



## Jewish Conspiracy Theories in China

By Jordyn Hayme and Tuvia Guring

Excerpted from the *China Media Project*, 18 July 2023

<https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/07/18/jewish-conspiracy-theories-find-an-audience-in-china/>

Recent news of China's renewed access to the Russian port of Vladivostok this May sparked celebration among some Chinese netizens. But among others, it was a painful reminder of its "century of humiliation," beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. At the time, the Qing dynasty's ruling Manchu royals had reluctantly handed over their homeland, which included the port, to their northern neighbors. More territory was ceded to the Japanese invaders in 1931, resulting in the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo.

The Vladivostok decision sparked a debate in corners of Chinese social media about whether a debilitated and increasingly reliant Russia would be made to return the stolen land. Surprisingly, a third perpetrator has emerged alongside the Russian and Japanese empires: the Jews.

In the early 20th century, "before moving into Palestine, Jewish capital chose to settle in the Northeast [of China]," explained a May 19 article by popular WeChat account "Blood Drink". It added that the Jews "were even willing to make a Devil's bargain with the Japanese fascists and give almost all of their money away for this purpose."

Over one-hundred thousand people have now read the post, many of whom learned for the first time how "during the ensuing eight-year war, Japan's military industry, which was financed by Jewish capital, massacred tens of millions of Chinese civilians."

As with most conspiracies, the Jewish-Japanese blood libel contains a kernel of truth. It is based on a little-known episode in World War II known as the "the Fugu Plan".

In 1939, Japanese "Jewish experts" had proposed to invite 50,000 German-Jewish refugees to Manchukuo with the hope that Jewish capital would help revitalize the territory. Drawing on their expertise of the fabricated antisemitic text *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, they hoped that a "deal" with the Jews would inspire them to help improve Japan's position in the war due to their supposed power over the West. It was named after the "fugu," the Japanese blowfish that — like the Jews — was a delicacy when handled correctly, but deadly if not. Although Jews indeed found refuge in Japanese-controlled areas during World War II, they were never seriously involved in the Fugu Plan, and the plan never came to fruition...

(continued on page 6)

## She's In the Army Now

By Shmuel Munitz

Excerpted from *Ynet.com*, 6 Sept 2023

Abigail Windberg, 24, was at the scene of a West Bank terror attack five years ago. "I heard gunfire and took cover. Everyone was told not to go outside. When I eventually went out, I saw blood on the road," she says. "It was the first time in my life that I felt such danger. Only then did I truly grasp the reality of the situation in Israel."

Windberg, a native of China who was at that time studying in a Jewish women's seminary, hadn't yet officially completed her immigration process and had been understandably shaken. "When my mom heard about it, she almost booked me a flight back to China. I was in a real dilemma," she says. "On the one hand, I wanted to continue my studies, but on the other hand, I was genuinely scared. In the end, I told my mom that I would at least I will complete my year of studies because it was important to me."

This incident was a turning point that ultimately led her to decide to enlist in the IDF and serve as a combat soldier. Today, she is a signal operator in the 215th Artillery Brigade, and her unit conducts training exercises in the Golan Heights. "I thought to myself - God forbid if something like that were to happen to me, and I wouldn't have the luck of having someone protecting me and the people I love, what would I do? I wanted to be able to defend myself and others," she explains. "I realized that the security situation in the country wasn't that great, and I wanted to do something for the state."

### How did your mother react to your decision to enlist?

"My mother thinks I'm crazy. Both of my parents think that. They don't really understand it. My mom lives in China, and my dad in the United States, two of the world's strongest countries, so they don't quite grasp why I chose this particular country. I strongly believe in the idea of Zionism and feel that it's important for every Jew, at the very least, to help Israel in some way, if not by immigrating like I did."

Windberg's family originally belonged to the ancient Jewish community in Kaifeng in the Henan province. They were not an observant community, but they did maintain certain traditions and customs, including Jewish holidays. Her father's family eventually moved to the United States, and he was born in Chicago. When she was 10 years old, her parents divorced. Her father returned to the United States and currently lives in Boston, while her mother still resides in Beijing. "My mother used to manage a chain

(continued on page 7)

## Notice to Subscribers. Particularly Overseas Subscribers. Please Consider Receiving Points East Digitally

It is very expensive for us to mail out Points East, particularly to those of you outside the United States. Please consider receiving the electronic version of Points East and letting us put your dues to a better use. Just send an email to [Laytner@msn.com](mailto:Laytner@msn.com) and you'll be switched over. Thanks!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Featured Articles:

Jewish Conspiracy Theories in China .....	1
She's In the Army Now .....	1
From the Editor.....	2
Summary of the Sino-Judaic Institute Board Meeting.....	3
Letter to the Editor.....	4
Book Nook.....	4

### Articles:

Chinese-Jewish-American .....	8
Photo Exhibit on Jewish Life in Tianjin .....	9
Remembering Robert Goldman ..	10
How a Jewish Catholic Canadian became a Tsinghua U Dean: Daniel Bell's Story .....	10
Help Revive the Jewish Community of Kaifeng .....	12

## SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	118
China	17
Israel	8
England	5
Canada	2
Germany	2
Taiwan	2
Australia	2
Japan	2
El Salvador	1
Greece	1
Total:	160

## FROM THE EDITOR

This issue cannot go to press without my mentioning, with profound sorrow, the horrific massacres conducted by Hamas on innocent Israeli civilians. But even as I continue to mourn their murders, I also grieve for the Palestinian civilians of Gaza, most of whom want nothing more than to live their lives free from Hamas' control. To my mind, nothing illustrates Hamas' callous disregard for Palestinian lives than their attack on Israel's kibbutzim and towns. I remain horrified by Hamas' willingness to subject the Palestinian civilians to Israeli reprisals, knowing that these were bound to be ferocious—and all in the name of a "resistance" that offers nothing but the possibility of more violence. As of this writing, Israel has not (yet) invaded Gaza and not (yet) succeeded in its stated objective of destroying Hamas' military capabilities. It seems to me, however, remote as the possibility may be, that the alternative to the status quo in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank—the substitute for this endless cycle of terrorism and reprisal—is for people on both sides who support the idea of peaceful co-existence to rise up, and clamor for it, and demand that their leaders negotiate it. Or do what they need to do to replace those leaders.

As history is being made in a big way in the Middle East, SJI is poised to make history in a much smaller way by bringing a Kaifeng Jew out of China for training as a Jewish resource person to her/his community members. See the back page of this issue for details on how you can help in this historic venture.

On an even less significant note, the attentive reader will have noticed that the Chinese characters we use in our name have changed. At its recent meeting, the SJI Board approved a change recommended by Board member Josh Zuo, a Kaifeng Jewish descendant. (See his story in *Points East* 37:1, March 2022.) Josh explained that a shift in the translation of 'Sino' from Zhong guo to Zhong hua would be a better fit with our mission because of the latter character's focus on culture. This subtle, yet significant change, hopefully will demonstrate a greater openness to the broader Chinese cultural world and foster a greater sense of welcome to our audiences, not only in China, but also in Taiwan and in the Chinese diaspora.

**Anson Laytner**

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Editor

*Points East* is published by the Sino-Judaic Institute, a tax-exempt, non-profit organization. The opinions and views expressed by the contributors and editor are their own and do not necessarily express the viewpoints and positions of the Sino-Judaic Institute.

Letters to the Editor and articles for *Points East* may be sent to:

### Preferred Form:

e-mail: [laytner@msn.com](mailto:laytner@msn.com)

or to: Rabbi Anson Laytner  
1823 East Prospect St.  
Seattle WA 98112-3307

*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: Prof. Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, 34 Colgate Rd., Unit 1, Roslindale, MA 02131 USA

**Sino-Judaic Institute**  
c/o Rabbi Anson Laytner  
1823 East Prospect St.  
Seattle WA 98112-3307

### SJI Officers

Anson Laytner, President  
Wendy Abraham, Vice-President  
Steve Hochstadt, Secretary/Treasurer  
Arnold Mark Belzer, Immediate Past President

### Managing Board

Joel Epstein, Beverly Friend, Loraine Heller, Dan Levitsky, Ondi Lingenfelter, Abbey Newman, Kevin Ostoyich, James Peng Yu Charlene Polyansky, Eric Rothberg, Danny Spungen, Joshua Zuo

### International Advisory Board

Moshe Y. Bernstein, Jan Berris, Zvia Bowman, Mark Cohen, Avrum Ehrlich, Fu Youde, Jonathan Goldstein, Judy Green, Len Hew, Tess Johnston, Dan Krassenstein, Den Leventhal, Michael Li, Yonatan Menashe, Maisie Meyer, Mark Michaelson, Sonja Muehlberger, Gustavo Perednik, Andrew Plaks, Pan Guang, Shi Lei, Yitzhak Shichor, Elyse Silverberg, Noam Urbach, Shalom Wald, Tibi Weisz, Xiao Xian, Xu Xin, Albert Yee, Zhang Qianhong, David Zweig.

### Past Presidents

Al Dien, Leo Gabow

## Bequest Request

Please consider putting the  
Sino-Judaic Institute in your will.

## Summary of the Sino-Judaic Institute Board Meeting, 30 July 2023

Present on Zoom were Anson Laytner, President, Steve Hochstadt, Secretary/Treasurer, Wendy Abraham, Vice-President, Ondi Lingenfelter, Arnold Belzer, Joel Epstein, Beverly Friend, Loraine Heller, Dan Levitsky, Kevin Ostoyich, Charlene Polyansky, Eric Rothberg, Danny Spungen, James Yu, Joshua Zuo. Doron Shapir, invited guest.

### Guest Speaker

Doron Shapir, an Israeli student, was invited to make a presentation to the Board about his contacts with and visit to Kaifeng on April 3–6 2023. He was taken to various Jewish sites in Kaifeng and met a number of Jews there. He talked about “smooth relationships” in Kaifeng and noted the Israeli curiosity expressed by the organization Shavei Israel about what’s happening in Kaifeng. The Kaifeng descendants are very family-oriented rather than centrally directed into a “community”. Families have different views on how to move forward with their Jewish heritage. Doron noted the lack of educational resources and of a central authority to make decisions, resulting in general lack of knowledge about Judaism. He said there is nothing displayed in the Kaifeng Museum about Jews. He did participate in a Seder, using a Chinese-style Haggadah. He felt embraced by his hosts and did some reading of the Haggadah himself. He mentioned about Christian Chinese who want to learn Hebrew, noting he is not sure of their reasons.

In response to a question by Loraine, Doron estimated about 10 to 15 children among these families. Steve encouraged him to write an article for Points East or elsewhere about his experiences. In response to Anson’s question about whether we can make Zoom calls with Kaifeng Jews, he said it was possible, but not easy. He believes that some people in Kaifeng have participated in Zoom calls from abroad and noted as an example some Christians studying Hebrew. He noted Chengdu Beth Shalom as having an emphasis on teaching Christians Hebrew and thought we should try to understand why and how. He suggested that the people in Kaifeng would like to know more about what is going on in their own city and in Beijing. In response to Wendy’s question about how we might get materials to Kaifeng, he said one is never sure in China. David Li has been able to receive things from Israel, e.g. matzot. Doron said there might be a way to send certain things, and suggested emphasizing family and creativity. Eric

wondered whether this meant directing things to particular family units. Josh explained that the nature of the materials we might send would affect what means or medium we use. James Yu asked how the families are considered. Doron said he met 4 to 5 families, and he thinks they are officially Han Chinese. He suggested that we create a database of links to Kaifeng descendants, a gathering place for personal contact information, so that we can keep them informed, and they could have more contact with each other and us.

### Election of New Officers

Anson and Steve explained the technical problems that currently make the job of Treasurer inefficient and complex because Steve lives in three different places every year. Anson asked for volunteers to become Treasurer and repeated this request later in the meeting. There was no response. Wendy and Ondi were elected first and second vice-presidents respectively, and Anson remains president.

### Bylaw Changes

Anson proposed a number of changes to the Bylaws, which had originally been discussed at the Board meeting in 2007, but not yet incorporated into the Bylaws. These changes were discussed article by article.

#### Among the changes approved were:

- Purposes of SJI: a) To assist the Kaifeng Jewish descendants, where Jews have been living for over a millennium, in reconnecting with their cultural heritage as appropriate. b) To support research on Jewish life in China, in Kaifeng, Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries, by providing grants.
- All term limitations on Board service were voted to be removed.
- A broad nondiscrimination clause, Article VI, was unanimously adopted: “No one shall be denied membership because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, national origin, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law.”

### SJI Traveling Exhibit

Arnie explained that the SJI traveling exhibit has been held in storage in Savannah since 2017. He said it is a “really nice exhibit” for which he has paid storage fees but now would like SJI to take on this cost and to decide what to do now with the exhibit. He suggested the possibilities of a congregation in Flushing, NY, temporarily or permanently or perhaps the Asian museum in Seattle. Wendy suggested the Royal Museum in Toronto.

It was voted unanimously that the SJI will take over the storage payments and decide on the future of the exhibit. Arnie will check with the Flushing congregation and Wendy will contact the ROM.

### Proposal to Change “guo” to “hua” in our Name

Josh proposed this change noting that it would provide a better translation of “Sino” and would be more acceptable in the Chinese diaspora. Ondi and James agreed with Josh’s explanation. The change was accepted unanimously.

Anson will follow up with a graphic designer.

### Financial Help for Individual Kaifeng Jews

Dan said that he received an email from a Kaifeng Jew detailing his family’s financial problems and requesting SJI’s help. This led to a broad discussion of SJI policy regarding financial support for individual Kaifeng Jewish descendants. Eric noted that in the past, SJI has provided tuition for kids. Wendy said she personally did not support SJI providing financial support, especially not to support activities not connected to Jewish heritage. There emerged a consensus that SJI could act as a conduit for funds collected privately. We discussed a possible separate fund specifically for aid to families in the community in hardship but nothing was resolved. Anson asked Ondi to organize that discussion.

### Comments on Reports

After his President’s report, Anson got approval for the publication of a special issue of Points East featuring a major article by a pseudonymous Chinese author. Much time was spent planning on the plan to bring a Kaifeng Jew out of China for training as a para-rabbi.

Wendy reported on behalf of the Fundraising Committee on the successful launch of our three designated funds to which donations are welcome: The Denise Yeh-Bresler Kaifeng Scholarship Fund, The Arthur H. Rosen Sino-Judaic Memorial Fund (grants for scholars and creatives), and The Shanghai Jewish Memories Fund. She also outlined all the improvements made to the SJI website and noted how it dovetails nicely with fundraising and membership.

Steve’s Treasurer’s Report indicated that SJI has assets of nearly \$45,500, with the publication of Points East being our biggest expense. Yeshiva University received a grant of \$5,000 for a Chinese language YouTube holiday series. When Steve gave the he raised the general question of whether we should support official Chinese institutions. Later in the

meeting Anson asked whether anyone opposed to working with Chinese institutions. There was no opposition.

### Other Discussions

Danny informed the Board about the new museum in Yiyang devoted to celebrating the humanitarian work of Dr. Feng Shan Ho, Manli Ho's father, who was born in Yiyang. A delegation from Yiyang is coming to SF Jan. 16th-17th, and Manli arranged meetings and meals with the Chinese Consulate, which Danny will attend. Danny noted that the Spungen Foundation will not do anything without connection to SJI.

### Letter to the Editor

Dear Rabbi Laytner,

I read the [special] September issue of Points East with great interest. The theme of the Kaifeng Jews and the intersection of Jewish and Chinese identities led me to recall an experience of more than three decades ago.

In April 1992, I was one of the representatives from Asian Jewish communities invited to Beijing to attend, as observers, what was called "The First International Colloquium on Chinese and Jewish Culture," sponsored jointly by the World Jewish Congress and the China International Culture Exchange Centre. Among the participants were novelist Chaim Potok, former President of Israel Yitzhak Navon, and WJC Secretary-General Israel Singer.

Over three days, a total of 25 papers were presented by Jewish and Chinese scholars. Many of the papers emphasized elements of commonality between the Jewish and Chinese peoples, including historical consciousness, respect for education and love of learning, devotion to family, the existence of diasporas that have experienced both prosperity and discrimination, and (brought up by one of the Chinese presenters) "business acumen." Sidney Shapiro, an American who spent most of his life in China, gave a paper that reviewed the scholarship about the history of the Kaifeng community.

Originally the colloquium was to be held in a fancy international hotel, but for security reasons the attendees in the end were housed in the prestigious Diaoyutai State Guest House and the concluding banquet took place in the Great Hall of the People. As dinner at the banquet was beginning to be served, we became aware of a commotion on the other side

of the room as a crowd gathered around a late arrival. One of my tablemates said: "Don, you speak Chinese. Why don't you go over there and see what this is all about?"

The man who was causing all the fuss was handing out business cards that identified him as Professor Zhao Xiangru, affiliated with an institute of minority studies. He was also showing his national ID card on which his ethnicity was listed as Jewish (you tai). I asked how many you tai ren there are in China, and although I don't remember his precise answer, I recall being astounded by the number, which was probably in the low thousands.

When I returned to my table and reported on what I had heard, an Israeli diplomat who was attending said something like: "And as soon as word gets around that an Israeli embassy has opened here, there will probably be a few hundred thousand 'Jews.'"

Wu Jinyao's article mentions that the authorities revised the ethnic classification system a few years later to remove the you tai designation option. And I am not aware that the First International Colloquium on Chinese and Jewish Culture was ever followed by a second.

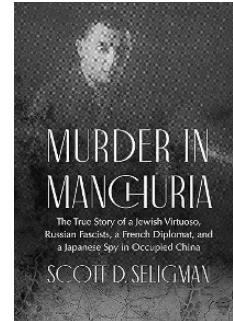
Don Shapiro, Taipei  
donscha@gmail.com

### A Belated Correction

I read with concentration your most interesting historical overview about Kaifeng in POINTS EAST (29:3, Nov. 2014). There is a minor error I would like to correct. There were not two separate visits by European Jews to Kaifeng in 1957, one in February and one in November. There was only one visit: Timoteus Pokora and I visited together the Li family in the Scripture Study Lane. I was then an undergraduate student and Mr. Pokora a post-doctoral researcher from Charles University in Prague. We were part of a group of about twenty foreign students in the History Department of Beijing University led by a teaching assistant around historical places in Henan and Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces. The privacy we had hoped for when visiting with Chinese Jews alas did not avail: not only did we have to put up with the presence of a Communist Party cadre, but also with the presence of several East German students.

René Goldman  
t.dekur@shaw.ca

## BOOK NOOK



**Murder in Manchuria: The True Story of a Jewish Virtuoso, Russian Fascists, a French Diplomat, and a Japanese Spy in Occupied China.**  
By Scott D. Seligman

University of  
Nebraska/Potomac Books: October 2023

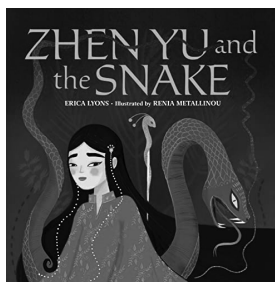
240 pages, 20 photographs, 4 maps,  
1 chronology, 1 glossary, index  
Hardcover and E-book

When concert pianists Semyon Kaspé and Lydia Shapiro parted on a street in the city of Harbin near midnight on August 24, 1933, neither could anticipate the dark sequence of events the coming months would hold in store. The kidnapping of Semyon that night would set the Manchurian Jewish community on edge, arouse worldwide opprobrium, and leave behind an unsolved mystery. And it would pull in an improbable cast of Jewish merchants, Japanese military men, White Russian thugs, French diplomats, Chinese judges, an Italian spy-for-hire and even Pu Yi, the deposed former boy emperor of China. It turned out to be a watershed event in the history of the so-called Empire of Manchukuo, a piece of northeast China forcibly carved off by the Japanese Army in 1931 and declared independent.

Part cold-case thriller and part social history, the book is an effort to merge the author's interests in Chinese and Jewish history. The tragic tale of Semyon Kaspé heralded the exodus of thousands of Russian Jews who had called this northeastern Chinese city home for decades, despite a grand Japanese plan to keep them there and use them for their later conquest of Asia. It helped unmask Manchukuo as the Japanese puppet state it was. And the book posits a solution to the mystery of exactly who ordered the abduction, a question that has puzzled historians for decades.

The publisher is offering a discount of 40% off the list price to those who order directly. To do so, go to: <<https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/potomac-books/9781640125841/>> and use the code 6PC9. It is also available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and all the usual websites that sell books. An audio version is also in the works and should be available later this year from Tantor Media.

## Zhen Yu and the Snake



By Erica Lyons

Illustrations by Renia Metallinou

Kar-Ben Publishing

Hardcover, 24 pages

Reading age: 4 - 8 years; Grade level:

Preschool - 2

## Talmudic Tale with a 12th Century Chinese Twist

by Jordyn Haime

Excerpted from the JTA, 2 October 2023

Rabbi Akiva's daughter was destined for death on her wedding day, at least according to the star-gazers. So the early Jewish sage seemed resigned to his daughter's fate.

But on the wedding day, Rabbi Akiva's daughter offered a poor old man her portion of the wedding feast. That night, before going to bed, she removed her hairpin and stuck it in the wall. In the morning, she discovered that the hairpin had pierced the eye of a poisonous snake, which trailed after the pin as she pulled it from the wall.

"Charity saves from death," Rabbi Akiva declared.

Erica Lyons doesn't remember the first time she heard this Talmud story, but she can't forget its many strange omissions and inconsistencies. What rabbi listened to astrologers? Why wasn't Rabbi Akiva worried about his daughter's fate? And why didn't Rabbi Akiva's daughter have a name of her own?

"It sort of made me think of Jephtha's daughter, this other girl who is going to potentially be sacrificed for the sake of a story, of a lesson of some sort," said Lyons, referencing another biblical character from the Book of Judges.

Lyons's new children's book, "Zhen Yu and the Snake," published this month with rich illustrations by Renia Metallinou, seeks to fill in those gaps — with a twist. The story is set in 12th-century Kaifeng, China...Its main characters are all Chinese Jews — Rabbi Akiva becomes Li Jian and his daughter finally gets a name, too: Zhen Yu, which means "precious jade" in Chinese. The astrologer in the story becomes a fortune-teller from the Chinese city of Chengdu, which was home to several famous fortune-tellers at the time...

In Lyons's version of the story, Zhen Yu is the main character, who lives a life of virtue long before getting married. Common in Chinese culture, the presence of the fortune-teller feels natural in the Kaifeng market, where he reveals Zhen Yu's fate to Li Jian on an afternoon before Shabbat.

Lyons stays loyal to the source text, highlighting the characters' observance of Jewish law and the importance of Jewish values in their lives. But the setting and characters make the story more accessible to non-Ashkenazi readers, she said.

"The Talmud belongs to all Jews around the world," said Tani Prell, creative director at Be'chol Lashon, a non-profit dedicated to raising awareness about the racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity in Judaism, primarily through education. Encouraging teachers to include diverse Jewish stories is "a hard thing to do" when those resources are limited, Prell said. "So I think it's beautiful that Erica is creating the resources that do have such a direct impact on the lived experiences of young Jews of color."



Lyons, who has been living in Hong Kong for over two decades, had always wanted to be a writer. In college, she majored in English and Jewish Studies but began her career as a lawyer for an insurance company in New York. When she moved to Hong Kong with her husband in 2002, she saw the opportunity to get back to her undergrad roots.

Today, she is deeply involved with Hong Kong's historic Jewish community...The city's Jewish population has fluctuated over the years but remains about 3,000-4,000 strong today with six congregations to choose from. Lyons chairs the Hong Kong Jewish Historical Society and serves as the Hong Kong delegate to the World Jewish Congress.

As a Persian-Ashkenazi Jew who is raising Chinese children, Lyons has prioritized the inclusion of Jews of diverse experiences in her work in Hong Kong. As a journalist and founder of Asian Jewish Life, a magazine that spotlighted Jewish stories in Asia from 2008 until 2016, she has always been fascinated by "Jewish stories in the margins" — little-known bits of Jewish history or traditions that have gone overlooked by the Jewish majority living in the West...

Lyons's book comes at a time when Jewish stories from Asia — especially stories of Jewish escape and survival in China and Japan during World War II — are receiving a wave of attention. In this year alone, stories about Jewish refugees in Asia have been the subject of multiple novels, an exhibition in New York City, a musical, and two high-profile symphony performances.

In these stories, China is often a temporary backdrop against which Western Jewish stories are set. There is less awareness of the history of the Chinese Jewish community in Kaifeng, Lyons said.

"In this way, I was able to educate people without being didactic in any way. I didn't just pick a random city in China and plop my characters into it. I picked a Jewish community, and I think a lot of people are not aware that [Kaifeng] was a historic community," she said.

Books for young readers about Chinese or Asian Jews, in particular, have been rare. But the widening availability of literature about diverse Jews in recent years is creating more demand for these stories, said Prell.

Nicholas Zane, a master's student at Dartmouth University whose family immigrated to the United States from China with the help of a Jewish family in the Catskills, has been developing accessible information about the Kaifeng Jews through a website, nonfiction books and picture books in Chinese and English. "Two New Years," a picture book published last month by Richard Ho, tells the story of a family that celebrates both Rosh Hashanah in the fall and Chinese New Year in the spring.

"There's these stories that people don't know, and to be able to tell them and bring them to Jewish children, and children generally, is really incredible," Lyons said.

But there are still gaps, Lyons said, and she has been busy trying to help fill them with several other forthcoming picture books on the way. "Counting on Naamah," released on September 5, turns Noah's wife Naamah into a mathematical genius. In the coming year, her other releases will tell the stories of an 1881 Yemenite aliyah journey, the Indian Bnei Israel Jews (illustrated by renowned Indian-Jewish artist Siona Benjamin) and a Chinese-Jewish girl who must figure out how to celebrate Sukkot and the mid-autumn festival on the same night.

"Racial diversity amongst the Jewish people is not a new thing. It has been there. That's another reason why I also think it's very, very cool for Erica's books, that with 'Zhen Yu and the Snake' and 'Naamah,' it's these stories that have been part of Jewish tradition over time," said Prell.

### **Conspiracy, continued from page 1**

The Fugu Plan, though, takes on a different meaning inside China: It demonstrates a foreign assault on the homeland, with “Jewish capitalists” portrayed as the puppeteers behind Western governments seeking to “contain” China’s rise.

At the time of writing, the Fugu Plan is featured in the top search result for the word “Jew” on Douyin, ByteDance’s Chinese equivalent of TikTok. The video is the first in a three-part series about the historical “mistakes” of the Jews.

In less than eight minutes, the video’s narrator blames the Holocaust on Jewish greed, accuses Jews of starting China’s “century of humiliation” by financing the Opium Wars, and describes their cunning Fugu Plan with the Japanese.

Other videos about the Fugu Plan have received as many as 200,000 likes and 30,000 shares. Millions of others have followed the story on social media, where it can also be found with a simple search on Bilibili, WeChat and Weibo, among other platforms.

The narrative has become so popular that an acclaimed Chinese author Yang Shu received state funding to pen a spy novel based on the story, which has been short-listed for television or film adaptation by the state-led Chinese Writers Association.

The conspiratorial spin on the Fugu Plan only scratches the surface. A distinct brand of localized antisemitic conspiracies is thriving on Chinese media platforms. A quick search for “Jews” on WeChat, Douyin, Bilibili, Weibo, or Zhihu, reveals that negative, anti-Jewish content and conspiracies take up significant real estate among the top results.

### **The economics of antisemitism**

Antisemitism is not just a social media phenomenon. Despite Beijing’s tight control of the information space, it can also be found among leading academics, party-state journalists, and military strategists. Whereas benign pro-LGBTQ posts and dissenting political voices are often censored, Jewish hatred is openly propagated.

The mirror image of this phenomenon is more well-known. Any Jew who travels through China and reveals their heritage will be met with an admiring torrent of ostensibly “philosemitic” remarks: Jews are inherently intelligent, clever, business savvy, and wealthy. Today, this attitude is widely understood by outsiders as a harmless admiration of stereotypical Jewish traits.

The issue with this “positive” spin is the very fine line that separates it from overt

antisemitism. To those who admire Jews for being inherently intelligent and good with money, holding resentment for their supposed disproportionate power over American institutions like Wall Street, the Federal Reserve, and Hollywood is not a major leap.

None of this is to say that antisemitism is widespread in China, or to suggest the PRC is a uniquely and irrevocably racist country. However, it does beg the question of how a country with a negligible Jewish population and an even smaller indigenous Jewish community could form such strong opinions about people they had never met.

Chinese antisemitism should first be viewed as one manifestation of a broader problem of racist nationalism in Chinese discourse. Earlier this month, many observers were shocked and appalled to see how China’s top diplomat Wang Yi hinted at an East Asian race-based bonhomie against “sharp-nosed” and “yellow-haired” Europeans and Americans, advocating for an East Asian alliance that “can eliminate external interference and achieve sustainable development.”

The irony is that despite exhibiting some of the most well-documented instances of systemic violence, dehumanization, and discrimination against ethnic minorities, China is rarely called out for racism...

Chinese nationalism under Mao Zedong viewed racial issues through the prism of class struggle, though there were times when the differences were merely semantic. When socialist Israel aligned itself with the “capitalist” Western Bloc, China gravitated towards the anti-Zionist Muslim world, viewing the Jewish state as “the enemy.” With little to no personal contact with Jews, many Chinese scholars and statesmen came to rely on the deeply antisemitic Soviet and Pan-Arabist anti-Zionism that masqueraded as legitimate criticism of Israel.

The enduring legacy of ultra-leftist “enemy studies” abounds in the works of Beihang University military strategist Zhang Wenmu. In a series of articles for a peer-reviewed socialist journal under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Zhang describes Covid-19 as a usurious American-Jewish bioweapon aimed at China and humanity as a whole. In keeping with the teachings of Mao and Karl Marx, Zhang says that “what Jews require most is an environment conducive to borrowing, which includes things like financial crises, pan-

demics, disasters, and, preferably, war.”

In the early 1990s, during the second coming of reform and opening, opportunistic writers and publishers flooded bookstores with “get-rich-quick” guides in an attempt to profit from the pervasive stereotype of the “Jewish Shylock.” An entire genre of books has emerged that portrays Jews as a wellspring of financial wisdom, a source from which the Chinese could learn valuable lessons.

One of those books is *The Jewish Guide to Getting Rich*, which includes a seemingly admiring line: “The money of the world is in the pockets of the Americans, but the money of the Americans is in the pockets of the Jews.”

Following this logic, nouveau riche families in Shenzhen can now enroll their kids in posh programs designed to help them “learn from the best” in management, finance, and parenting so that they, too, can carry on a Rothschild-like legacy.

However, these assertions become troubling when they contribute to the notion that Jews are influencing America’s trade war and efforts to contain China. Similar conclusions can be found in viral videos and posts discussing the alleged Jewish-Japanese Fugu Plan, in which “Jewish capital” supposedly supported Japan’s war against China.

Conspiracy theories thrive on ignorance and sensationalized content reaps lucrative clicks and revenues. However, spreading rumors online risks falling afoul of China’s dreaded Cyberspace Administration, inviting charges of “picking quarrels and making trouble” that could lead to imprisonment. Antisemitism avoids this fate, given that these narratives are seamlessly embedded within state-sanctioned nationalistic frameworks, warning against foreign encirclement and influence...

A prime success story of this tactic is *Currency Wars*, a five-volume book series by Song Hongbing. Beginning in 2007, its publication represents a significant turning point in the integration of Jews as stakeholders in popular conspiracies.

The series claims to reveal the secrets of an international financial cabal dominated by a small group of wealthy Jewish elites, most notably the Rothschild family. According to the author, their intentional manipulation of the Federal Reserve results in major social, political, and military disasters.

Despite being panned in China and elsewhere for their broad generalizations, factual errors, and overt antisemitism, Song’s books were a commercial success, with over three million copies in circulation as of 2020. They even re-

ceived endorsements from senior officials in Beijing, including former Chinese Vice President Wang Qishan, who reportedly recommended the series to his staff.

This process of othering the Jews has allowed the Chinese to project their own anxieties and desires onto a group that is both foreign and familiar.

Wuhan University professor Sunny Han Han argues that Currency Wars represents a broader trend of Chinese “pop-nationalism.” This phenomenon revolves around conspiracy theories targeting the “hypothetical West,” an abstract force believed to hinder China’s ascent.

It appeals to nativist anxieties over Western influence and globalization, which Han traces to the emergence of early Chinese nationalism in the late Qing. According to Han, such anachronisms perpetuate traditionalist groupthink. Even more concerning, they distort Chinese perceptions, ultimately perverting Beijing’s ability to communicate effectively with the world.

### The ultimate Other

Conspiracy theories and racism are prevalent throughout the world, across all cultures and time periods. And yet, the setting in which they evolve is essential to understanding them.

From Sun Yat-sen to Wang Yi, racialized discourse has been an element of Chinese nationalism since the late Qing dynasty. By classifying Jews as innately external and homogeneous group, the PRC’s founding fathers were able to see a reflection of their nation’s own fate [and future]...

Historical trends also influence the geopolitical landscape. China established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, after the Cold War had ended and the Maoist class mentality had subsided. Consequently, antisemitic rhetoric wrapped in anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist language had to be discarded as well. Nevertheless, countless Chinese politicians and academics carry on the Soviet legacy and use the Jewish state as a battering ram against its American “big brother,” in what Glenn Timmermans of the University of Macau refers to as “antisemitism by proxy.”

In China, where there is a minuscule Jewish minority, conspiracy theories about the treatment of the country’s sizable Muslim, Christian, LGBTQ, or African communities face greater scrutiny. Antisemitism, however, is rarely discussed as it exists primarily in elite circles and online. Diplomats from China (and Israel) would even go so far as to claim that “antisemitism has never existed in China.”

The socioeconomics of the country’s rapid development may explain the niche

market for books and programs based on the stereotypical Jewish financier. At the same time, the prevalence of antisemitism in the world’s second-largest economy is concerning. China accounts for one-fifth of the world’s internet users, with over a billion active users. As scholars Yang Tian and Fang Kecheng have found, the nationalist “influencers” who coordinate and share content on a daily basis comprise a large, toxic network.

Furthermore, despite their xenophobia, they share ideological ties with the far right in the West and Eastern Europe. According to Yang and Fang, the Chinese Han majority, which accounts for more than 90 percent of the population, claim that their own majority culture is in crisis due to minority groups such as Muslims, Blacks, or, in this case, Jews.

Due to their direct import from the West, many of the aforementioned Chinese conspiracies should be very familiar to Westerners. In his lectures, for example, Jin Canrong, dean of Renmin University’s School of International Studies, has promoted the Great Replacement theory. Popularized by French nationalist Renaud Camus, the theory holds that non-white immigrants are replacing white European societies with the help of Jews.

Nevertheless, when we examine these theories through a historical lens, we can observe their transformation and incorporation of Chinese metaphors and distinct cultural and historical notions. What is the Fugu Plan conspiracy but the Great Replacement with Chinese characteristics?

To rationalize Chinese antisemitism on ignorance is, at best, patronizing. Many of its proponents, including naturalized American citizen Song Hongbing, have resided or attended school in the West. Some have even written extensively about the perils of “Western” antisemitism.

Contemporary antisemitism — whether in the United States, Europe or China — is, in the end, a conspiracy that has proven remarkably useful around the world. As American writer and activist Elad Nehorai writes, antisemitism does not always appear to be Jew hatred: “Jew hatred is actually the end result of antisemitism.” Viewed from this perspective, perhaps no one should be surprised that kitschy admiration for Jews has turned sour; isn’t China just catching up to the rest of us?

*Jordyn Haime is a freelance journalist based in Taiwan and Tuvia Gering is a researcher at Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies’ Diane & Guilford Glazer Israel-China Policy Center.*

She’s, continued from page 1



Staff Sergeant Abigail Windberg  
(Photo: IDF Spokesperson’s Unit)

of hotels, so every few years, I had to move from to a different city in China. It was challenging; I studied in boarding schools, and I was constantly adjusting to a new environment,” she says.

### Was Judaism practiced in your household?

“In my home, we did celebrate Passover, but my parents aren’t religious, and it’s not very important to them. As a child and teenager, I didn’t know much about Judaism, and I never read the Bible. Judaism is not one of the five recognized religions in China. Authorities warned the Kaifeng community that people were not allowed to pray together. Most people in the community aren’t religious, so it did not matter to them. In my family, we have Jewish traditions, like not eating pork, seafood, or blood. We also don’t mix meat and dairy. Pork is a food staple in China, and I always made sure not to eat it. I remember when I was in boarding school, some friends put pork in my lunchbox,” she says. “They thought that if I ate it, I would die. They were just kids, and they did it as a joke. After I ate it, I felt like I had done something wrong.”

### Was there any discussion in your home, about Israel and Zionism?

“We always heard about Israel from people who had visited and there are also organizations that come to China and volunteer to teach people from the community about Judaism.”

### Did you encounter antisemitism in China?

Not generally, but I wouldn’t usually tell people that I’m Jewish. Most people in China don’t even know what being

Jewish means. The truth is, that I also didn't fully understand what it meant to be Jewish. Sometimes kids would make fun because the Chinese word for Jew sounds the same as the word for pig. When I studied at a university in the United States, I did encounter antisemitism, particularly on campus during protests against Israel. There were incidents when people on campus who were antisemitic, vandalized a sukkah that had been set up there."

### From the kibbutz to the midrasha

After a year of studies at the University of Washington in Seattle, she felt the need to change direction. "At the end of the year, I felt like I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. I returned to China to weigh my options," she says. "My mom's friend told her about volunteering opportunities in Israel so I volunteered at a kindergarten in Kibbutz Ein Gev, near the Sea of Galilee."

She arrived in Israel through the KPC (Kibbutz Volunteers Program Center) organization, and it was her first introduction to the country. The original plan was to volunteer on the kibbutz for a year. "At first, I thought all of Israel was like a kibbutz," she says. "I loved the life there, the tranquility, the simplicity. I was at Ein Gev for Passover, and before I got there, I didn't know that a Passover Seder could be so interesting. Traditional people from the kibbutz would invite me home for Shabbat dinners and to the synagogue. It interested me, and I wanted to learn more about Jewish tradition."

At first, she studied at the Midreshet Nishmat in Jerusalem, and later at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin on the West Bank and during that time, had been near the terror attack. "The seminary was somewhat Hasidic. it was a beautiful place, but it didn't suit me. I was more down-to-earth. But I loved studying Gemara and Torah," she notes. "After a few months, I returned to Jerusalem and studied at Nishmat and at the Ora Institute"...

Windberg had to undergo conversion to complete her immigration process under the Law of Return. "The Rabbinate told me that I needed to undergo conversion, like all members of the community. After studying for two years at the Midrasha, I went to a rabbinical court where I was asked very basic questions. It was somewhat annoying because, by that point, I had already had advanced studies. It was easy for me to talk to all the judges," she says.

In the IDF, she first trained for a position in an elite unit in the Artillery Corps, but her path was not smooth. "I spent a year

in the course, but because of a leg injury and also because my Hebrew was not yet good enough, I was transferred out. When I recovered from the leg injury, I requested to return to combat duty. After five months, I managed to get a position I now hold," she says.

### Many in the religious world, oppose women serving in the military, especially in combat roles.

"When I was studying, I was recommended the national service rather than enlisting in the IDF, but I believe that everyone should do what suits them. I knew I could be a good fighter. It's important for me to do something physical to defend the country."

Thanks to her military service, Windberg is now fluent in Hebrew. Next month, her mother is expected to visit for the first time in two years, and they will finally reunite.

For Windberg, Zionism is not just a slogan. "In the end, the State of Israel is the home of the Jewish people," she says. "I think the decision to come was the best decision I've made in my life. Here, I know exactly what my path is."

## Chinese-Jewish-American

Christopher Michaelson

*The Forward* 23 June 2022

Years ago, when I first told my mom I was converting to Judaism, she worried that I would become less Chinese. More recently, when I told her I was legally changing my name, she wondered if "Christopher" was not Jewish enough, not realizing that I meant I was adopting her surname, Wong, as my middle name.

Growing up in a majority white, Christian community in the Upper Midwest, I did not fit in as a multiracial kid in a sea of Caucasian faces. I was neither white enough to fit in with my classmates, nor Chinese enough for Chinese school classes on the weekends, where my sister and I were the only half-Asian students.

While studying for my doctorate in philosophy, I fell in love with a Jewish woman and traded my secular identity for a Jewish one. As an adult, I am part of the new math of the Jewish American Diaspora — a world where increasingly more Jewish families look like mine. Between 12% and 15% of American Jews identify as Jews of color.

When my wife Beth and I were engaged, family members on both sides speculated that our marriage would work

because her Jewish and my Chinese cultures shared the same family values. Journalist Rachel Gross joked that being part Asian American and all Jewish means "I really, really like Chinese food."

In my experience, both of these claims — about family and food — may be true, and yet, of course, not quite so simple. As well-meaning as the search for common ground between cultural and religious identities can be, discovering our uncommon ground is also critical to our appreciation of the diverse histories that we each bring to the changing faces and futures of Judaism.

Jewish and Chinese cultures do both revolve around familial bonds. Our wedding procession honored four living grandparents, including my Gong-Gong (maternal grandfather) and both of Beth's bubbes. Through them, we learned the oral histories, which our children now know by heart, of the improbable series of events that allowed our lives to intersect.

My wife's ancestors had emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States, while my mother's journey to the same destination began in China and went through Brazil. Both families fled threats in their respective homelands, one from antisemitic persecution, the other from wartime enemies. Many nights, I feel grateful to fall asleep listening to my wife retelling to her mother every detail of her and our children's days, continuing the oral tradition and cementing the intimate knowledge of each other's lives.

There is also truth to the cliché that Jewish and Chinese familial bonds are both strengthened by food. Before every Rosh Hashanah, my wife and her cousin spend a full day making their grandmother's potato knishes from scratch. These re-creations of inherited recipes for matzo ball soup, cheese bake and poppy seed cookies are our children's comfort foods and our most tangible connection to Jewish tradition.

Much like my wife grew up having Shabbat dinners at home with her family, our children put eight-course Chinese banquets at my mother's home ahead of most other social activities. We eat noodles for long life on birthdays, fish to symbolize the abundance we hope for in the new year, and we always go home with bags of mantou (steamed bread), baozi (filled steamed bread) and jiaozi (dumplings). The filial piety our children exhibit by prioritizing family is inseparable from their gastronomic self-interest.

Notwithstanding these parallels, our family conventions are as different as our food traditions. After our engagement, my in-

laws asked that I call them “Mom and Dad” instead of “Mrs. and Mr. Winnick.”

I understood this to be not only a personal gesture of affection but also a celebration of the growth of the Jewish population by one. My Chinese inclination to dutifully accede conflicted with my sense of loyalty toward my own parents, whom I already called “Mom and Dad.” My in-laws and I settled on “Ma and Pop.”

By contrast, at a Wong family reunion, the spouses who married into the family are more likely to take the pictures than appear in them. My Chinese relatives do not love my wife any less than her Jewish relatives love me, but being left out of photos can come across as insulting for the uninitiated.

Family bonds are not all alike to my Chinese family, whose story of constant physical separation due to war and its aftermath leads them to hold blood relationships in especially high esteem.

Perhaps these different yet strong familial ties in Chinese and Jewish culture are informed by their experiences with loss. Nazis killed six million Jewish people in the Holocaust (including relatives of my wife’s ancestors), and at least 10 million Chinese civilians (including my step-grandmother’s sister) were killed in the war with Japan between 1937 and 1945.

Although the absolute scale of loss of Jewish and Chinese people was comparable, the relative scale of loss was not. On the eve of the Holocaust, the global Jewish population was only 16.6 million people, whereas China’s population around the same time was estimated to be half a billion. Our Jewish family gatherings are often intimate celebrations of individual births and accomplishments, whereas our Chinese reunions bring as many of us together as possible to exalt the family. I have wondered if this is typical of others with my mixed heritage and if the relative scale of loss has influenced history’s remembrance of these tragedies and how our cultures balance the relative priority of individuals within collectives.

As part of their b’nai mitzvah, my children each lit candles in memory of specific Jewish children killed in the Holocaust, to whom we were related by religion but not by blood, who did not live to reach their b’nai mitzvah. The only time in my childhood that I can remember ceremonially lighting candles was during a large family homage to my maternal grandmother, who died when my mother was an infant during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

I have also wondered whether attitudes toward cultural assimilation have been affected by these historical tragedies and cultural orientations. Expressing Jewish identity is a sacred duty to my wife’s family in significant part because some of their ancestors were persecuted

and killed for expressing theirs. In contrast, since my physical appearance is not conspicuously Asian, expressing my part-Chinese identity can be a choice.

As a child, I yearned to assimilate into the majority culture. Even within my extended Chinese family, there used to be a social hierarchy among my generation that favored cousins who were perceived to be more Westernized. While my mother succeeded as a high school teacher who taught thousands of non-Chinese students how to speak Mandarin, I rebelled against learning her family’s native tongue. Ultimately, my mother could not force me to continue my Chinese education, and I gave it up until I chose to take Chinese art and history classes in college.

As an adult in an era in which both antisemitic and anti-Asian violence are rising, I am ever more concerned about the threat that extermination and assimilation pose to the histories of peoples who do not belong to the dominant culture. At the same time, as a part Asian American and all Jewish person, I am inclined toward optimism about the new math — that the inverse of not fitting in anywhere is the hope of fitting in everywhere.

*Christopher Michaelson is a member and former board member of Temple Israel in Minneapolis and a professor of business ethics at the University of St. Thomas and New York University.*

## Photo Exhibit on Jewish Life in Tianjin

By Yang Cheng

Excerpted from *China Daily*, Hong Kong Edition, 3 August 2023

<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>

Israeli Ambassador to China Irit Ben-Abba said that she was “surprised” when she visited the exhibition *Jews in Modern Tientsin*, opened in the coastal city of Tianjin in mid-July, as it featured only a small part of the collection of the curator of the event.

Since 2001, 70-year-old Song Anna, a retired reporter from *Tianjin Daily*, has been interviewing Jewish people across the world who once lived in the city or who had relatives that did, collecting photographs from them showing their life in the city.

The exhibition features the cherished photos that Jewish people contributed depicting their childhood in the city, their communities and beloved Chinese friends and neighbors and many shining moments in their lives.

Impressed, Ben-Abba says: “It’s very emotional to see a piece of the city’s history, and of Jewish history.”

The photo exhibition running until the end of this month depicts the lives of Jewish people in Tianjin during the first half of the 20th century, when the Jewish population in the city peaked at around 3,500...

Ben-Abba visited Tianjin on July 18. As well as viewing the exhibition, she went to a well-preserved synagogue and held a business seminar with Tianjin medical and pharmaceutical companies.

She tells *China Daily* that she wants to boost business ties between Tianjin and Israel.

“Tianjin has one of the largest Israeli desalination facilities in China and we’re trying to explore more opportunities in medical, new energy and other industrial sectors,” she says.

After the seminar, she held an in-depth talk with Song about the photo show, during which Song shared her experiences of collecting the photos and letters on display.

Song says: “When I began to search for the photos in Tianjin’s archives and libraries, I could hardly find any.”

“I was fortunate that many Jewish associations around the world supported my project to trace the Jewish people’s steps in Tianjin.”

Song was impressed to find that many Jewish people said they loved Tianjin so deeply that they “felt it hard to describe in words.”

“Among the people in the show, two are still alive in their 90s,” she says. Song has been in close contact with many of the people whose photos are on show, and she has accompanied some of them to revisit Tianjin since 2001.

She says the Jewish people expressed their love for the city and their sincere gratitude to the love they received from their Tianjin neighbors and business partners.

“Based on their oral history, I have published several books on their lives in the city, including *The Jews in Tianjin*, and I also have plans to shoot films on this part of history,” Song says...

The photo show was held in Jerusalem in 2010. The current Israeli President Isaac Herzog, who was a senior minister-level official at the time, cut the ribbon for the show. The show then toured Tel Aviv in 2011. The photos on show have since been collected by the Museum of the Jewish People at Tel Aviv University.

Luan Jianzhang, director general of Tianjin’s foreign affairs office, says: “The photos reflect both the friendship between people of Tianjin and Jewish people and the positive outlook for a community with a shared future for humanity.”

## Remembering Robert Goldman

By Faith Beckerman Goldman

Robert Goldman lived his life with a brave heart, fiery spirit, strong mind and a profound love for family and the rich traditions of Jewish life. His values were created by the unique circumstances he endured as a "stateless" person born and raised in the Hongkou ghetto of Shanghai for the first 18 years of his life. His middle class parents, Thea Klein and Noah Goldman, fled from Germany in 1939 and secured passage to the open port of Shanghai. While Hongkou was a crowded, disease-ridden place with many hardships, it was a refuge from the certain death they would have faced in their former homeland.

Robert was born at Mount Moriah Hospital in Shanghai on May 30, 1940. His childhood was punctuated by his parents' divorce and separation from his brother, which meant residing in numerous homes. He attended five schools in seven years including Talmud Torah, adjusting as each school closed due to the declining number of children in the area. Without the availability of antibiotics, he survived an early battle with spinal meningitis and an injury from shrapnel from U.S. friendly fire in July 1945. Robert was Bar Mitzvah'd at the Ohel Moishe with barely a minyan, and Judaism became a centerpoint of his life, even prompting him to dream of becoming a cantor. Robert was extremely smart and confident, but lonely and yearning for life in a free country.

In 1952, his half-sister Sonja, who lived in England, emerged. After six years of negotiations with and cooperation from HIAS, The Joint and The British Commonwealth amidst an unstable China, Robert and his father landed at the White Cliffs of Dover on September 16, 1958 with their clothes, 10 dollars, a hidden family ring and the promise of a new family and new life.

Robert went to work, taught ballroom dancing and attended Kings College in Newcastle, but he dreamed of the U.S. So in 1960, sponsored by his mother, he emigrated to New York City. As a provision of his entry into the country and eventual citizenship, Robert was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in Germany. From that point, his life unfolded rapidly. He met me, his wife, after they were transatlantic pen-pals during his military service. After eight months of correspondence, they met, fell in love, were married and raised two children,

Naomi and Samuel, while he pursued his career of international freight forwarding.

Robert passed away unexpectedly on September 17, 1994, before he could finish writing about his life experiences. I took up the family project of love and has spent many years telling Robert's story and those of the 18,000 Shanghai Jews of the 1940's and 50's. Part family memoir, part historical narrative and archive of first-person refugee testimonials, "My Journey on a Slow Boat From and To China" allowed me to shine a light on this often-overlooked aspect of the Jewish experience in the World War II and post-war era. In 2006, I finally retraced Robert's childhood footsteps in Hongkou and continue to share his powerful legacy.

After Robert's passing, Steven Spielberg wrote to the Goldmans about Robert, the man who so identified with the young displaced boy in his epic film *Empire of the Sun*. "To survive in a world at war, he must find a strength greater than all the events that surround him. This seems to describe your husband well."

*Faith Beckerman Goldman is active in the former Shanghailanders field and may be reached at [FaihtNamdlog@aol.com](mailto:FaihtNamdlog@aol.com).*

### Bequest Request

Please consider putting the  
Sino-Judaic Institute in your will.

## How a Jewish Catholic Canadian became a Tsinghua U Dean: Daniel Bell's Story

Excerpted from the *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 26 June 2023

In the 1960s in Quebec, Canada, the anglophone and francophone worlds were completely separate, but there were exceptions, including my family.

My father was an anglophone Jew and my mother was a francophone Catholic and they married against the wishes of their parents a couple of years before I was born, in 1964. My sister is 11 months younger.

We were brought up in a bilingual family. Eventually my grandparents reconciled, but there was an issue about which religion we should be brought up in. My father wanted me circumcised and my mother wanted me baptised – they decided on both. I heard later that when I was being baptised my father was very upset and ran into the church and rang the church bell and it was quite a tense time.

When I was about two, my parents decided the best way to maintain harmony in the family was not to have any religion at all, so I was brought up in a not really religious environment except when I went to my grandparents' home.

With my Jewish grandparents we celebrated Passover and with my Catholic grandparents we went to church. I did not experience it as a conflict and maintained an interest in both sides.

My mother worked as a secretary and my father (Don Bell) was a journalist and writer. His best-known work, *Saturday Night at the Bagel Factory*, won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 1973...

My parents got divorced when I was about 10. It was a good divorce in the sense that they had a policy of not criticising each other in front of the children. I saw my father much more after the divorce, he picked us up every weekend and brought us to museums.

I went to West Hill High School, a rough school where there was a lot of ethnic warfare – the Jews versus the blacks, and the Asians. I did not fit into a clear category, I was not quite Jewish, and I was not quite anglophone...

In my final year [at McGill University], I took a course with the philosopher and political theorist Charles Taylor, which I found much more interesting. After I graduated, I went to Oxford University in England to do a master's and then a PhD in politics.

At Oxford, I met a mainland Chinese student and we got married in 1989. I wanted to learn the language to meet her parents and friends, so I studied intensive Chinese language at Middlebury College summer school in 1990 and 1991, which gave me a good foundation.

### Getting published

At Oxford, I studied with British political theorist David Miller and G.A. Co-

hen, a Marxist from Montreal, and that is where I learned about Marxist theory. I still use a lot of Marxism, much of which came from Oxford rather than my experience in China.

At that time, a leading debate was between liberals and communitarians and the communitarians criticised liberalism for favouring more individualistic ways of life and the communitarians think we should value social relations more. I found the debate fascinating and wrote my thesis in dialogue form, which you could not get away with today.

No one talked about finding jobs and only at the end of my time in Oxford, in 1991, did I realise that maybe I would need to apply for jobs. My supervisor suggested getting my PhD published. Communitarianism and its Critics was published in 1993; it was my first book.

### Confucian scholar

I got an offer from the National University of Singapore to teach political theory. I had never been to a hot country, so it was difficult just from the climate point of view.

I was a white guy from Canada, so they asked me to teach United States foreign policy. The debates were around communitarianism and Asian values and I thought it was interesting as an idea, but the term was an empty one. But as I dug into it, I realised a lot of it was about Confucianism, which has themes that are similar to communitarianism such as critique of individualism, but it is a deeper and richer tradition.

The Confucian tradition has themes

such as the importance of social harmony or ritual propriety and I decided I needed to go in that direction and improve my Chinese and become a more Confucian-oriented scholar.

After three years, I got an offer of a fellowship at Princeton University, which is where our son, Julien Song Bell, was born...In 1996, when Julien was one, we moved to Hong Kong and I taught philosophy at Hong Kong University. In 2000, I moved to City University of Hong Kong for three years and then had a one-year fellowship at Stanford University.

### Educating elites

In 2004, I was offered a post at Tsinghua University, so we moved to Beijing. I had a substantial cut in salary, but my wife had a high-paying job as a lawyer and then at Goldman Sachs...

Tsinghua is super competitive to get into and many of the students have political aspirations, so I felt I played some role in helping to educate the elite. That experience gave me the idea to write a book on political meritocracy, the idea that the political system should aim to select and promote public officials with above-average ability and virtue.

The China Model (2016) is probably my most controversial book because you can imagine the reaction in the West – “Oh, China apologist” and so on – but I describe an ideal and I also describe what is wrong with the reality.

### Becoming dean

In my first year at Tsinghua, I was handed a mini copy of The Analects of Confucius by a student surnamed

Kong who was the 76th descendant of Confucius. A few years later, the party secretary of a new campus at Shandong University, also named Kong, suggested I become a dean of the faculty of political science.

They wanted to Confucianize the university – find an interesting way to teach The Analects – and to internationalize the university. I started as dean in 2017. It was a great opportunity for a guy who was not a Communist Party member.

To the extent that I was successful, that was due to my wife, Wang Pei. We met when she was a postdoc at Tsinghua, I got divorced in January 2020 and we married in April. I dedicated my new book – The Dean of Shandong (2023) – to her because she was the key emotional and intellectual support and adviser.

### A better city

It is very hard for academics to find jobs at the same university, so we are very happy to have both been offered positions at Hong Kong University. We started last October and she is teaching Chinese intellectual history.

Compared to when I was in Hong Kong 25 years ago, I feel more at home. I speak Mandarin rather than Cantonese – in the late 1990s, there was hardly any Mandarin on campus, but now there are more teachers from the mainland than from Hong Kong.

The air is much better than 25 years ago, the MTR now comes to HKU and the restaurant scene is flourishing. I do not like the constraints on academic freedom and political freedom but compared to how it was on the mainland the academic freedom is much better. So far, I tend to see the positive things.

**Visit SJI's Website**

[www.sinojudaic.org](http://www.sinojudaic.org)

**Featuring updated  
articles and links  
and open access to Points East archives**

## Please Join our Effort to Help Revive the Jewish Community of Kaifeng

### Dear Reader,

Not since 1902, when the Shanghai Society for the Rescue of the Chinese Jews invited seven Chinese Jews to journey from Kaifeng to Shanghai to learn more about their Jewish heritage, has any organization undertaken an effort to revive the Kaifeng Jewish community such as the Sino-Judaic Institute is about to do.

After years of planning, punctuated by an unanticipated interruption by COVID-19, SJI is set to bring one Kaifeng Jew out of China to train as a para-rabbi — a position we will call a “madreekh,” or guide.

After a number of months of study, s/he will travel around to give talks about the Kaifeng Jewish community, its past glories (and troubles) and its present circumstances.

Following this training and touring, s/he will return to Kaifeng to play a major role in helping Kaifeng’s Jews once again observe their Jewish cultural traditions in whichever way they deem best.

**To accomplish this goal, we urgently need your financial support. We estimate that a six-month stay in the US, including room and board, travel costs, books, honoraria for Judaica teachers and translators, and a monthly stipend for our guest, will come to \$25,000.**

**To date, SJI has raised \$11,000.  
Please help us reach \$25,000.**

Please join us in our efforts to help revive the Jewish community of Kaifeng. Of all the unique accomplishments SJI has made over the years and continues to make, this particular mission is the one for which SJI itself was created back in 1985.

To become a part of making Sino-Judaic history, **please send your tax-deductible contribution to SJI online ([www.sinojudaic.org](http://www.sinojudaic.org))** as soon as possible through the Denise Yeh Bresler Kaifeng Scholarship Fund.

**If you prefer to mail a check**, please make it out to The Sino-Judaic Institute, note “Kaifeng Scholarship Fund” on the Memo Line, and mail it to: Prof. Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer, Sino-Judaic Institute, 34 Colgate Rd., Unit 1, Roslindale MA 02131

The Chinese Jewish community of Kaifeng has endured for over 1,000 years but has been an “endangered species” for the last 200 of those years. Join us in being a part of their historic revival!

*Rabbi Anson Laytner*, President,  
on behalf of the SJI Managing Board