. The percentage of Americans who view China unfavorably—which stood at 29% in 2006—is now 66%. And as in the late 1940s, this rapid deterioration in superpower relations has sparked a hunt for enemies within.

...In 2018, FBI Director Christopher Wray testified that the “naïveté on the part of the academic sector” was allowing China to use “professors, scientists, students...across basically every discipline” as agents of espionage. The FBI

has launched investigations into Chinese government spying at American companies...

Not all the subjects of these investigations are ethnically Chinese. But Chinese Americans are particularly likely to be targeted. Early this year, a former FBI official told *The Intercept* that Bureau leaders were sending the message that “Chinese Americans are being weaponized as a tool” by Beijing. Last year, the president of MIT reported that “faculty members, post-docs, research staff and students tell me that, in their dealings with government agencies, they now feel unfairly scrutinized, stigmatized and on edge—because of their Chinese ethnicity alone.” The Committee of Concerned Scientists has described a “massive investigation of ethnic Chinese faculty throughout the country” that “involves searches of their email accounts, correspondence and phone calls, as well as video surveillance.”

China does, undoubtedly, spy on the US. But in many cases the FBI is not even accusing ethnically Chinese researchers of espionage. It is charging them merely with having failed to adequately disclose associations with Chinese institutions—even though, until recently, neither American universities nor the American government were vigilant about enforcing such disclosure requirements. Often, it’s not even clear that the scientists now facing prosecution were trying to hide their work in China at all. Last August, the Department of Justice indicted University of Kansas chemical engineer Franklin (Feng) Tao on fraud charges for concealing his position at Fuzhou University while doing research funded by the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation. Tao could face decades in prison. Yet, as Peter Waldman and Robert Burton of Bloomberg News have noted, Tao listed his relationship with Fuzhou University in several published articles; it’s even mentioned on his Chinese-language Wikipedia site. Last May, Emory University fired Xiao-Jiang and Shihua Li, a husband and wife team who ran a lab conducting research into Huntington’s and Alzheimer’s disease, because they, too, had allegedly failed to disclose work in China. But they, like Tao, had mentioned their Chinese affiliations in published papers. Xiao-Jiang Li claims he even listed his on his CV.

In several high-profile cases against ethnically Chinese scientists, the Department of Justice has either dropped its charges or failed to convince a jury to convict...A 2019 study of cases brought under the Economic Espionage Act

found that the Justice Department was almost twice as likely to bring cases that did not result in a guilty verdict against Chinese Americans as it was to bring such cases against Americans with Western-sounding last names. But even when cases are dismissed, Chinese American academics often pay a terrible price. Four months after armed FBI agents took Temple University physics professor Xiaoxing Xi from his home in handcuffs in 2015, while his wife and daughter watched, the government dropped its case after it became clear that the “secrets” Xi had disseminated to colleagues in China weren’t secrets at all; they were easily accessible on the internet. But when Teresa Watanabe of *The Los Angeles Times* interviewed Xi last July, she found that he still owed \$220,000 in legal bills as a result of his ordeal. He had been stripped of his university chairmanship and most of his government research grants, and was finding it difficult to sleep.

FOR CHINESE AMERICANS, these government investigations are the most blatant consequences of the new cold war... For every Xiaoxing Xi or Chunzai Wang who sees their lives wrecked because the FBI deems them disloyal, there are other Chinese Americans who avoid being targeted—but at a cost. They downplay their opposition to Washington’s cold war posture because their ethnicity makes them vulnerable to being labeled agents of Beijing.

Chinese Americans—who emigrated to the US at different periods and from different places—are ideologically diverse... [But] a study of Chinese Americans in North Carolina and a study of Chinese American newspapers—both published in the 2002 edited volume, *The Expanding Roles of Chinese Americans in U.S.-China Relations*—suggest that most Chinese Americans support a cooperative relationship between Washington and Beijing.

But for Chinese Americans, loudly expressing that view—and thus challenging American policy—risks inviting aspersions on their patriotism. The Trump administration and its allies have already implied that Chinese Americans are more loyal to their ancestral homeland than to the US. In an April ad that depicted Joe Biden cozying up to Chinese government officials, the Trump campaign included an image of the presumptive Democratic nominee with Gary Locke, the Chinese American former Secretary of Commerce—thus implying that Locke is an agent of China too. Last year, Frank Gaffney, who has spent decades claiming that American Muslims constitute a fifth

column, launched the Committee on the Present Danger (the name dates to the Red Scare of the 1950s) to alert Americans to Beijing's influence in the US. In its statement of principles, the Committee warns that the Chinese government is "undermining and subverting Western democracies from within through its: control, domination and exploitation of Chinese diaspora communities."...

As in the 1950s, when Roy Cohn and other McCarthyite Jews made themselves arbiters of American Jewish patriotism, some hawkish Chinese Americans have begun questioning whether other Chinese Americans are loyal. "Some Chinese-Americans never miss an opportunity to bash America to support #China's attacks on our society," tweeted Fox News favorite Gordon G. Chang in April. "They don't deserve America." That same month, Pastor Bob Fu—one of three ethnically Chinese members on the Committee on the President Danger's 51 member board—retweeted a video of a Chinese American woman, ostensibly in the US, boasting that "it feels so awesome to buy all the [coronavirus] masks. I didn't leave a single mask for the Americans." Fu called on the FBI to "investigate her" and the Department of Homeland Security to send her "back to #CCPChina."

These insinuations of disloyalty—which have only grown since Covid-19 sparked a wave of attacks on Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans—constitute the backdrop to Andrew Yang's op-ed calling on Asian Americans to display their patriotism. There's nothing wrong with asking Asian Americans—or any other group of Americans—to help out their fellow citizens in this moment of need. But at a time of mounting paranoia about the China threat, it's difficult to fulfill Yang's call for super-patriotism and challenge America's bellicose posture toward Beijing at the same time... Many Chinese Americans "are very fearful of standing out" by criticizing US policy. As in the 1920s and 1950s, hyper-nationalists are defining patriotism in ways that limit space for dissent. Kaiser Kuo, editor-at-large of the news website SupChina and the host of its Sinica podcast, explains, "For Chinese Americans, it's not just apologia for Beijing or for the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] that arouses suspicions of disloyalty now: even saying something construed as 'in line with the CCP narrative' can get you in trouble."

Like Jews in the early and mid-20th century, Chinese Americans today enjoy advantages that will help them weather the coming cold war. Like Jews, Chinese

Americans are comparatively well-educated; a majority of Chinese American adults possess at least a bachelor's degree compared to roughly one-third of Americans overall. And like most Jews, most Chinese Americans are not black, and thus benefit from the fact that they are not white America's quintessential other.

But Chinese Americans deserve to do more than survive, or even economically prosper. They deserve to be able to assert their views about a geopolitical struggle that will shape the next era of American history and, if they so choose, to boldly challenge an American foreign policy course that has deep implications for their lives. That also means feeling free to speak out against the domestic racism that the geopolitical situation exacerbates. The problem with Yang's op-ed, The Huffington Post's Marina Fong has argued, is that it "reinforces the model minority trope" that implies Asian Americans should "NOT speak out about racism...when we should be doing the opposite."

If America's escalating cold war with Beijing inhibits Chinese American dissent—as the cold wars of the 20th century inhibited dissent by American Jews—Chinese Americans won't be the only ones who suffer. Jingoistic intimidation rarely produces good foreign policy... Today, the Trump administration is using its antagonism toward China as justification to cripple the World Health Organization, the international body tasked with fighting pandemics. If Chinese Americans don't feel free to challenge the new cold war without having their loyalty questioned, we will all pay the price.

Peter Beinart is editor-at-large of Jewish Currents.

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## Despite COVID-19, Israeli Innovation Day Held in Nanjing

By Hagay Hacohen

Excerpted from <https://www.jpost.com/jpost-tech> 15 July 2020

The China-Israel Innovation Center will hold a conference promoting global innovative culture on Thursday at the Jiangning Development Zone (JDZ) in Nanjing as part of the city's TechWeek...

Shengjing Peakview Capital is expected to launch its partnership with EcoMotion on Thursday. Jointly created by the Economy Ministry, the National Plan to Promote Smart Transportation and the Israeli Institute of Innovation, EcoMotion connects roughly 600 Israeli start-up firms that offer various transportation solutions. Shengjing senior partner Sherrie Wong told The Jerusalem Post that, thanks to the JDZ, Israeli firms will now have a starting point on their journey into China.

"We think they have a great potential in the Chinese market," she said, "which is why we make things happen." So far, Shengjing has invested \$80 million in Israeli companies.

When asked about possible Chinese-Israeli partnerships to combat COVID-19, she mentioned DiaCardio – now known as DiA Imaging Analysis, which was selected by her firm to represent Israeli innovation in China in 2015 – as an example of how innovative mapping of the human heart can be used to save lives in times of crisis.

In addition to hi-tech, academic relations between the two countries are expected to grow, as the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology intends to sign a cooperation agreement with Tsinghua University's AI Center and the Nanjing Tsingzhan AI Center.

Tsinghua University intends to announce a partnership with the Weizmann Institute of Science, with a focus on machine learning...

Prof. Xu Xin told the Post, the Chinese edition of Start-Up Nation was read by every Chinese official he met.

He will lead a panel with YChina founder Yael Einav Winehouse and Xinergy CEO Niv Schwartz about Chinese and Israeli entrepreneurial cultures.

"In premodern Chinese culture," he said, "one studied to pass exams and get a government job," like the famed Mandarins, for example. "In Jewish culture, people study because it is a mitzvah: it is something you do for yourself even if there is no practical reason to do so."

China, with its traditional symbol being the dragon, and Israel – its national bird being the hoopoe – are very different. But "if China and Israel work together," Shengjing's Wong said, "it will improve the whole world."



### The American Vacuum

The story of American decline in the Middle East is a complex one. It has occurred despite, or perhaps because of America's expansive military presence. After decades of regional entanglement, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, officials and the American electorate have grown weary of maintaining an over-sized presence in what has proved, in terms of security and stability, an unforgiving region.

Yet longer term shifts are also at play. Dr Burton, a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics, notes that the global financial crisis knocked America economically, causing a more generalised retrenchment of overseas endeavours. Hasan al-Hasan, a doctoral researcher at King's College London notes that America's role in the region has also resulted from a changed international energy regime. America's cosy relations with the Gulf States in particular had been built on demand for oil to fuel America's rapid economic expansion in the post-war era. Yet as Hasan notes "the introduction of tight oil and shale gas, especially in North America, has transformed the global oil and gas markets."

Americans grew tired of foreign adventurism and focused on combating a tough economic situation at home.

America has proven far less dependent on energy security in the Middle East than was the case even one decade ago.

Americans grew tired of foreign adventurism and focused on combating a tough economic situation at home and during the presidency of Barack Obama, the American government pursued a policy of pragmatic realism in the Middle East.

A process of managed decline occurred as America signalled that it was no longer willing to commit to large scale military operation or provide blank cheque support for regional partners. High profile moves such as the negotiation of the Iran nuclear deal signalled that America preferred maintaining an arms-length relation with Middle Eastern affairs based on diplomacy and mediation rather than an active on the ground presence.

Though President Trump has made issues related to Israel and Palestine and placing pressure on Iran central to his foreign policy agenda, his regional ambitions are decidedly modest...Mr Trump's avowed commitment to put America's domestic interests above regional and global stability has provided space for other actors to fill the large vacuum resultant from American decline. Yet those actors which had

long played a supportive or adversarial role in relation to American interests in the region lack the interests or resources to increase their own involvement.

### Where Other Actors Have Failed

Though Russia has aimed to secure short term benefits in the region by backing the Assad regime in Syria, providing material support to struggling regimes in the Maghreb and the Horn of Africa, and pushing for regional stability to prevent the spread of international terrorism to its borders, it is not financially powerful enough to fill the American vacuum.

The Middle East does not fit centrally with Russia's security agenda, focused as it is on Eastern Europe and East Asia, nor does Russia, one of the world's largest energy producers, retain a significant material interest in regional reconstruction or the cultivation of financial ties to hydrocarbon rich states.

The European Union has also abrogated its once significant regional role. Whilst outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows into the Middle East and, in particular, North Africa, remain significant, the EU lacks the military might or political support to play a decisive role in the region's future...Whilst the European Neighbourhood Policy once funnelled significant investments into the region, since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, such resources have not proved as forthcoming. Regional powers looking further afield for political support, military hardware and financial assistance are looking East rather than West.

To some extent, a decline of traditional great powers in the Middle East has led regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran to exert increasingly autonomous influence over regional affairs. As Mehran Kamrava, a Professor at Georgetown University notes, all three states, have turned to bold foreign policy manoeuvres including support for regional proxies, attempts to expand cultural and ideological influence regionally, and, in some cases, direct foreign military adventurism to assert their leadership over the region.

Yet none of these states, in its own right, is particularly powerful. All remain reliant on international support, have to face their own domestic economic travails, and have struggled to cultivate regional support for their agendas.

Asserting a more direct military role would require a far higher degree of international quiescence than is currently forthcoming and depends on the importation of military technology and expertise from abroad. This time, regional

powers looking further afield for political support, military hardware and financial assistance are looking East rather than West. Whether as an independent actor, or a strategic ally, China has come to the fore as the ally of choice for many Middle Eastern states, even those which have traditionally pledged allegiance to the United States.

### A Rising China

In the early 19th century, writing on China, the French general Napoleon Bonaparte noted, "let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world." Two centuries on, his comments have appeared prophetic. Whilst China struggled under the weight of foreign control and revolution in the early 20th century, and isolation and chaos in its middle decades, since the 1970s, it has become a power to be reckoned with on the global stage...

Economic theorists see this as a period in which China transitioned from a form of state socialism, in which bureaucrats and officials directly controlled the country's productive apparatus to a form of state capitalism in which a close nexus between the state and semi-autonomous business partners catalysed a centrally directed process of economic liberalisation...A state once gripped by widespread economic insecurity and deprivation has emerged more unequal but far more prosperous...

In 2013, Chinese officials first announced what was then called the One Belt One Road Initiative, later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Originally, the BRI was intended to serve as a pushback against America's much touted 'pivot to Asia'- as Qiao Liang, a retired major general in the People's Liberation Army noted, "a hedge strategy against the eastward move of the USA."

Yet the initiative took on a life of its own. It was written into the constitution of the Chinese Communist Party in 2017 and has been seen as key to China's future prosperity. The project, funded by a combination of direct Chinese foreign investment and a regime of low interest loan provisions to partner states, is regarded by many as the largest infrastructure project in history. It is set to cost an estimated \$2 trillion US Dollars, directly include 63 economies, and connect billions of people through road, silicon and rail. Though only one of the BRI's 6 pathways, the China-Central West Asia Corridor, runs directly through the Middle East, the region plays a vital role in Chinese economic development.

Sustaining China's economic miracle is contingent on two key factors. The first

relates to securing access to a reliable flow of energy resources. Though China has emerged as a leading player in the green technology sector and hopes to achieve energy self-reliance by the end of the century, it continues to exhibit an almost insatiable appetite for hydro-carbon imports. China is estimated by the International Energy Agency to consume a staggering 13.5 million barrels a day, a demand expected to increase by 57% by 2040. Secondly, as China attempts to escape the middle-income trap, it must continue to expand production at home whilst securing investment prospects and market opportunities abroad. The Middle East and North Africa offers opportunities consistent with both of these needs.

### Breaking into Trade

By 2004, China had begun making inroads in the region. In that year, former Chinese president Hu Jintao visited Egypt to discuss the establishment of the China Arab States Cooperation Forum with Amr Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League. This forum hoped to develop closer relations between East and West Asia without forming dependent alliances and has since proliferated a range of influential sub-groups including the Energy Cooperation Conference, the Entrepreneurs Conferences and Investment Seminar, and the Internet Cooperation Conference.

A deepening of commercial and diplomatic ties has been central to this project. By 2016, China had signalled in its first Arab policy paper, a desire to further bind the region to its economic plans. China's initial forays in the Middle East were built on a requirement for supplies of oil and gas. China is now the top petroleum export destination for Iran, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia. In fact 52% of China's hydrocarbon imports come from the Middle East and nearly a third of Chinese petroleum imports from the region come from Saudi Arabia. This percentage continues to increase as US sanctions on Iran's oil industry begin to bite. Qatar provides China with more than 20% of its Liquid Natural Gas Imports.

Yet the energy industry has also been a tool for the expansion of Chinese investment regionally. Chinese firms have financed energy exploration and extraction in Iran and the UAE. China's Petroleum Engineering and Construction Corporation is playing a key role in rebuilding Iraq's Rumelia oil field and many Saudi officials see a private share sale to a Chinese company as a viable and more palatable alternative to an Initial Public Offering of Aramco, the Kingdom's petroleum giant.

China has also invested significantly in down-stream oil capacity. It has emerged as the world's second largest refiner of crude oil and refines 14.5 million barrels per day, securing lucrative deals to build refineries throughout the Gulf and in China with regional partners.

Yet oil and gas do not explain Chinese staying power in the region. Chinese authorities also see an increasing role in the Middle East and North Africa as a way to expand markets for Chinese goods and develop a stake in crucial nodes of the global trade network. In 2008, 1% of Chinese FDI was earmarked for the Middle East and North Africa. By 2016, China had become the largest foreign investor in the region, holding one third of the Middle East's entire FDI stock according to the Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation. Now 16 Middle Eastern states are integrated into the BRI and many have inked high profile investment deals with Chinese state-owned enterprises and private companies. President Xi's hopes to 'break the bottleneck in Asian connectivity' is slowly being realised.

A core element of the BRI is the so-called 'Maritime Silk Road Project', an ambitious venture to connect the Chinese mainland with a string of Chinese operated ports, particularly in the Indian Ocean. East Africa has been key to efforts in this regard, but China hopes to secure a presence on both sides of the Gulf of Aden as well as more presence in the Suez Area and on the Mediterranean.

Maritime trade is of particular importance for the expansion of Chinese economic influence- 90% of Chinese exports travel by sea. Chinese enterprises have secured deals to manage important maritime real estate in the Middle East. Chinese companies have been in negotiation over building a deep-water container port at El Hamdania in Algeria, have won contracts for an extension of the port of Doha in Qatar and been involved in developing the capacity of the UAE's two leading ports, Jebel Ali in Dubai and the Khalifa Port in Abu Dhabi. The UAE has emerged as a key hub for Chinese international trade- approximately 60% of Chinese goods destined for Europe, Africa and the Middle East pass through the country.

Though Chinese firms have sought to assist Egyptian authorities in the establishment of a new Suez Canal Economic Zone, China has logistical ambitions to lessen dependence on strategic bottlenecks like Suez altogether. China hopes to build a so-called 'Red-Med Railway' connecting Eliat on Israel's Red Sea Coast with the Mediterranean port of Ashdod. Such a development would create an

important alternate route for the flow of international trade and reduce Chinese dependence on maritime transport...

Yet as a recent report by Chatham House, a UK think-tank, notes, China's infrastructural presence may be defined less by steel and bitumen and more by silicon...It is in the field of digital development that China appears most ambitious. Chinese firms currently operate or co-own 9 submarine data cables serving the region. The UAE and Chinese tech giants Huawei and China Telecom are working on joint projects in 5G telecommunications, whilst China's aims to develop an alternative navigation system to America's GPS has been met with interest in the region. BeiDou, a company responsible for the so-called BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, opened its first overseas Centre for Excellence in Tunisia in April 2018. The UAE and Chinese tech giants Huawei and China Telecom are working on joint projects in 5G telecommunications, whilst China's aims to develop an alternative navigation system to America's GPS has been met with interest in the region. Huawei has agreed to help establish a broadband network in Syria as it seeks to reconstruct itself after nearly a decade of conflict.

Chinese firms, which lead the world in research and development funding in emerging fields of technological advancement including artificial intelligence, nano-technology and cloud computing have linked with regional partners to carry out more ambitious projects. China's Communication Construction Company and Road and Bridge Corporation have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tangier Tech Development Company to build Tangier Tech City, a smart city powered by Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things. Kuwait's Silk City megaproject hopes to benefit from a similar extension of China's largesse. Dr Jonathan Hillman, a Fellow at the Washington based Centre for Strategic and International Studies notes, "as China's telecommunications networks expand, it gains power: reducing its dependence on Western systems while gaining data that can be used for commercial and strategic purposes..."

### Leverage in the Middle East

Chinese investments have synergised well with regional plans for economic diversification embodied in 'Vision' development plans in the Gulf. Regional leaders, fearful of declining returns from hydrocarbon sales, see Chinese investments in digital infrastructure as a way to facilitate their emergence as dynamic players in a 21st century global economy.



Chinese investments have proved far more forthcoming than those from traditional international allies. Crucially, they come with fewer strings attached. As General Ahmed Zaki Abdeen, a former Egyptian government minister responsible for the development of his country's new Beijing backed administrative capital, aptly warns Western governments and corporations: "stop talking to us about human rights. Come and do business with us. The Chinese are coming—they are seeking win-win situations."

What is immediately striking about China's expanding economic and diplomatic involvement in the region is its enormous scope. China cites a belief in the power of economic linkages and development to solve regional instability. Unlike previous international actors, China has very consciously sought a position of political neutrality in the region: it meets with Israeli cabinet ministers and leaders of the Palestinian National Authority; Saudi oil executives and commanders in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; tech entrepreneurs from the UAE and Qatari University directors. Indeed, China has signed Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships, its highest level of diplomatic recognition with a range of regional adversaries. As Hasan al-Hasan notes, a 'premise of de-hyphenation' dictates China's foreign policy: dealing with two or more adversaries on a case by case, independent basis. China officially promotes a policy that claims to support national sovereignty, arguing that political tensions ought to be solved at home rather than internationalised.

This explains China's oft-criticised stance on the Assad regime in Syria. Whilst China officially condemns atrocities committed in the country since its descent into civil war in 2011, unlike other international actors it does not firmly commit support to Mr Assad or his domestic foes, seeing the issue as one to be "solved by the Syrian people." When pressed to reveal the key planks of its foreign policy, China cites a belief in the power of economic linkages and development to solve regional instability and stagnation, a view often shared by regional actors...

China's ability to curry favour with a range of regional powers has set alarm bells ringing in Washington. Particularly concerning are China's efforts to ingratiate itself with traditionally staunch US allies. As Guy Burton notes, "the problem starts when the search for economic opportunities is challenged by existing partners." A 25-year agreement to operate Israel's Haifa port, secured by China's Shanghai International Port Group has proven especially controversial. Israeli ports like Haifa are seen as vital to US

interests in the Mediterranean—the US 6th Fleet uses Haifa as a routine replenishment spot, as does Israel's submarine fleet. The increasing involvement of Huawei in Israel's thriving tech sector has provoked similar consternation.

It remains to be seen whether China's increasing economic and strategic influence in the region will be converted into a more significant presence of Chinese officials, particularly military forces in the region. A 2016 Chinese Defence White Paper noted "China will never seek hegemony or engage in military expansion," but the People's Liberation Army has already shown a penchant for protecting Chinese interests in the region...

Though China's military footprint is far lighter than that of the US, Chinese weaponry certainly plays an important role in regional conflict. Frank Slijper, an arms trade specialist at Pax for Peace, a Dutch NGO, notes Gulf States have moved to significantly increase their importation of Chinese arms, in particular for "weapons the US doesn't want to sell them for strategic reasons such as armed drones." According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China has become the largest exporter of unmanned combat aerial vehicles in the region.

China argues that its international military operations are minimal because it is a different kind of international actor—one which places a premium on negotiation and diplomacy over armed conflict. Yet as lucrative contracts expand, populations migrate, and relations deepen, the People's Liberation Army may find itself drawn into a more active role.

### Cultural Exchange

Western pundits have tended to argue that while China's economic influence has spread globally, it lacks forms of cultural capital with which to truly exert its hegemonic power. Chinese culture does remain unfamiliar in most of the Middle East and North Africa. This fact may inadvertently come with significant benefits. As Jonathan Fulton, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi notes, China has less historical baggage in the region, making it seem a more trustworthy partner than ex-colonial powers and the United States. Indeed, as Dr Burton notes, China often draws rhetorically on narratives of historical similarity, describing itself and its partners as victims of past Western colonialism and imperialism.

However, China has recently stepped up campaigns to spread the country's overseas cultural influence. China has established 17 'Confucius Institutes', similar

to European institutions such as Alliance Française and the British Council, in the Middle East and North Africa to spread Chinese language and culture in the region. China's state-owned news agency, Xinhua, has slowly developed into an international service. It created a news office in Cairo and now publishes in Cairo, whilst China Global Television Network, China's state television network has broadcast in Arabic since 2009.

Tourism from China has significantly expanded regionally. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation noted a 6-fold increase in Chinese residents visiting Israel between 2012-2017. Gulf monarchies are forecasting an 80% increase in Chinese visitors between 2019-2022 and the UAE expects more than 1.5 million Chinese tourists to visit this year. About 500,000 Chinese expatriates now call the Gulf States home.

Learning from previous international powers, China has been especially keen to expand its international outreach in the sphere of education. In 2018, Peking University hosted its first China-Middle East Youth dialogue to enhance cross-cultural interactions between youth leaders. Where Arab youth once looked to America and Europe for opportunities, they may be shifting their horizons eastwards, put off by high fees and stringent visa requirements in the West. Chinese universities have begun to offer curriculums in Middle Eastern Languages and the Chinese Scholarship Council sponsors thousands of students from the Middle East to study in China. According to the Middle East Institute, a Washington based think-tank, the number of Arab students studying in Chinese universities and Chinese students studying at Arab universities increased by 26% and 21% respectively from 2004-2016...

Most ambitiously, China has attempted to directly develop its own universities. China's flagship regional institution, the Egyptian Chinese University opened its doors in 2016 and has educated more than 2500 Egyptians. Chinese authorities hope to establish a second regional institute, the China-Jordan University during the next decade.

Religion has proven the most difficult issue for China to navigate regionally, particularly given its own much publicised mistreatment of its own 20 million strong Muslim population. Yet close relations between China and regional governments has won quiescence over the issue. As Dr Burton notes, ambassadors from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE signed an open letter of support



for China's nefarious activities in Xinjiang province. Whilst Turkey criticised China's actions, it did so in a very muted tone, a far cry from its denunciation of crack downs on rioting in Xinjiang in 2009 as 'cultural genocide'. Fittingly, Hajj pilgrims arriving in Jeddah are highly likely to continue their travels to Mecca and Medina on a \$1.8 billion Chinese built railway linking the holy cities with the Saudi coast...

### The Other Side of Influence

China's influence in the Middle East presents a mixed bag of opportunities and challenges for a volatile region.

Some aspects of China's expanding influence in the region should be welcomed.

Money for infrastructure projects is sorely needed and China is right in noting that development and economic growth is the key to a more stable and secure region.

Yet..as China becomes more embroiled in the region, like other powers it may turn to more overt displays of hard power to protect its interests. This would risk renewed international conflict in a region finding its feet after decades of conflict.

Secondly, though Chinese investment should be cautiously welcomed where it genuinely empowers local populations, it may stifle the diversification opportunities it is purports to enable. Local enterprises may struggle to compete in their home markets under the weight of competition by powerful Chinese state backed enterprises.

Though infrastructure projects may stimulate economic growth and opportunity, the encroachment of Chinese companies able to flood markets with cheap goods may harm emerging players in a diversifying regional economy.

Thirdly, many raise concerns about China's financial relationship with BRI countries. Though loans have low interest attached, many regional autocrats, keen for a quick fix to long term developmental problems have eyes bigger than their pockets. Debt-trap diplomacy ought to provoke fears among weaker economies in the region. Significant debts owed to China may be used as leverage for China to extract more favourable financial terms from partner states...

Finally, technological development should be treated with a high level of scrutiny...More importantly, Chinese technological assistance to autocratic regimes may empower their capacities for surveillance and coercion.

Protesters in Hong Kong identified the pervasive and pernicious influence of smart city technologies, used to monitor activists and control their movements. The developments of similar capabilities in the Arab world should be a concern for regional citizens and the international community alike.

China's international rise has not left the Middle East and North Africa behind. An expansion of economic opportunities, infrastructural development, and cultural exchange should be welcomed by states attempting to diversify and reconstruct. Yet Middle Eastern peoples know all too well the dangers presented by strangers bearing gifts. They would do well to adopt a cautious scepticism to the latest international actor to make inroads in their region.

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## Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum Receives Massive Donation of Books

By He Qi

Reprinted from *chinadaily.com.cn*, 3 Sept 2020

A collection of 8,100 books that was donated by an 82-year-old Jewish man arrived at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on Wednesday.

The donor, Kurt Wick, first arrived in Shanghai with his family in 1939 to escape the persecution of Nazi Germany. To make a living, his family set up a shop selling handbags in Hongkou district.

Wick and his family left Shanghai in 1948 to settle in London.

In 2019, Wick brought his wife, daughter and son-in-law to Shanghai. When he saw the name of his family on the wall of survivors at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, Wick decided to donate his books to help with the extension of the museum.

"When I visited the museum, I saw that they did not have many books. I was looking for a place to store my collection of books so I thought maybe it would be useful here as there are many students and Jewish people," said Wick, who likes to collect books about Jewish history, politics, economy, and culture.

"I also thought that this gesture would be my way of saying thank you to Shanghai for saving me and my family," he added.

The collection of books began their journey from London to Shanghai in July 2019. Free Trade Zone Art, the company that helped Wick with his shipment, had to make four trips to his home to collect the books.

Due to the Chinese New Year and the epidemic, the books only entered the bonded warehouse of the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone in late February this year.

For photographs and a video the Wick family and the books being delivered, see the article at <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/03/WS5f508d3ca310675eafc57550.html>

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To access the archives, go to the "Members' Section" on the far right of our website homepage

others disappeared voluntarily by trying to cross the border into Switzerland or France, or they were picked up by the Gestapo and not heard from again. We took trips to Grunewald on our bikes, and sometimes stopped in a cafe to dance. That, too, became too dangerous; we got very panicky when on one such occasion a storm trooper came and asked me to dance. Either way that spelled trouble. So, I used the old ruse that I had to go to the restroom and would be right back, and I slipped out the back door. We probably broke every pedaling record on the way out of there.

One of the laws that Hitler made was that we could not kill poultry fit for kosher use anymore. He claimed it was cruel to chickens. So every Friday morning, (I guess I was out of school by then, or it could have been Thursday after school), I took a bus to the Jewish part of town where the Russian and Polish Jews lived in an almost ghetto-like fashion. These people spoke Yiddish—a mix of spoiled German, Polish and Hebrew—which I could not speak, and which was frowned upon by western, particularly German, Jews. I caught many a suspicious glance. I had to wait, sometime for hours, until the man with the illegally slaughtered poultry appeared. Then I could be on my way home. Of course, sometimes the waiting was in vain because the man had been caught by the Nazis, who could tell by visual inspection how the chickens had been slaughtered. Of course, we all knew what his fate was! Even being there was extremely dangerous, because there were many raids especially in that area, and I never knew if I would get out of there alive. But I suppose I was lucky as I was one day when I did not go to school.

We had to go to school on Sunday because we did not go on the Sabbath. That particular day I stayed home because of illness. When I returned on Monday, I noticed that many children were absent and found out that the Gestapo had picked up several truckloads full [of children] and shipped them off.

It was dangerous to attend the synagogues. Many times, they would be set on fire. But a lot of information was exchanged, such as which country was giving out visas, how many, and what was happening in the rest of the country. Of course, everything was whispered, no one dared speak up anymore. There were a few who returned from the camps, but they were so afraid to speak that they begged, practically in tears from remembering the horrors and the threats, not to ask them any questions. They were the ones whose emigration had already been arranged and, of course, they did not want to take any chances during their last few remaining days in Germany.

It is difficult for me to remember the exact series of events. I can only remember the things that happened. They might not be in

the order that they did occur. I do remember that pressure at school got stronger. It seems strange that the ones who hated me the most were children who were poor students and all of a sudden became very prominent in the Hitler youth, and declared that they were not allowed to talk to Jews, especially after I would let them cheat, namely take notes from my papers and such. My friends I still saw during the first years. As the pressure in school got stronger, and I had shed many tears sitting in class having to listen to slanderous remarks about the Jews, how evil they were, and all the misdeeds of them, and how they had hurt the German people, I finally realized that I could not stay in that school any longer. I went to see my director and told her that I would have to leave the school to attend one of my own faith. I remember the director crying and saying, "In a way I'm glad that you came to me. If you had not, I would have had no choice but to ask you to leave. I think you know how we feel, a lot of us, at least. I hate to see you go, but it is probably the best. We don't know what's going to happen to any of us, but I hope that you will think well of us no matter what happens."

There were several teachers who were good to me, and kind; some of them got in trouble for it. I remember one incident: My French teacher was my very favorite, and I was a very good student in French, even though I was quite shy. Whenever I wasn't sure about an answer, she would encourage me and say, "Come on, say it, that's right." However, when we started to learn English, I had the same teacher and I did not particularly care for the English language, especially the Oxford English that we learned.

Having to contort your mouth to bring out the proper *eeoh* is not really very attractive for a girl. But eventually she called me, and she said, "Ruth, you know, I know you can do it. French is a beautiful language, but you are going to need English, so why don't you concentrate on it a little more?" This was overheard by a Nazi girl, and for some reason, well, not for some reason, it was because of my teacher's kindness to a Jew, [that my teacher] was fired. I can recall one terrible day when I was ill and did not go to school, and that upon my return, all of my friends who were Jewish were suddenly gone from the school. They had been taken away, but I never learned what happened to all of my childhood friends. I was required to change schools because I was Jewish.

In the meantime, the interference in our lives got stronger and stronger. All of a sudden, I could not talk to my friends anymore when I met them on the street. They averted my glance and did not say hello anymore. I had to take a bus all the way across town to go to the Jewish school where I did not make too many friends, because my friends had been very close, and this was a completely different milieu. I had to work harder, I must admit, just to keep up, whereas it used to be a snap for me.

One law after the other appeared on the scene. Jews were not granted any more drivers' licenses. Military men could come through our neighborhood any time looking for Jews, and we lived in hiding and in fear. You were not allowed to have maids under 45 years of age so the Jewish men would not take advantage of the Aryan girls, which according to their newspaper "Der Stürmer," which was solely dedicated to nothing but horror stories about Jews and what Jewish men invariably did, namely take advantage of the pure, Aryan, Christian maidens. Many licenses of physicians were pulled, my grandfather's among them. He had grown old in the service to his profession. He was a very proud and very straight man. When they took his license from him and he could not practice medicine anymore, he could not grasp the idea that just because he was a Jew, they would take his license. He became mentally disturbed, and after several suicide attempts, he finally was successful. I like to believe that by ending his life he was spared many more horrors. My aunt and uncle, who were both pediatricians, left the country at the beginning of Hitler's regime. They were a few of the very smart ones who could still take everything with them.

Of course my mother maintained that Hitler could not last in a country as civilized as Germany who had artists like Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, and refused to believe what people hinted at, or told her, or what she saw with her own eyes, until it was almost too late. She had married a Polish Jew, my stepfather. Since at that time, a woman would take the nationality of her husband, she absolutely refused to become a Pole, and insisted on his being naturalized to become German. This turned out to be our luck, because as things got rougher and rougher, and more and more people disappeared, and a lot of them tried as much as they could to get out of the country, my mother still would not believe that anything would happen to her, especially since the police came to our house the night before the notorious Crystal Night, when all Jews that were found on the street, or located by the Storm Troops, were arrested and shipped off to concentration camps. The police came to our house and warned us, saying, "We have not given the Brown Shirts your address. They do not know of you. If you stay home tomorrow, you will be safe." They were kind. I don't know, they could have lost their own families by doing this humane act. And yet, it only reinforced my mother's opinion that nothing was going to happen to us.

However, shortly after that, Hitler brought up an action to denaturalize all Poles that had been naturalized and to give them time to either get out of the country or get back to Poland. This proved to be our lifesaver. All of a sudden, my mother had to face the truth, to leave the country. It was so late; it was almost impossible to get any visa to



another country. It seems nobody wanted us. Everybody was afraid that we would be a burden to their country. America was completely out of the question. The doors were absolutely shut to anybody who did not have any relatives here and could provide affidavits. The only possibilities were Cuba, Paraguay, San Domingo, and England, where they would take young girls as maids. I had a chance to go to England. A friend was going to help me to get over there. My mother refused by saying that I was too young. To make a long story short, when we finally arranged to leave the country, the only place that was open to us was Shanghai. I remember that when we packed all our belongings into a huge lift van, we had Nazis sitting there watching our every move. Somehow, we got everything together and went to Bremen. The lift van with all our belongings, which we were permitted to take out of Germany, and which we were able to take onto the ship, were never retrieved and were either taken or went down with the ship [when it was scuttled in 1941.]

### Kristallnacht

*[Mom wrote this up for my nephew in 2007. He was writing a paper for school.]*

It was a rainy winter night at my home in Berlin, and though it was three days before my 17th birthday, the atmosphere was far from festive. We were already living under a cloud of fear as we were daily hearing of arrests, beatings, and even worse acts against Jewish people. We were also personally affected by the terrible acts of Hitler, as they had already taken much of our money, we were no longer allowed to drive, and everywhere we went we would see signs "Juden und Hunde verboten." (Jews and dogs forbidden.) Synagogues had to close down, and we went to an apartment in the community where we set up services. Many German Jews had already left the country if they were able to secure a visa to a country that would accept them. Many of my friends had gone to England to work as maids so that they would have a safer place to live. The evening of November 8th, a policeman came to our front door and warned us that something terrible was going to happen the next night so we should stay indoors and not go anywhere. This was a great act of courage and kindness on the part of that policeman. This one chose not to obey, putting himself at great risk if he were discovered to have done what he did for us.

We did not live in a Jewish neighborhood although we were Orthodox and observant. Because of the kindness of the policemen and because of where we lived, we were one of the families that was spared the terror of that night and the following day. Our home was not attacked. On the day following Kristallnacht, I went out to shop and I saw the destruction, vandalism, burning and looting of Jewish

homes and businesses that had taken place the night before. Many people died either at the hands of the Nazis or by their own hand. As it turned out, on my birthday that year, my parents had to attend the funeral of a friend who had ended his life rather than continue to live in fear for what would happen to them each day.

It was on this day that the actions against the Jews became deliberately more concentrated and violent, namely the official onset to the "Holocaust." On the following Sunday, I prepared to make my volunteer rounds of Jewish families to collect money for charity, which occurred once a month by Hitler's orders. On that day, I realized the damage that had been done, because many of families on my route were gone, our synagogues were burning, and the streets were littered with glass from broken storefronts and merchandise that had been destroyed after the looting.

The following Thursday I had to make my way across town to the Jewish Quarter of Berlin to buy kosher chicken for Shabbat. [It's awful that my mother had to carry out these dangerous errands for her parents!] I had to find my way to the house where many Jews huddled and feared to wait for the arrival of the schochet [ritual slaughterer]. It had to be very secretive since it was against the law to kill chickens according to Jewish law if we had been discovered by the Nazis with it we would immediately have been arrested and sent to the concentration camps. It became a triumph when I made it all across to help back to my home. Anyway, I remembered many things that had happened in Germany. I do not know exactly just how our emigration was accomplished. It seems even to get a visa to get into China we had to have 50 English pounds to show upon entry. Since Hitler would not release any foreign currency, we somehow had to buy it on the black market to be received after we left the country. How this was engineered, how much my parents paid for it, and how others handled it, I do not know. I know it was there when it was needed.

The emigration problem did not end with the obtaining of the visa, you also had to have transportation, which had to be paid, in part, in foreign currency. Naturally, many palms had to be greased, and more black-market wheeling and dealing took place. As far as money was concerned, you could not take it out of the country. On the contrary, Jews had to account for every penny they took out of their accounts. Our valuables had already been taken. First, we had to make lists declaring all of our precious metals, stones, collectibles, etc. Then we received a postcard ordering us to deliver all of these things on a certain day, at a certain time, with the exception of wedding rings; one per person which were only gold bands, not diamonds as here, and two settings of silverware each; a fork, a knife, a soup- and tea-spoon, not all the

different fish knives, dessert forks, serving spoons, etc. Some of the older people who had served in the First World War believed that if they brought their medals along, they would be spared, or at least be given special consideration. But it did not matter at all. A Jew was a Jew was a Jew.

The ship we were supposed to leave on in August of 1939 was delayed for a month for some reason. Our lift van was supposed to go with an earlier ship, but my mother insisted that the van go on the same ship that we did. We finally left Bremen [on the Coburg]. We traveled via the east coast of Africa (Eritrea which was Italian territory at the time). After we had passed Aden, our ship stopped for some unknown reason. We were not told anything except that the ship stopped to take water. This was outside of Massawa, which at the time was under Italian occupation. It was part of Italian Eritrea. In a day or two, we finally found out that England had entered the war, that our ship could not go on nor go back because we were caught between two English harbors and the ship, of course, was German. There were some Americans and some British people on board who were shipped back over Russia to England and on from there. A handful of us refugees, who were now stateless, because you became stateless as soon as you left Germany, were to remain on board the ship until they decided what to do with us. There were about four children and approximately sixteen adults. [I have since found a list of those who were on the ship. There were 8 passengers.] Since I was seventeen at the time, I counted myself as an adult. We remained there for eight months.

[Mom (E-R. W.) told me (L.D.) that the German ship had to be scuttled because the war had broken out and the ship could not go on. The German government was afraid it would be captured and used in the war effort against them. The entry "Massaua" in Wikipedia notes that "During World War II Massawa was the homeport for the Red Sea Flotilla of the Italian Royal Navy. When the city fell during the East African Campaign, a large number of Italian and German ships were sunk in an attempt to block use of Massawa's harbor.]

We were on the ship, and we went ashore several times a week to do some shopping and so on, while we had no idea what our fate was going to be. It was mentioned that we might be returned to Germany, which would have been automatic shipment to the concentration camps.

### In Eritrea

The time that I spent in and off the coast of Africa was not entirely uneventful either, apart from the uncertainty our destiny. Of course, I was in contact with my father [Bernhard Wolfsohn], who had left Berlin about a year earlier, and, having no alternative, also had emigrated to Shanghai, as many of the last desperate, and yet in the long run, fortunate Jews had done. He went to work

in Shanghai trying to arrange the continuation of my voyage. Of course, since the problem was transportation, and there just wasn't any, I am not certain how successful his efforts could possibly have been. However, during this correspondence I was unaware that our letters were intercepted and censored. I was to find out!

I was still living on board of the Coburg, which, along with nine other German freighters were, like ours, between two English harbors anchored a few miles offshore. Every day a "Routineboat" would come to all of the ships to ferry people who wanted to go ashore to the Massaua [Italian spelling of Massawa] harbor and return them in the afternoon. I remember that having to wait for the ferry on land, the sand under my feet was so hot that it burned through the soles of my shoes, and I had to step from one foot to the other as people do when it's cold!

Anyway, one day, a beautiful white motorboat pulled alongside our boat and I found out that it was me they had come for. After my first reaction of being flattered had subsided, (The guys in the boat in their snow-white uniforms weren't too shabby looking; on the contrary, they were very good looking!), I decided to inquire as to what I owed this honor. Maybe it was the fact that I spoke three languages, and they only spoke Italian. I did not find out until much later what the problem was. When we got ashore, they took me to some official-looking building, sat me in a chair under a huge fan, put a huge bowl of fruit on a table beside me and left. A couple of minutes later some other men with piles of paper came in and sat down around the room.

Somebody addressed me in Italian and it soon became obvious that I did not understand them. There was a huddled discussion and an interpreter was sent for.

In the meantime, I noticed something in their possession that looked like a letter that I had written. Since I did not believe that I was a great author who warranted publishing, I became a little suspicious. In the meantime, an interpreter appeared who spoke French and just enough German to tell me I was being charged with treason. In one of the letters I had sent to my father I had written of all the diseases that were rampant upon the natives: cholera, smallpox, typhoid, etc. The Italians claimed that if this news got out, the supply ships would not want to stop there anymore. And, because the Italians were dependent on those supplies for their survival in Africa, this quarantine could have dire results. I don't recall entering the conversation too much, especially since it was continued in Italian, and with the exception of an occasional question directed at me in French, my interpreter seemed to speak for me. Apparently since no actual damage had been done, and maybe because of the fact that the letter was not written with any malicious intent, (my age might also have been taken into consideration), I was taken back to the ship with

an admonition to be more careful of what I wrote.

For some reason, probably because I was too dumb to be scared, I felt like a femme fatale when I returned, and everybody watched come back on board! Everyone except for my mother who claimed that I would be the downfall of all the Jews, if not the entire human race!

Even though we were out of Germany and were of stateless nationality, (Jews lost their citizenship upon leaving the country), we were still on the ship, at least, on German "soil." Italy, under whose rule Abyssinia was, was still neutral at the time. Even though the Nazi attitude ran high in Germany proper, I can't complain about the crew on the ship. In fact, I remember that we were served kosher food in the beginning of our journey. But after the outbreak of the war all bets were off, and we were informed that there would be no more special diet. My stepfather [Adolf Renzer, sometimes I see Nachman as his first name.] being Orthodox, refused to eat anything but boiled potatoes and salads, even though our laws allow dispensation in cases of hardship.

I remember our cook, who was the typical German cook, very big and strong. After several weeks of watching me eat the same food my stepfather ate, he waited for me when I went to the music system—I had become the unofficial disc jockey—and pulled me into the galley. Holding a butcher knife in his big hand he sat me down at the table, produced a bunch of sausage, and announcing that a girl my age could not subsist on potatoes and lettuce, and he made me eat. I can't say that I was unhappy because I already had doubts about religion, especially as it was practiced by my stepfather, namely hypocritically. After that, I ate with the others and the cook was like a father to me. When later on we lived in the mountains, he got me a little kerosene cooker, and every week when he had to go to Asmara to buy supplies for the crew, he brought me some meat, most of the time filet mignon. But I had problems too.

The only women in Massaua, except for the natives and Arabs and some eastern Jewish married women, were Italian prostitutes. Naturally, not only did some of the sailors make a play for me, but some of the bolder ones even tried to climb in my window at night when we were in the barracks in the mountains.

Eventually, a lot of the children got ill. After all, Massawa is the hottest harbor in the world, and it was extremely hot in September. They shipped us into the mountains above the sea to a deserted, so-called hospital. The hospital consisted of barracks that didn't even have windows with filthy wooden floors, just so we could get out of the heat. We were given money enough to exist on while they tried to decide, mainly the nachsturmeneu [meaning unclear; could mean 'nightmarish'], the Italian gov-

ernment and the German government, what to do with us.

I was in barrack by myself, and the recreation camp for the Germans was not far from our barracks. However, since they did not want to be found out—to be with a Jewess had been decreed as a crime punishable by law, and possible extermination by the Third Reich—my screams drove them away. Besides, I had fallen in love with the chief steward, which even though both he and I were threatened with denunciation, afforded me some measure of protection. I was not on speaking terms with my stepfather [Nachman Renzer], and, of course, my mother [Elise Renzer], who would never dare stand up to him anymore, so I spent many hours reflecting on the past while wandering around in the jungle. During those jaunts, I saw and observed many monkey herds that were very noisy, but harmless. I also had one occasion to kill a rattler with my walking stick. The choice was him or me; I preferred the latter.

It was our saving grace that Italy was still neutral at the time, because after approximately eight months under these conditions, an Italian luxury liner, the Conte Rosso stopped, picked us up, and brought us on to Shanghai in the summer of 1940.

The Italian Ocean Liner, SS Conte Rosso, that picked up the Jews in Eritrea. In 1932, she began serving the Trieste–Bombay–Shanghai route, and thus became one of the major escape routes for the Jewish population of Germany and Austria as Shanghai was one of the few places that did not require paid emigration visas. She also served briefly as an Italian troopship during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in the 1930s. (Wikipedia)

During the trip from Massawa to Shanghai, we were not allowed to leave the ship whenever we came to any ports because we did not have visas. People were afraid we would jump ship and stay in another town.

### In Shanghai

When we came to Shanghai, my father and my stepmother waited for me and took me to their place. They had come to Shanghai approximately half a year before us. They were expecting me because we had been corresponding. My father was very happy to see me. It was shortly before his birthday, and he said that was the best birthday present he ever had. I was told later on by the customers of the restaurant that he had established in the meantime, that he was running around, hopping and jumping and laughing and telling everybody, my daughter is coming, my daughter is coming. However, it was very difficult to adjust to family life. I had become 18 in the meantime, and my father and stepmother lived in one room, which I consequently had to share with them. Of course, this is not a very good situation for the couple nor for me. And after approximately a year, I left and found a position in a place of my own.

So in Germany Hitler had every Jew take the middle name of Israel, every Jewess take the



middle name of Sarah, which is still on my passport today. Of course, we didn't use those names any more after the Holocaust. But it was just another little thing that was supposed to aggravate us. And they also, I understand, had identification cards in Germany later on, and, of course, it was noted on them. So, everybody knew immediately that they were Jews, even though they could tell that by the Star of David that had to be printed on everything, that they had to wear on their clothing.

The restaurant my father had opened in Shanghai, Restaurant Grouchy, located on the Rue Grouchy was situated in the French Concession. Our customers were predominantly refugees with a few Americans. I remember we had a slot machine in there. Of course, again, it was legal in Shanghai, and it was owned and serviced by an American whom we suspected of being a refugee from the law of the states. There were also some Russians. All in all, the restaurant was run in a European fashion. And if it had not been for the Chinese that we occasionally saw in the French Concession, we could not really tell too much difference from Europe. Right next to us, was eventually another restaurant of a friend of my father. There was a little boutique, a hat shop; all these places were owned by refugees, and, again, run in the European manner. The doctors, physicians, we had an overflow of. We had many very good and able, physicians, because, after all, they had been banished from Europe, and even from Germany and Austria. Most of the good doctors had been Jews, which is something that Hitler used to pound on, be upset about, forgetting that it was because of their ability and not their faith that they were the best physicians. We also had fantastic lawyers. Of course, we had not much use for them. We got along fairly well. There was constant little haggling between Viennese and Berliners, but this was taken in a tongue-in-cheek fashion.

After a while, I found that I would rather be on my own—I was about 19—rather than stay with my parents. I felt I could be, and wanted to be, independent and I moved to Hongkew. This part of Hongkew had been built up in the meantime by refugees. It was clean, it was modern, and it was a little community in itself. It was part of Shanghai and was across one of the bridges; Shanghai is surrounded by bridges. It was not part of the French Concession anymore. I found a job as a secretary to an Englishman. I had taken English lessons, of course, in Germany prior to my leaving, not only my schooling but I had taken some crash courses, and I had also in the meantime, in Shanghai attended a business college where I learned shorthand and typing. My shorthand was such that I could only decipher it if I had sufficient time. Sometimes I couldn't decipher it at all. When I had the interview with this Englishman, I remember hardly understanding anything that he said, and here I was supposed to take dictation

from him. But it seems that in Shanghai, they were just looking for somebody who was reliable, who was not corrupt, and who they could depend on. I remember him saying not to come before nine o'clock in the morning; from 12 to 2 is dinner time, but not to leave later than four o'clock, because if you spend too much time in the office, you lose face in front of the Orientals. Losing face was a big thing in China. For instance, you could insult a Chinese by trying to tip him. That would make him lose face, which would be the worst thing you could possibly do to him. Anyhow, I was supposed to be working for this man who was very, very patient with me. He himself was half Scotch, half Australian. He had a Japanese wife who hardly spoke any English. He was in his sixties and his little daughter was five. [I have a letter from him to my mother informing her that he had to close his business up. It's very sweet and caring.]

He used to go to the races on Bubbling Well Road. And it was my job to pick up the spreadsheet for him where he would pick the potential winners. On Monday mornings, he would come back into the office and either throw me a bundle of notes across the desk and say, "here is half of my winnings," or he would just mumble, say good morning, and I knew he had lost. He was a very intelligent and a very kind man. He did dictate a few letters to me from time to time, which I took in shorthand, and, of course, constantly running back to him and asking him, "What was this? "What came after that?" Every once in a while, he'd come back and say, "Ellen, this has to go out in a hurry; please take it in longhand."

After the Japanese took over, he first had to wear an armband, marked with B for British. The Americans had to wear an armband marked with A. Since we didn't have any nationality, we were free to still walk around without any armband. He also had to leave the International Settlement where our office was and get ready for deportation to a Red Cross camp. He was dealing in medicinal drugs, and I remember they came in one-pound cans. I smuggled some of those for him. I sometimes wonder where I got the courage or the stupidity to do this, because, as I crossed the checkpoints, I was walking by Japanese guards with their bayonets pointed right at me, and I just walked through with all this contraband in my sleeve.

The International Concession where our office was also being taken over by the Japanese. If they had found these valuable things, they of course would have confiscated them. This way, I smuggled them to his house where he could at least sell them, get the money out of them. (He was in import-export.) I don't recall exactly what we were involved in. I remember typing letters, but it was so long ago, I don't remember, but the business was import-export. Sometimes, in that type of business, you don't

even see what you sell or what you buy because you act as a middleman. It goes directly from the seller to the buyer. The exporter is just the middleman.

At the same time, I believe it must have been about the time of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese decided that the stateless Jews that were there were really their enemies. The Japanese were there as part of the Axis, which of course was combined of the Germans, Italians, and the Japanese. Where to confine Jews? They found it in the dirtiest part of Shanghai, the part called Hongkew, but right outside the part that the Jews had built up. There we had to stay. We could not leave without Japanese permission. Many of our people were cut off from their livelihoods. My father had to sell his restaurant, and he opened another one in Hongkew. People who had their businesses in the French concession, like my father had, or in the International Concession, they were not great businesses. They were not doing as well as most of them had been doing in Germany, financially, before everything was taken away from us, but they made fairly good livelihoods.

I remember that my father had some business with the Japanese, on the side. He was selling suit material, which a lot of immigrants did at that time. The Japanese that he dealt with, at that time, were very different from the ones we got to know during the occupation. The occupation forces were soldiers, very dedicated to their country, but very brutal to us and to the Chinese, not just to us. They had never had it as good before. As I had said, they occupied Shanghai. They took over the apartments and the places that we had built up, and, of course, they didn't have to give anything for it. They were an absolute power. If we needed our passport to get out of the restricted area and into the other parts of Shanghai, we had to stand in line and ask for a permit. It depended on the mood the officer was in that day whether we got one or not. I remember one woman who gave violin lessons. She had some pupils in the International Concession. She would stand in line, and every time that she asked for a permit to leave, it was denied her. However, that same evening the Japanese officer [Ghoya, Mom talked about him.] would appear at her door demanding violin lessons. Of course, he never paid for them. She never got a permit. That went on through all of the occupation. He was one of the more cruel ones. She was lucky he did not abuse her. But I remember one instance, a girl was standing in line, it was a very hot and muggy day, as most of the summer was in Shanghai, and she was in shorts. The officer asked her if she was hot. She said yes, she was. He marched her down to the courtyard where he turned a fire hose on her, a strong water stream. This particular officer, I remember, lived through the end of the war and sometimes I think he would have been happy if he had been dead, because after the war, every bone in

his body was broken by some of our people. He wound up in the hospital for a long, long time.

While all Jews were living in the ghetto, my real father, who was healthy and in his 40s at the time, was arrested for some alleged misstep and imprisoned in conditions of dirt floors, lice, and other filth. His wife, my stepmother, and I paid money to someone who was one of us to find a way to get food to my father. He never received any of the food we sent. After his release, he told us of his terrible thirst, and of an agreement that the guard in the jail had made with him: that in exchange for his suit, which was a very nice one, he would be given a large bowl of water. He gave the guard his suit, whereupon the guard brought a large bowl of water and threw it in my father's face. When he was finally released, he was ill with typhoid and meningitis. He died soon afterward [May 31, 1944], and that is how I tragically and unnecessarily lost the only parent with whom I was close. [from U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum which shows my mother's father's information. [https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person\\_view.php?PersonId=3103660](https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=3103660)]

Our living conditions were about the worst that you can possibly imagine. We were living on the ground floor in a house, which was off a lane, off the street. We had one room which was our living room, bathroom, dining room, kitchen, everything. In the meantime, I had gotten married and I was living there with my husband. I remember one evening, or one time, I was ill and I was flat on my back, and I made a little drawing of the ceiling because the ceiling had a very solid pattern of little children that did not, they don't wear diapers in Shanghai, nor are they probably toilet trained, so they go where ever they are. Of course, that leaked through the ceiling and made quite a pattern. There was hardly a square inch that was not covered. The ground floor, of course, was cement. Heat was, we used little cans, not little cans, but gallon cans that were made into little ovens that burned briquettes. That's what we cooked on too. Of course, the Chinese made those briquettes and they found that the more sand they put in, the more money they made. Of course, that didn't help the burning any, and it was very difficult to get a fire started. Also, the fumes were so strong sometimes that we had to take it out and cook in the lane, in the rain. And sometimes the Chinese would walk by and, whether it was intentional or not, upset the whole thing. Everything went on the ground. And there went our food for several days. I spent many days without eating. We did get some relief through the Red Cross, through care packages, but most of the care packages ended up on the black market. Of course, we didn't have the money to buy them. The Chinese had become very unfriendly toward us, to say the very least, because they felt that we were not in a position of power. There was no reason

to be friendly. They could not get anything out of us. We didn't have anything. Shanghai, if not the rest of China, was very, very poor. Life was cheap. You found deceased beggars on the street; people would just step over them. You would find babies in garbage cans. And even though that was very difficult to accept in the meantime, it became a way of life, and you didn't give it any second thoughts. Naturally, if the Chinese didn't even help each other, they certainly wouldn't help us. We, as a community, stuck together very much and yet we lost quite a few people. Starvation. Exposure. After all, we had lost almost everything in Europe, and even though we had been able to make a living prior to the Japanese occupation, during the occupation it was extremely difficult, and people who still had anything would sell everything they had left piece by piece just to keep their head above water.

I found a job in the beginning in a Viennese bakery and I worked there waitressing for most of the time. But I just remember that that too was outside the restricted area eventually, so I lost that job too.

My husband [Adolf Edward Sonnenfeld, who was in the British Volunteer Corps] was from Breslau. I met him in Shanghai, of course, and the marriage was conducted by going to a Chinese lawyer who would open the door, draw up some documents in Chinese, pronounce to the whole world that you were married and that was it. There was no wedding. I think he called two Chinese in from the street as witnesses, but it was not a typical June wedding. The reason I married was partly due to pressure from him and my mother. I had been engaged in Germany. My fiancé [Werner Goldmann] was in Bolivia and even though he tried everything possible to get me over from Shanghai to Bolivia, the war broke out and we lost all contact. In the meantime, my mother kept harping about that when the war was over, I'd be sitting there as an old maid. He would have been married and have six children and how would that look to the world? And for some reason, I began to believe it myself, and even though I did not really love my husband, I did get married. When the war was over, I found out that he [Goldmann] had waited. He had actually had a proxy wedding performed in Bolivia. He even mentioned that his friend's wife stood in for me, but he had to promise that he would, my fiancé, would babysit after the ceremony so the two of them could go out and celebrate our marriage. Of course, all this happened shortly after America entered the war and we lost all contact.

I was married [in the Hongkew Ghetto] after the Japanese took over. This is also when we could not get any correspondence through any more to South America, or America, or anywhere else. I only worked for a while in that Viennese bakery, I believe. I don't quite remember whether

that was in- or outside the restricted area. I believe it was inside. After I was married, I quit working. My husband did repairs on radios. He invented a little transformer that you put in between the bulb and the outlet to generate more light with less energy because the electricity we received was rationed at the time. He kept us alive by doing things like that. He also had a stand on the street as many other Jews had, where you traded little things that you had brought from Europe, back and forth and generated a little bit of money. There was also a kitchen that would supply you with food if you stood in line. Prior to my marriage I never went there because I was too proud to accept anything like that, I'd rather go hungry. But I remember that later on, my husband would go and stand in line and get food which was pretty nourishing. [He] brought it back and [we] ate it. The area we were in was not that large.

Again, we had the best doctors available, and I think only because of that, did we stay, most of us, stayed healthy, even though there were not many medicines available. I was expecting a child and as I was in the hospital in August of 1945, I was lying on the delivery table, I had about 24 hours labor. I was lying there by myself. [Mom's voice is cracking here. She lost her baby, Viktoria Regina, to smallpox eight months later, April 1, 1946. Viktoria passed away a couple of months after her inoculation. I have the obituary that was published in Shanghai and photos.] I remember it was dark, and all of a sudden, I saw two women holding on to each other coming into the room. I thought, "Uh oh, this woman is farther along than I am," and I tried to scramble off of the table to make room for her. It turned out that those were two nurses who had just found out that the war had ended. They were so deliriously happy they just stumbled all over the place.

The following day, I was on the balcony and I saw the first American planes fly over Shanghai. I felt like jumping up and grasping. Of course, about a month before this happened, the Americans were bombing Shanghai. They were trying to hit the Japanese weapon factory that was situated right next to a refugee camp. The bombs went awry and hit the refugee camp. My stepmother was hurt, her sister, her brother in law, we lost many of our friends, in that particular bombing raid. My husband went to help dig people out that had been buried under the debris. There were also some of our dear people who went and just pulled rings off of people's hands that they saw sticking out. Anyhow, after that, the Americans that we met were really upset about the bombing and the mistake they had made, even though this was exactly as was planned by the Japanese and it was an error that was easily understandable.

I remember too, that in the same room where I had my baby, there was a Japanese



woman who was married to one of the Japanese occupation force officers. They were only in there because they forced their way into everything. The hospital itself was a refugee hospital but you could not deny them access, of course. The moment the war was over, the situation had changed. I remember the man came in once after the woman had given birth to the baby. After he found out that she had given him a baby girl, he furiously stomped out never to be seen again. Of course, he wanted a boy. In the whole Orient, a girl is not worth anything. They sell them, they give them away, sometimes they kill them. This of course, doesn't apply to all the Orientals, but certain classes, lower classes. Then, of course, after I got out of the hospital, I had to stay in there for ten days, because this was still under the old German way. We had a choice. Only after three days, you can dangle your feet after you had a baby. You can sit up after five days, and so on, which was really boring to me because I felt great right after I had the baby.

After I left the hospital and went home, it still took about two years for us to get out of Shanghai because there was such an influx of people trying to decide where to go to, because all of a sudden, every country seemed to be open to us. They wanted to welcome us with open arms. I had lost my baby in the meantime to smallpox and so there were just the two of us, my husband and myself. The major choice we considered was we tried to decide between Australia and America. I had gotten back with my old boss who was now out of the Red Cross camp and whose dog I had kept through the occupation, because he wasn't allowed to have any pets in the camp, and I asked his advice. He said, "Well, if you'd like to go to sleep at nine o'clock at night and just go to church on Sundays, without much activity, go to Australia by all means. Knowing you, you'll go to the States." The visa was gotten through affidavits. My uncle who had emigrated to Palestine at that time, which is now Israel, had in the meantime settled in New York and had established his practice there.

### In America

He had sent me an affidavit or was in the process of sending me an affidavit. However, in the meantime, the Jews of the States had gotten together and had collected affidavits for all the Jews that were to come to this country. Of course, not all the Jews were eligible; there were restrictions on age. My mother and her husband were too old. They chose to go to Israel. Some people even chose to go back to Germany, which is something that I could never understand. But then again, these were older people that had grown up and had grown old in that country, and they probably thought that things would have changed. I have not been bitter about Germany because there were many Germans that helped us. With-

out this help we would not have survived. But to go back there and live was something that I would have not even have considered. When I took a trip back there about five years ago, I could still feel resentment against the Jews and that part of the Germans blamed the Jews for all the bad things that had happened to them during this time. And they even made statements such as, "Well, the Jews got money, and what did we get?" They did forget that they were the ones that were the aggressors.

To get my citizenship, I had to go to school. In the meantime, I had small children; I had been divorced.

[My sister asks, What about your time over? Did you come on a ship? And when did you arrive in the states?]

We arrived in the United States on the 4th of July, [Other documents show July 2.] in San Francisco, and since this was a holiday, we could not enter on that day, but we had to stay on board for another day until the officials came on board with our passports. And we disembarked. We had to go through customs. Of course, we didn't have anything to begin with, but we were greeted by a committee of the Jewish Federation who arranged for living quarters, et cetera, for us.

[My mother started beading moccasins in Los Angeles, then worked at night in a pen factory. She eventually became a draftsman and ended her career working in the Department of Defense, at Lockheed Missiles & Space Co. as an engineer.]

### Addendum

My Mother's Father: Bernhard Wolfsohn was a jeweler in Berlin. Had remarried in Germany before going to Shanghai.

My Mother's mother: Elise Wolfsohn was born Elise Hahn January 11, 1892 in Pyritz, Germany. Married Adolf Nachman Renzer (b. Dec. 15, 1885) in 1938.

My mother, Ellen-Ruth Powers, née Ellen-Ruth Wolfsohn, married my father, Adolf Edward Sonnenfeld in Shanghai, March 6, 1944. Divorced after arrival in U.S. Interlocutory decree September 1952; Final divorce January 6, 1954, Pomona, California. (He changed his name to Edward Adolf Sonnenfeld once a U.S. citizen.) My mother and he had four children. The first one, Viktoria Regina, was born in Shanghai, August 1945; died from smallpox on April 2, 1946. They had three more girls. My mother was pregnant with my sister Susan, on the ride from Shanghai to San Francisco aboard the S.S. General M.C. Meigs. They arrived in San Francisco July 2, 1947. Susan was born on November 30, 1947 in Los Angeles. They had two more girls in Los Angeles, Judy, June 1949; and me, Linda, May 1953. Mom married David Bernard Powers in 1958. They had one son, Brent.

### Mother's Education:

April 1931 to April 1937: Uhland Oberlyceum in Berlin; earned her certificate.

April 1937 to September 1939: Adass Jisroel Oberlyceum; earned her diploma shortly before her escape from Nazi Germany.

June 1940 to June 1941: Kadoorie Schule, Shanghai, China

August 1941 to September 1942: Shanghai Business College

June 1962 to January 1963: Foothill College, Los Gatos, California

Linda Powers Detmers is Ellen-Ruth's youngest daughter. She may be reached at [linjondet@msn.com](mailto:linjondet@msn.com).



## From Beijing to Jerusalem:

### Abigail's Story

By Alan Rosenbaum

Excerpted from *The Jerusalem Post*. 15 July 2020

"I moved to Israel because I am a Zionist," says the speaker on the Skype video call. "The connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel is unbreakable."

Inspirational words such as these would not seem unusual coming from a charismatic rabbi or teacher. But the fact that these powerful words were uttered by a petite, 21-year-old Chinese convert gives them added meaning.

Abigail Windberg was born in Dalian, a city of almost six million people in northeast China. The middle child in a family of three, she and her younger brother were considered "illegal" children, due to China's birth control policy, which at the time permitted only one child per family (in 2016, the law was changed to allow two children per family). Abigail did not exist "officially" for the first two years of her life, until her parents were able to bribe government officials and receive an official ID number. Due to her unofficial status, Abigail could not attend public schools, and was sent to boarding schools from the age of five.

Her mother was a hotel manager and, because of her job, moved frequently to vari-

ous cities. Abigail herself studied at boarding schools in various cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

When Abigail was first sent to boarding school, she was told by her mother not to eat pork and blood, which are staples of the Chinese diet. "When I asked why, she said, 'It is a family tradition. We are Jewish.'"

Abigail's mother's family came from the Jewish community in Kaifeng...During the Yellow River flood of 1938, the family moved to Beijing.

Abigail learned English at boarding school, and became a baseball aficionado, due to the large number of Japanese and Korean students in her school.

After her parents divorced when she was 10, her father moved to Boston with her younger brother, and her sister studied at a boarding school in Switzerland, before attending university. When Abigail was not away at school, she spent most of her time living with her maternal grandparents.

After she completed high school, her parents decided that she should study at the University of Washington, in Seattle, major in computer science, and become an engineer.

Ever the dutiful Chinese daughter, Abigail agreed and went to the United States, but did not enjoy her studies. "I got totally lost in the first year," she says.

Abigail decided to return to China, and worked with several start-ups, helping them develop applications, and meeting with investors. She earned a comfortable living from her work and invested her time and financial resources in building a women's baseball team in China. She soon gave up on that dream, because of the close connection between sports and politics there. She felt lost and did not know what direction to take in life.

Attempting to raise her spirits, Abigail's mother suggested that she attend a one-year volunteer program on an Israeli kibbutz.

"She thought it would be a good opportunity for me because I was always curious about

my family's story, so she thought it would be a good idea for me to come to Israel," Abigail says.

Abigail arrived in Israel in March 2018, after she turned 18, and volunteered at Kibbutz Ein Gev, in northern Israel. Life was quiet for her at the kibbutz until the day that she read a story on Facebook about five Chinese girls from Kaifeng who had moved to Israel and converted, with the assistance of Shavei Israel..."Suddenly, everything became a clear line. I knew I must contact them."

Abigail contacted Eran Barzilay, the director of Shavei Israel's Kaifeng project, and she began developing a greater interest in Judaism. She attended religious services on the kibbutz and was invited to kibbutz residents' homes for Shabbat meals.

Shavei Israel recommended that she continue her Jewish education at Nishmat's English-language summer program, which the five Chinese girls had attended. Abigail says that the beginner's program was amazing. She particularly enjoyed the classes in Jewish law. "After three weeks of studying in the summer program, I felt that I had found the right path of my future life."

When the course ended, Abigail flew to China for a visit, before returning to Israel. She studied at Midreshet Be'erot Bat Ayin for three months, but felt it was a bit too "hassidic and hippy," so she returned to Jerusalem to study at Machon Ora.

Abigail began the conversion process when she studied in Bat Ayin and continued at Machon Ora...

Abigail lives in Jerusalem, and her roommate is one of the original five converts from Kaifeng. She joined Garin Tzabar, the organization that helps and supports lone soldiers who have made aliyah, and plans on entering the IDF in September...

As for her future in Israel after the IDF, Abigail says, "I hope I can do more and contribute to

Israeli society. Because of the coronavirus, I saw some of the darker parts of Israeli society, and it could be better. Everything could be working better. I want to be a lawyer to help Israel, and to help Asian Israelis."

She adds that foreign workers in Israel are a part of society and need to have their rights protected. She also wants to study international relations, because "Israel needs more allies than enemies, and it's important to have a good relationship with China."

Abigail says that she sometimes feels lonely in a spiritual sense, because her family doesn't understand why she made these decisions. However, she has made many new friends here in Israel who share her Zionist values, and who are anxious to start their new lives in Israel.

Being Chinese, she has been subject to some slurs and wayward glances from Israelis. "It's a bit hard for me," she admits. "I saw the attitudes of people when they saw my face."

Nevertheless, she says that coming to Israel is the best decision that she has made in her life. "My life in China and the United States was not always that happy. There was a lot of stress. Here in Israel, every day I appreciate and am grateful for a new life, and I really have hope for the future of my life here."

When asked to discuss some of the positive aspects of life in Israel over her native China, she points to the Israeli trait of chutzpah, as well as the Jewish penchant for asking questions. "When I was in school, I was taught not to ask questions. Every time I asked a question, the teacher said, 'Don't ask it again, because you are wasting everyone's time.' Here in Israel, in midrasha, the rabbi will ask you if you have any more questions. I really love it and enjoy it."

Abigail Windberg has found a home for herself in Israel and has perhaps answered her most important question – that of her identity. "I came from a country that didn't allow me to exist in this world, but Israel said to me, 'You are a member of my people.'

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