



Four Views on Anti-Semitism in China

Antisemitism in China After 7 October

By Jordyn Haime

Excerpted from the *Times of Israel*, 09 November 2023

...After Oct. 7, China's internet — from message boards to video platforms to social media — suddenly flooded with viciously anti-Israel and antisemitic comments. Pointing to Israel's actions against the Palestinians, people have said things ranging from support for Hitler and Nazi Germany to the idea that oppressed Jews have become oppressive Nazis.

Steven Spielberg's Holocaust classic "Schindler's List," which has been widely loved in China, was review-bombed so heavily on the video platform Bilibili that its rating declined from 9.7 to 4.3. "Where is the Palestinian Schindler?" read one highly rated comment.

Commenting became so intense that Israeli and German embassy accounts on Weibo, China's popular microblogging platform, began filtering responses to some posts.

"We believe in the power of free speech and rational debate... But all this is not without limitations: invective that is degrading to human dignity will be deleted," the German embassy wrote. "We also want to make it clear that those who deliberately combine the Israeli flag with Nazi symbols in their profile pictures are either ignorant idiots or shameless bastards! Such accounts will be permanently blocked by us."

It's not just a phenomenon on social media. State media, such as the Chinese Communist Party-backed national news broadcaster CCTV, claimed that "Jews represent just 3% of the American population but control 70% of its wealth ... these factors can be used to exert incomparable influence on politics."

The CCTV video has since been removed, but the hashtag "Jews represent just 3% of the American population but control 70% of its wealth" became a "hot topic" on Weibo, and that unfounded statistic has appeared numerous times in other social media posts seeking to pin the responsibility for the current war against Hamas on a global Jewish conspiracy.

"I am deeply concerned by the spread of antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories in recent weeks, including the uptick on the largest social media platforms in the PRC [People's Republic of China]," tweeted US antisemitism envoy Deborah Lipstadt on Wednesday. "This dramatic increase in antisemitic rhetoric is a cause for alarm."

How "philosemitism" can turn into antisemitism

Judaism is not one of China's five recognized religions, meaning the identity of Chinese Jews like Uriah or the historic community in Kaifeng is not recognized as legitimate. But Jews have long been revered in China, where centuries-old stereotypes are common — such as the conspiracy theory that Jews have control over

(continued on page 4)

Antisemitism in the China Explained

By Mary Jane Ainslie

Excerpted from <https://theconversation.com/china-why-there-has-been-a-sudden-surge-of-antisemitism-in-the-peoples-republic-217116> 16 November 2023

During the conflict between Hamas and Israel in Gaza, many nations have tried to maintain a neutral stance by not explicitly supporting either side. But despite attempts at balanced commentaries at the top of business and politics, there has been evidence of rising antisemitism in many countries. One of these has been China...

But now — at a government level — there is friction between Beijing and Jerusalem over China's refusal to condemn Hamas's actions and formally declare it to be a terrorist organisation. Israel is also angry and dismayed at what it perceives as Beijing's inaction over a rise in online antisemitism in Chinese cyberspace.

But this growth of antisemitism is not connected to China's official position on the war between Hamas and Israel, which is entirely consistent with China's international relations under Xi. Beijing has tended to avoid formally taking sides in conflicts, instead preferring to play the "honest broker" — albeit offering solutions that differ to those of the west...

But in the Israel-Palestine situation, China took a very pro-Palestinian position from the late 1940s to the 1980s. Since then, it has continued to favour a two-state solution despite its warmer relations with Israel from 2010.

Western and Asian antisemitism compared
Antisemitism in China and east Asia is different to how it is generally understood in Europe. In Europe, antisemitism is a unique discourse of hatred against Jewish people. It draws upon a long history of persecution and was heavily embedded within Christianity, culminating in the Holocaust...

In contrast in East Asia, Jews and Israel have tended to be attached to a positive image of western modernity and achievement. This results in a widespread form of positive stereotyping known as "philosemitism".

Philosemitism, the opposite of antisemitism, is the attachment of desirable and admirable characteristics to Jewish people and Israel. Chinese philosemitism includes positive notions of Jewish political governance, national identity, moral refinement, advanced civilisation and a will to survive...

Philosemitism has been able to prosper in East Asia and

(continued on page 3)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Featured Articles:

Four Views on Anti-Semitism in China	1
Ant-Semitism in China After 7 October	1
Anti-Semitism in China Explained	
From the Editor.....	2
Letter to the Editor.....	2
In the Field.....	3
Book Nook.....	10

Articles:

An American Perspective on Anti-Semitism	5
A Chinese Perspective on the Israel-Hamas War	6
Weinbach Story	6
Soroka Letters.....	8
Never Has So Much Been Written About So Few.....	10

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FROM THE EDITOR

So much has happened in Israel and Gaza since our last issue, it makes no sense to comment on it here other than to say that both Israelis and Palestinians need new leaders and an alternative to the status quo ante.

In this issue, we focus on the growing anti-Semitism in China, at least as observed in social media. We are offering four perspectives for you to ponder. I would like to know whether this online animus translates into something more concrete or is it all just talk. But why does the government allow it and what would it do if talk turned to deed?

In this issue, we begin a new occasional feature, The Way Back Machine, which will feature materials from long ago, this time from Kaifeng in 1947. I welcome your suggestions for future inclusions.

This year we welcome in the Year of the Dragon. In the Chinese zodiac, the dragon represents strength, power, wisdom, nobility, good fortune, leadership and success—all good things to hope for in the coming year.

Anson Laytner

新年快樂



Letter to the Editor

A Correction

Dan Shapiro from Taiwan noted that page eight of the November 2023 recent issue (38:3) has Abigail Windberg being quoted as saying “Sometimes kids would make fun because the Chinese word for Jew sounds the same as the word for pig” but that, Dan writes, is backwards. The Chinese word for pig (zhu) sounds like Jew. Even if it is quotation marks, if she misspoke, that should have been corrected. He is right of course and we should have caught this and noted it with an editorial comment!

Points East

Anson Laytner, Editor

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

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

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In the Field

• Prof. Kevin Ostoyich in Germany

SJI Board member Prof. Kevin Ostoyich delivered an interactive lecture, “Vortrag: Stories about the Shanghai Jews. Bremen, Bavaria and Beyond” at the Institut für Bayerische Geschichte - LMU München (Institute of Bavarian History), with readings from plays, screening of clips from Gary’s Letter and Three Girls of Shanghai, and engagement with items for his upcoming exhibition at the Textile and Industry Museum in Augsburg.

• The China Project Folds

The China Project (formerly SupChina), which launched in 2016 with the aim of informing the world about China with a breadth and depth that general interest news organizations cannot devote to one country, has announced its demise. In an email to its many readers, its leadership team, led by Editor-in-Chief, Jeremy Goldkorn, wrote: “As the U.S.-China relationship deteriorated, and China’s relations with other countries have become more complicated in the years since then, our work has only become more important. But sadly, that same work has put several targets on our backs. We have been accused many times in both countries of working for

nefarious purposes for the government of the other. Defending ourselves has incurred enormous legal costs, and, far worse, made it increasingly difficult for us to attract investors, advertisers, and sponsors. While our subscription offerings have been growing strongly and steadily, we are not yet in a position to rely on these revenues to sustain our operations. The media business is precarious, and the politically motivated attacks on us from various interested parties put us in an even worse situation...And this week, we learned that a source of funding that we had been counting on was no longer going to come through, and we have had to make the difficult decision to close down...We’ve made some great things together, and we have made the world more informed about China — the good and the bad...It’s been a hell of a ride!”

• Introducing a New SJI Board Member

Jeremy Goldkorn, formerly Editor-in-Chief of The China Project, has been elected to the SJI Board. Goldkorn, a native of South Africa and a graduate of the University of Cape Town, moved to China in 1995 from his hometown of Johannesburg and became managing editor of Beijing’s first English-language entertainment magazine. He later edited and founded several other publications, including the website

Danwei, which tracked Chinese media, markets, politics, and business. It was acquired in 2013 by The Financial Times. While in China, he lived in a workers’ dormitory, produced a documentary film about African soccer players in Beijing, was active in Kehillat Beijing, and rode a bicycle from Peshawar to Kathmandu via Kashgar and Lhasa. He moved to Nashville Tennessee in 2015, where he lives with his wife, Wu Fei, and two children. Wu Fei is the composer of Hello Gold Mountain, an original composition for chamber and symphony orchestras inspired by stories of Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai from Europe before and during World War II and built lives in China.

• Don’t Forget “The Forgotten Commandment” Says Wife

SJI President and Points East Editor, Anson Laytner, has had his first (and probably only) novel published by Wipf and Stock. The Forgotten Commandment is a story that combines Sephardic Jewish history, a Holocaust-era escape diary, intrigues in the Vatican involving a lost manuscript, and an animal rights tale with a powerful environmental message. What’s not to like? Order through your favorite bookstore, Amazon, or directly from the publisher.

Explained, continued from page 1

operates as a convenient platform for Israeli international relations. It’s a form of soft power that is often referenced (and welcomed) by both Israeli and East Asian political actors in high-level diplomatic interactions.

Falling out of friendship

But stereotypes can very quickly switch between xenophilia and xenophobia as a result of sudden changes in the wider context. The antisemitism we see in China now is largely an inversion of philosemitism. This change was triggered when philosemitic stereotypes began to be threatening rather than useful to Chinese nationalism.

Specifically, the current Gaza conflict affirmed Israel’s connection to the US. This positioned the country as part of a perceived western “plot” to undermine China and promote US dominance. To many in China, Israel and Jewish people became part of a cluster of behaviours and beliefs associated with conspiratorial discourse about a threatening western axis.

This links to other nationalist conspiratorial beliefs in China, attached to issues as diverse as constructing COVID-19 as part of a US plot against China, and the Russia-Ukraine war being a US-instigated conflict designed to threaten China and Russia. In cyberspace, these have easily become mixed up with older, European-style antisemitic tropes, and grown substantially...

While the Chinese internet is tightly controlled, issues

discussed online tend only to be addressed if they are in some way threatening the authority of the Chinese Communist Party, or could potentially cause social unrest. With very few Jewish people to directly persecute, antisemitism does not pose an immediate threat to Chinese society. The wider conspiratorial discourses it is part of are also generally in support of nationalist ideology. For both of these reasons, the Chinese state has not intervened to prevent this antisemitism...

Together with other scholars, I have previously warned that encouraging philosemitic discourse in East Asia is dangerous. So, the “surge” in antisemitism in Chinese cyberspace hasn’t come as a surprise to those of us who study this phenomenon in Asia. Jewish stereotypes have been growing over the past decade in China, but largely as philosemitism, so were not seen as a concern. This is now changing.

Mary Jane Ainslie is Associate Professor in Film and Media, University of Nottingham. She has received funding from the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Zhejiang Philosophy and Social Sciences Programme. She is affiliated with the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) and the Max and Tessie Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish Studies at Carleton University. She co-convened the international seminar series ‘Antisemitism in East and Southeast Asia in Comparative Perspective’ available here <https://isgap.org/antisemitism-in-east-and-southeast-asia-comparative-perspective/>.

After, continued from page 1

American institutions from Wall Street to the media.

It's not just about money and power: the Chinese have historically looked to Jews as a sort of mirror of themselves, a down-and-out nation that survived extreme adversity and rose to a position of power and prominence against the odds.

These stereotypes are portrayed in a positive light and are often referred to as "philosemitic." Jews here have talked about getting everything from free taxi rides to compliments about their intelligence. Bookstores carry self-help books about how to be more like the "successful" Jews. Chinese philosemitic sentiment has been embraced by both Israeli and Chinese governments throughout the development of diplomatic relations, scholars have noted.

But the line between philo- and antisemitism can be thin. Unlike in the West, where antisemitism is a centuries-old, deeply ingrained tradition, Jewish conspiracy theories are a relatively new phenomenon in China. Even "positive" racial stereotypes have the potential to turn negative, especially in the context of heightened anti-Western sentiment in China in recent decades, says Mary J. Ainslie of the University of Nottingham at Ningbo.

As influencer Lu Kewen described in a viral 8,000-word WeChat post in 2021: "The image of Jews in China was once that of saints preparing to save the common people: firm, holy, intelligent, rich and kindhearted while full of trauma." Though after learning more about the history of "various countries," Lu wrote, "Jewish names kept coming up ... after classifying them and analyzing their behaviors, my impression of Jews slowly changed." His screed included passages copied and pasted from Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." [See Tuvia Gering's article "Influencer Lu Kewen Promotes Antisemitism in China" in *Points East* 37:2, July 2022.]

The free propagation of Jewish conspiracy theories despite China's powerful censorship machine indicates an endorsement by the party-state, which has been hurling blame at the United States for the war in Israel through its state media.

"There is a notice here that stereotyping of Jewish people, particularly negative stereotyping of Jewish people, is actually quite a force online. And because conspiratorial discourses are encouraged by the state and are often actually connected to the state, this is something that [authorities are] not willing to perhaps challenge," Ainslie said.

At a press conference last week, in response to a question on reports of antisemitism on Chinese social media, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin reiterated China's stance on the conflict — which calls for a two-state solution — adding that "China's laws unequivocally prohibit disseminating information on extremism, ethnic hatred, discrimination and violence via the internet."

China-Israel ties are at a low

China has cultivated a strong economic relationship with Israel since establishing ties in 1992, often referencing the "1,000-year" friendship between the Chinese and Jewish people and the thousands of Jewish refugees who found refuge in Shanghai during World War II. China today remains Israel's second-largest trading partner behind the United States.

In June, in a sign of warming ties, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US politicians that he planned to visit Beijing in the near future. He felt compelled to issue a statement emphasizing that "the US will always be Israel's

most vital ally and irreplaceable ally." (That visit now seems unlikely.)

But China has historically also had a close relationship with Palestinian leaders dating back to the Mao era. The country has shown that it additionally wants to play a bigger role in the Middle East peace process in recent years.

Since Oct. 7, China has not specifically condemned Hamas's attack on Israel or labeled it as terrorism, leading to deep disappointment and frustration from Israel. Unlike many Western nations, China does not categorize Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Last Thursday, Israel's representative to Taiwan called China's hesitance to condemn Hamas's attack "very disturbing." China has also released little information about the stabbing of an Israeli diplomat's spouse in Beijing, though police said the attacker was a foreigner.

Instead, China has repeatedly called for restraint on both sides and for a two-state solution to be reached with the help of the United Nations. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi has also said Israel had gone "beyond self-defense."

China has additionally courted support in the Arab League, to the extent that several countries in it have begun rejecting international concerns about human rights violations against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum said the Chinese government "may be committing genocide" in the region, where the Uyghurs have reportedly been subject to mass imprisonment and forced labor.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in June that China's actions in Xinjiang are aimed at combating terrorism and have "nothing to do with human rights" abuses.

Plenty of Chinese still support Jews and Israel

Viral social media posts do not necessarily determine the public opinion of the average Chinese, and the topic of antisemitism in China remains understudied. Condemnations of antisemitism in response to the recent phenomenon in China's cyberspace do exist — many users have condemned Hamas's terrorism and questioned their government's response to the conflict.

Pro-Israel sentiment exists, too. Israel has also long been a subject of admiration in China for its rich culture and strong educational and tech sectors that many entrepreneurs have tried to buy into or replicate.

Many Chinese express their support for the Jewish state on the Israeli embassy in China's Weibo posts. "Support Israel! Annihilate the terrorist organization!" one recent comment reads.

In a post on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, Ping Zhang, a professor of East Asian studies at Tel Aviv University, said his attempts to explain to Israeli friends that "there are still many Chinese who support Israel" basically received little response.

"The goodwill caused by 1,000 Chinese voices friendly to Israel is not worth the damage caused by one antisemitic statement," he wrote. "Simply put, the foundation of the good relationship built between the two sides over the past three decades has been shattered."

Jordyn Haime is a freelance journalist based in Taiwan. Times of Israel staff contributed to this report.

An American Perspective on Chinese Online Antisemitism

By Josh Rogin

Excerpted from *The Washington Post*, 8 January 2024

Since the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, the quantity and virulence of antisemitic content on China's tightly controlled internet — especially on its social media — has skyrocketed. This unprecedented surge in antisemitism online in China could only be possible with the blessing of the Chinese government, which appears to be using anti-Jewish hate as a tool of its anti-U.S. and anti-Western diplomacy. Comments comparing Jews to Nazis are pervasive on videos relating to the Israel-Gaza war on one of China's largest video-sharing platforms, Weibo. State-controlled media outlets have been spreading conspiracy theories about the American Jewish community online as well, including the idea that a small number of Jewish Americans control the vast majority of power and wealth in the United States...

Now, the U.S. government is starting to publicly push back on China's promotion of antisemitism.

"What we saw after October 7 was a drastic change in the social media within China. The antisemitism became more unplugged, more free-flowing," the State Department's deputy special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, Aaron Keyak, told me in an interview. "And because we know that the Chinese internet is not free, that's a conscious decision by the Chinese government to allow that kind of rhetoric to be greatly increased."

The Chinese government denies it promotes or even allows antisemitism online. When Keyak gave an interview last month in Brazil calling out China for using antisemitism as a tool of its anti-U.S. diplomacy, the local Chinese embassy protested loudly...

"This is not some kind of uptick, this was a tsunami of antisemitic rhetoric that was allowed to spread on China's social media," Keyak said. "This sort of drastic increase that has been sustained since October 7 coming out of China does not happen by accident."

China, after all, is far more actively involved in what its citizens post and see online than we are used to in the United States. Freedom House reports

that China has the "world's most sophisticated internet censorship apparatus," whereby internet platforms implement strict monitoring and removal of content or face severe punishments. Moreover, once the government signals its support for a particular opinion or narrative, Chinese netizens know that promoting that line brings clout and benefits.

"The government created an environment where it is easy for antisemitic content to thrive," Yaqiu Wang, Freedom House's research director for China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, told me. "And people know if they amplify what the government says, it's safe. And the more nationalist they go, the more clicks they get."

There's a parallel rise on China's internet of pro-Hamas and anti-Israel content. The Chinese tech companies, which operate under strict instructions from Chinese government censors, have played a big role...

Some of this grows out of what has been Beijing's largely pro-Palestinian position since the Israel-Gaza war broke out. Beijing has long relationships with Palestinian groups and sees the Palestinian issue in the context of its overall anti-Western, anti-imperialist worldview. But China never had a long history of antisemitism and targeting of Jews as state policy, as Russia has.

"Right now, it is very dangerous to be pro-Israel inside China without suffering some kind of punishment. That's the environment," former State Department official Miles Yu said in testimony last month to the select committee on the Chinese Communist Party. "The reason why China chose this moment to take a decisively anti-Israel position is because China regards

Israel as a close ally of the West."

But Beijing's promotion of antisemitism is not only about its Middle East policy. By putting forth the old conspiracy theory that Western democracies are secretly run by a small cabal of Jews, rather than subject to legitimate elections, Beijing seeks to convince its domestic audience that China's system is superior.

Obviously, these policies are distorting the news and seeding resentment among those inside China. But hateful content from China doesn't stay in China. The Chinese government's state media and propaganda reach is worldwide, and sowing distrust in Western democracy is a core pillar of China's international diplomacy.

"They see pushing antisemitism as a tool of promoting their national interest," Keyak said. "And that's a problem for the United States, and it's a problem for anybody who cares about the well-being of Jews anywhere, because it spreads."

A great way to fight bad information is with good information. The State Department has published much of what it knows about Russia's use of antisemitism as a tool of diplomacy and propaganda; it should do the same for China. And leaders in Beijing should be told clearly that its policy of fueling antisemitism is not only harmful to Jews, but a dangerous manipulation of its own people.

*Josh Rogin is a columnist for the Global Opinions section of The Washington Post. He writes about foreign policy and national security. Rogin is also a political analyst for CNN. He is the author of the book *Chaos Under Heaven: Trump, Xi, and the Battle for the 21st Century*.*

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A Chinese Perspective: Criticizing Israel's Gaza Action Is Not Anti-Semitism

By Li Weichao

Excerpted from *China Daily*, 04 January 2024

By Jan 2, Israel's military adventurism in the Gaza Strip had claimed the lives of more than 22,000 people, the majority being women and children, inviting a wave of criticism and condemnation from around the world. But some Israeli and Western media outlets have chosen to target Chinese netizens, accusing them of "anti-Semitism" for criticizing Israel's military policy. Such criticism, if not an attempt to confuse right and wrong and to call a stag a horse, is an attempt to deny history or misrepresent it.

The term "anti-Semitism" refers to prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Jews, their religion and culture. Since the time of the Diaspora, Jews scattered across the world have faced anti-Semitism...The Holocaust, perpetrated by Hitler in the 1930s and 1940s, is the worst genocide in history and a tragic irony of modern Western civilization.

In contrast, a thriving Jewish community once flourished in Kaifeng, capital of China during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The Jews, known locally as the "blue-capped Huihui", eventually integrated into Chinese society, making it the only anthropological case of Jewish assimilation in a non-Jewish society.

Even in modern China, there is no place for anti-Semitism. Among the Jews who came to China in modern times were both Sephardic Jews, who followed in the footsteps of the Western colonizers, and Ashkenazi Jews, who fled the anti-Semitic persecution in Europe, and Russia following the October Revolution and the subsequent Russian Civil War.

During World War II...Shanghai, which faced Japanese imperialist aggression, became for some time the proverbial Noah's Ark for many Jewish refugees, with a group of Chinese left-wing leaders led by Lu Xun and Soong Ching-ling taking to the streets to protest against the fascist policies of Nazi Germany.

More importantly, He Fengshan, a Chinese diplomat in Vienna, risked everything to issue "life visas" to thousands of

Jews so they could escape Hitler's murderous persecution. The Chinese national government at the time even planned to settle the Jews in Yunnan province but could not do so because of the Japanese military's pressure.

Back to the Gaza conflict, Chinese netizens have mainly criticized the military adventurism of Israel which has claimed more than 22,000 lives. Such criticisms cannot be equated with hatred or discrimination against the Jewish people. Confronted with images of children's corpses, destroyed homes, bombed hospitals and damaged United Nations humanitarian agency offices and compounds in Gaza, anyone would criticize the perpetrators.

Regardless of the pretexts cited by Israel, such military operations are unacceptable and go against the very reason why the international community supported the creation of the state of Israel in the first place...

Even in the light of international political realities, Israel's military operations in Gaza cannot be justified. The ruling Hamas dispensation in Gaza is both an armed nonstate actor and a transnational ideological and social movement. And the policy of "de-Hamasization" pursued by Israel in Gaza is not a viable military objective. In other words, no matter how much Israel achieves militarily in Gaza, it will be difficult for it to rid itself of the moral stigma of carrying out the military operation, and thus weaken the moral basis of the policies of Israel and its allies.

Any attempt to distort such criticisms and claim they are "anti-Semitic", or to weaponize "anti-Semitism" without regard for the facts will hurt those who love peace, and benefit those who are not. Chinese people are genuinely concerned about peace being restored in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Therefore, it's unreasonable to label China as anti-Semitic or equate the criticisms of Israel's military adventurism with anti-Semitism. China is against all kinds of anti-Semitism, including the irresponsible and meaningless weaponization of anti-Semitism.

Li Weichao is a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and deputy director of the Center for Jewish Studies in Shanghai.

The Weinbach Family's Story

Compiled from the *Rochester (New York) Holocaust Survivors Archives*

Rachel Rosa Probst was born Ruchel Reisel to Rubin and Scheindle Neuwirt Probst on May 19, 1890, in Stryj, Poland, now in the western Ukraine. She had two sisters, Fayga and Pennina. A high school graduate, she worked in a bank prior to moving to Vienna when she married Israel Weinbach on November 30, 1919. Israel Weinbach was a watchmaker who owned his own jewelry business. They had two sons, Bert (Berthold), born in 1920 (or 1921), and Kurt, born in 1928.

During WWI, Israel was sent to fight on the Russian front where he became a corporal and a secretary in the army office. Also serving as the unit photographer, Israel became a close friend of the captain, Heinrich Stumpf. The friendship between his father and Stumpf would become crucial to his family's survival.

Bert's Story

Bert had been a top student in his school, but in March 1938, when the Nazis annexed Austria, Bert's life changed dramatically. He was ostracized and humiliated by the teachers and fellow students. No longer willing to endure this environment, Bert, now 17 years old, dropped out of school and took a job as a trainee for a Jewish city wholesaler who made his living selling red cloth for Nazi flags.

Bert decided to leave Austria. In the summer of 1938, he slipped across the border to Czechoslovakia, but was sent back. Next he tried to cross the French border, attempting to travel to Paris to live with his paternal aunt, uncle and cousin. Carrying no luggage other than a toothbrush, he told the authorities that he was going to visit his family in Paris for the weekend. The German customs officer let him go, but the French officials stopped him at the border. They gave him the choice of either returning to Austria or joining the French Foreign Legion. He went back to Austria only to be arrested by the Gestapo who held him for a few hours before releasing him.

Now more determined than ever to leave, Bert somehow obtained a visa to cross into the USSR joining five others. His father paid his fare on the Trans-Siberian Express traveling to northern

China, now occupied by the Japanese. He decided to settle in Tianjin (Tientsin), China, which had an established Jewish community.

Kurt's Story

Kurt was only nine years old when he saw Adolf Hitler make his triumphal entrance into Vienna, in March 1938, shortly after Austria was annexed into the Third Reich.

In the meantime, Israel discovered that Heinrich Stumpfpl had become a three-star general and was now the military commander in charge of Vienna. Israel sent his former friend a letter to congratulate him on his appointment. Shortly thereafter, Stumpfpl invited him to an audience at his headquarters in one of the Hapsburg palaces. General Stumpfpl, realizing the danger that Jews were in, offered to protect Israel and his family in Vienna and would let him know when it was time to leave the country.

By November 1938, the Nazis went on a rampage, known as Kristallnacht, burning synagogues, destroying Jewish businesses and arresting Jewish men. Israel Weinbach's business was saved by customers, but the Nazis did not allow him to continue his business. He was able to support the family by running a clock-repairing school for a group of mischling (half Jews) who hoped to be employed in other countries. The family was forced to move to a Jewish area where they had to share an apartment, and Kurt was no longer permitted to attend public school.

In January 1941, a message came from General Stumpfpl telling them it was time to leave. Stumpfpl provided the family with exit visas and paid for their first-class passage on the Trans-Siberian Express. Their visas to enter China were obtained through the ingenuity of Rosa who convinced the Japanese officials, now in control of China, that an invitation she had received from Kurt's brother, Bert, to join the Jewish community's social club in Tianjin constituted an official entry visa. Unfortunately Rachel's sister and father did not survive; they were killed in Stryj. Most of Israel's brothers and sisters and their spouses and children

were also murdered.

After a long journey, the family reached Tianjin in April 1941. The family was finally reunited with Bert and became integrated into the well-organized Jewish community there. Kurt, now almost 13, was finally able to resume his schooling.

After the War

Tianjin, along with other Chinese areas where the Japanese governed, was not liberated until August 1945 when the Japanese surrendered. The family remained in Tianjin and again experienced war when the Communists fought the Nationalists in China. Rachel, Israel, and Kurt, as well as Bert and his family, lived in Tianjin from 1941-1945 under Japanese rule and from 1945 to 1948 under the United States Marine control.

Bert, his wife Minna and their children who were born in China left with the Marines. They travelled to Canada and then emigrated to Rochester, New York, where Bert worked as head of a local bus drivers' union. He attributes his survival and that of his family largely to his youthful, "mindless" bravado, wanderlust and fate.

Rachel, Israel and Kurt remained in Tianjin for six more months, living under the Communist government. In 1949, they emigrated to Israel where Israel died three months after their arrival succumbing to the aftereffects of war and resettlement as well as the difficulty of obtaining medical care in a very new country. After eight years in Israel, Kurt, and his mother emigrated to Rochester, New York, in 1957, to be reunited with Bert and his family there.

Rachel immediately became active at the Jewish Community Center and Congregation Beth Shalom. An educated woman, she made a strong impression on all with whom she came into contact. Proud of her abilities, she was artistic and creative. She redesigned all of her own clothing. A family treasure was a painting of Cinderella that she made in Stryj and that traveled with her from her native Poland to Vienna, to China, to Israel and finally to Rochester. She passed away in 1971.

Kurt became a purchasing agent for the men's clothing manufacturer, Michaels-Stern and Company, and later at Rochester Telephone Company (Frontier). On April 9, 1959, he met Sheila Gissin at an International Dance Festival at the YWCA. They married exactly one year later and danced together for 50 years. They had two children. David Ira, born November 2, 1962, named for Kurt's father and Susan Pennie, born June 6, 1964, and named in memory of Kurt's aunt killed in the Holocaust. Kurt and Sheila have two grandsons, Aron Max Reingold and Alexander Joseph Weinbach.



Kurt became a frequent speaker for CHAI (Center for Holocaust Awareness and Information) as well as for the Rochester Junior Chamber of Commerce where, even though a new immigrant, he won the annual speaker's award. He became president of the Purchasing Agents Association and a board member at the Rochester Jewish Federation as well as a volunteer for the International Sister Cities of Rochester. Kurt's unique story has been told in four books and student publications in four languages, including Chinese. Kurt passed away September 20, 2010, and his widow continued her membership in the Sino-Judaic Institute ever since.

Bequest Request

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

The Way Back Machine, A new occasional feature

Excerpts from the Letters of Margery Soroka 1947

[In 1947, Margery Soroka spent several months in Kaifeng, where she became very friendly with a number of the city's Jews. The letters and photographs she sent to relatives and friends in the US while living in Kaifeng reveal considerably more about the status of the community than any other source that was made available to the West during the period beginning in 1933, when Bishop White of the Canadian Anglican Church retired from his post in Kaifeng and returned home to Toronto, and ending in 1980, when the restrictions against visits to the city by Westerners were eased. Michal Pollak, *The Jews of Dynastic China: A Critical Bibliography*, 161. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College and The Sino-Judaic Institute, 1993).]

UNRRA
370 N. Soochow Road
Shanghai
21 July 1947
Kaifeng

Dear Mom and Mary,

Now that I have looked around here I can tell you a little about one of the reasons I wanted to come to Kaifeng. I had read someplace a long time ago that there was a place in China where some Jews had come many years ago, intermarried for generations until they had become almost completely assimilated with the Chinese. The place they settled in was Kaifeng and I thought it would be very interesting if I could see this for myself. It is such an old history that it took me all this time to find anyone here who knew much about it—although I had been noticing that many of the Chinese faces in town do not look entirely Chinese.

From some books at the Canadian Church Mission I was able to learn a little of the history. No one can be sure just when these Jews came here, but it probably that they came as early as the year 34 A.D.—almost two thousand years ago—from Babylon... Anyway, up until about 400 years ago these Babylonian Jews did not intermarry with the Chinese and were a prosperous community. They support their own large synagogue and were Hebrew scholars. But now, after intermarrying all these years, there are only three known Chinese-Jewish families left, and on Saturday I visited one.

I visited the Chao family and took some pictures I hope to send you if they come out all right. Mr. Chao, although he doesn't speak anything but Chinese, looks quite Jewish as you will see and calls himself a Jew. He was very happy to have me visit him and I asked a lot of questions. He is about 30 years old, and is married to a pure Chinese young woman, and is a newspaper reporter. He owns the compound he lives in and also rents some of the houses. He told me that the spot where the synagogue was is right underneath his house where I was sitting and for that reason he has a sentimental attachment to it and his family will always live there. Of course, there is no more synagogue here, all Hebrew books were lost or destroyed and he cannot read Hebrew. I asked him if he had any of the old books among his relics and he very sadly said, no, he wished he had. I told him that I could send him a new Hebrew book if he was interested, and he became very enthusiastic and said he would be grateful if I would. So I will write to a friend of mine at the Jewish Seminary where I worked, ask her to choose an appropriate book and send you the bill, which I would like you to pay for out of my money. I asked him if he still observed the dietary laws and he said that he does not eat meat with blood in it. I asked him how he prepares it, and he said he salts it. So there you are, Kosher meat here in Kaifeng. In his living room was a picture of his old grandfather. I took a picture of it because I thought it was beautiful. An old Chinese man in Chinese gown and hat, with the beard and face of a rabbi. I will track down the other two families too and will tell you more about [them].

22 July 1947

Dear Gloria,

You are not due for a letter yet but I am writing this to ask a special favor... The reason I am writing you all this is when I asked him if he would like to have a new Hebrew book, since he seemed very sad when he said he no longer had the ancient ones, he jumped out of his seat and said he would be very grateful of one. So—would you select something (or perhaps Dr. Finklestein would like to suggest something appropriate) send it direct to him, and the bill to my mother? I have already written my mother that I would do this, as I haven't access to U.S. \$ here.

His address: Mr. Chao Ching Huan
17 Nan Chiao Ching Hutung
Kaifeng, Honan, China

(also paste the Chinese address attached on the cover to insure delivery)

My mother: Mrs. H. Soroka,
4135 45 Street
Long Island City,
New York

4 August 1947

Dear Mom and Mary,

I received your airletter of July 22 this week. It took only ten days. I think the airmail service is pretty good lately...I have been unable to get away so far, because our whole Yellow River relief project seems to be drawing to a climax right now...

Yesterday I again went to call on some of the Chinese Jews in the city. First I went to see Mr. Ai Tze-huo who has a wood-carving and lacquer shop. He wasn't in but I met his two sons, in their thirties, who claim to be Jewish and were happy to meet me. These two looked like any Chinese coolie in China and did not have the slightest resemblance to a Jew. However, the family name Ai is an authentic Jewish one here and the picture of their father on the wall looked very interesting. They invited me into the back of the compound where they live and upon drawing back the curtains which they use instead of doors I saw what looked like a pile of junk on a wooden shelf, a rough table, a few rough chairs and the usual dirt floor. However, my interpreter informed me immediately when the curtains were drawn that this was a rich man. Apparently, all that junk—stone figures, vases, incense burners, all kinds of curios—is the sign of a wealthy man in Kaifeng. Because of the work they do (inscribing wooden plaques for doorways), both the Ai brothers were dressed in coolie working clothes and so it was a little hard to believe. One of them had on a red undershirt, which I couldn't take my eyes off. They were very gracious and insisted on my eating some watermelon with them—the orange kind. I then took pictures of them and invited them and their father to come and visit me at UNRRA any time.

I forgot to mention that before I started we went to pick up Mr. Chao, whom I met two weeks ago, as he was to make the introductions. While I was sitting in his house (also a dirt-floored hut with a shelf full of antiques) waiting for him I chatted a little with his wife. I noticed what looked like an incense burner on the shelf and asked her what it was. It was an incense burner. I asked what they used it for. She said for worship. I asked,

to worship what? She said Mr. Chao's ancestors—the first and fifteenth of each lunar month they burn incense in their memory. This, of course, is a Chinese custom. I told them about our Friday night candles. By the way, Mom, would you tell me what year it is of the Hebrew calendar. I think they would all be interested to know this—or perhaps you could send me a calendar.

From Mr. Ai's home, we went to visit Dr. Kao Shou-feng. He is an old Chinese Jew with whiskers and, of all things, he is a doctor of Chinese medicine. That is the kind who sticks needles and use all kinds of herbs and ancient remedies. He, too, is "rich" and, upon request, brought out many plaques which were presented to him by the grateful sick people he cured. All his ancestors have been doctors, passing their learning on to each son. His two sons are practicing Chinese medicine, too. He showed me his kit of needles—his fingers, incidentally, have those long, curved nails you read about. For fun, I asked him how he would treat a headache. He picked out one thin, curved needle and said he would stick it once in the left temple, once in the right, and once between the left thumb and index finger—for a man. For a woman with a headache, the same thing only between the right thumb and index finger! He told me he is a Jew and removes the blood from all meat before eating it. I asked him if he practiced any other religion (because most Chinese practice five or six at once – Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, etc.—they think the more the better.) He said no. I asked what about Christianity, because this influence is strong among the educated Chinese in a big city like Kaifeng. He said he was not baptized but sometimes he attends the Christian church. A little shocked, I said "WHAT?" He said sometimes he likes to take a walk and drops in at the local church. He seemed to know as much about the Chinese-Jews here as anyone and told me where several other families are located. (Mr. Chao says there are still 100 families, who don't know who they are, but he has a list and says he will copy it for me—what I will do with it, I don't know.) Dr. Kao also told me that during the Japanese occupation, the Japanese once rounded up all the Jews in Kaifeng and took their picture. I asked what for, and he said he was a friendly Japanese. This surprised me because Mr. Chao had told me he had to flee the city when the Japanese came because the Japanese were anti-semitic and looking for these Kaifeng Chinese-Jews. My interpreter, who is a humorous old Chinese scholar, laughed and said it was his opinion the Japanese was a Jew too. So you see, after all these

years the facts have gotten pretty much mixed up and confused and that's why no two accounts of this community are the same... I hope I can go back there sometime, with our UNRRA Romanian-Jewish doctor, and perhaps find out some more about this strange medicine he practices.

30 September 1947

Dear Mom and Mary,

It is very sharp, crisp autumn weather here now. The Chinese, and we, are just celebrating the Autumn or Moon, Festival. It is one of the three big holidays which come after the harvests so that the farmers can rest and celebrate. At this particular time, everybody buys and gives to their friends the small round Moon Cakes and it was really quite festive in town yesterday to see all the stores stacked with these gaily packaged cakes. It was something like Christmas the way everybody was in the streets at once, full of bundles, and hurrying about their holiday business. The New Year Festival in February is the time everybody pays up all debts, but at this time if any friends are mad at each other this is the holiday to bring them Moon Cakes and make up. And if they are not mad they bring cakes anyway. On Saturday I decided to join in the custom myself and bought these boxes of Moon Cakes and went calling on the three Chinese Jewish families I am acquainted with. Old Dr. Kao (the needle witch doctor) was in fine form and told us that as he looked at me and Dr. Krantzdorf he felt a very strong emotion and feeling of identity with his Jewish ancestors. He told us that whenever he reads in the papers of Jewish persecutions he feels very upset. So, we asked him if he could go to Palestine, would he? He said yes, but like a true Chinese, he added that he'd take his sons and leave the girls in China! When we left, also like a good Chinese, he kept bowing to the ground all the way out. The Ais weren't home when we called so I just left the cakes but I could hear all the servants and friends in the courtyard passing the word around in Chinese that "the landmen have come." The Chinese have a word "lao hsiang" which is very common, meaning people who come from the same native small town. Mr. Chao, the newspaperman, was very cordial but a little preoccupied because the government censorship had just clamped down on him and forbidden him to print any military news in his paper because, they said, the paper had printed a mistake last week. To report military news in Nationalist China you have to

be quite a contortionist and liar. Although the Communists have been mopping up in the past few months, in the Chinese papers you only read of Nationalists victories, their "strategic retreats," and bombastic threats of annihilating the whole Communist Army—rather, the Bandit Army, as they call them. Items appear like: "A force of 20,000 bandits attacked at such-and-such a place. The Nationalists killed and wounded 60,000 of them and then retreated!" (I don't read Chinese, but we have a daily translation in the office of the local news.)

7 October

Dear Gloria,

...Emotionally, I could almost do a missionary job in revitalizing this lost tribe, but intellectually I wonder if it isn't better to let them lose the stigma. They really have succeeded in this and have more in common with any Chinese than they have with us. If they re-established themselves as a Jewish community, that familiar day might very well come... Anyway, I don't think there is any harm in a few books and in any case, without a bona fide missionary, Judaism with them would play no bigger part in their lives than Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, etc. You know, when the "converts" embrace Christianity here it is my firm conviction that they do no more than add it—as a philosophy—to their collection of other above-mentioned "philosophies" and practice them all at once. They do this frankly with Buddhism, Taoism, etc., though the Christian missionaries of course expect them to discard all others. The Chinese respect wisdom above all else and so why shouldn't they select the best from all philosophies rather than accept the close-mindedness which a monotheist religion demands? Consequently, there is no religious or racial prejudice in China—though the country is plenty backward in most other respects. And it is just my opinion (a westerner with crazy standards) that they are backward at all, not theirs...

[Mr. Chao] told me that about 40 years ago his grandfather opened a teahouse in Kaifeng, inviting anyone to partake free of charge provided he could tell a story that might throw some light on the history of the Jews in Kaifeng, but nothing much came of it. It is Chao, too, who has a list of the few hundred Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, compiled by one of his family. He also told me that these remaining Jews do get together for a meeting every few years just to keep track of their Jewish beginnings. I told him I thought the book I promised was coming soon and he jumped up out of his seat and bowed three times, with much smiles and thank yous...

BOOK NOOK

New of Note

Jewish Communities in Modern Asia: Their Rise, Demise and Resurgence, edited by Rotem Kowner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Jewish settlement in Asia, beyond the Middle East, is largely a modern phenomenon. Imperial expansion and adventurism by Great Britain and Russia were the chief motors that initially drove Jewish settlers to move eastwards, in the nineteenth century, combined as this was with the rise of port cities and general development of the global economy. The new immigrants soon become centrally involved, in ways quite disproportionate to their numbers, in Asian commerce. Their role and centrality finished with the outbreak of World War II, the chaos that resulted from the fighting, and the consequent collapse of Western imperialism. This unique, ground-breaking book charts their rise and fall while pointing to signs of these communities' post-war resurgence and revival. Fourteen chapters by many of the most prominent authorities in the field, from a range of perspectives, explore questions of identity, society, and culture across several Asian locales. It is essential reading for scholars of Asian Studies and Jewish Studies.

Never Has So Much Been Written About So Few

By Anson Laytner

Although never numbering more than 10,000 souls even at their height in the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese Jewish community of Kaifeng, whose population is now estimated at no more than 500, has received far more attention than their size might have warranted.

Between Rudolf Loewenthal's 1939-1946 classic three bibliographies (reissued as *The Sino-Judaic Bibliographies of Rudolf Loewenthal*, ed. Michael Pollak, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College and Sino-Judaic Institute, 1988) and Michael Pollak's own 1993 supplementary volume *The Jews of Dynastic China: A Critical Bibliography*, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College and Sino-Judaic Institute, 1993), there are over 950 entries. The late Donald Leslie's masterful *Jews and Judaism in Traditional China: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Sankt Augustin –Nettetal: Monumenta Serica, 1998), itself a compendium reviewing primary and secondary sources in numerous languages—Chinese, English, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, and more—lists more than 900 authors, and many of these with multiple entries!

And publications regarding the Kaifeng Jews have only burgeoned since then.

This essay will review the major books and key essays, both classic and contemporary, on the Kaifeng Jews that have been published in English since Leslie's book.

The Classics

There is no better place to start than with William Charles White's massive compilation of materials on the Kaifeng Jews. White, a Canadian Anglican missionary, was bishop of Henan province from 1910 to 1933. His book, *Chinese Jews: A Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of K'ai-feng Fu*, 3 vols., (Toronto: University of Toronto: 1942); 2nd ed., 1 vol., (New York: Paragon, 1966), is essential reading on the subject because it contains translations of the commemorative stelae, the synagogue inscriptions, abridged accounts of visitors to the community and much more. His translations of the Chinese materials have been faulted as some-

times inaccurate and for insensitivity to their Jewish context but the book is essential for its content nonetheless.

Hyman Kublin, then a professor of history at Brooklyn College, compiled two volumes, *Studies of the Chinese Jews: Selections from Journals East and West*, (New York: Paragon, 1971) and *Jews in Old China: Some Western Views*, (New York: Paragon, 1971), which reproduce otherwise hard to find materials. The first volume features thirteen articles by prominent scholars from 1895 through 1969, including Lawrence Kramer, Rudolf Loewenthal, Paul Pelliot, Donald Leslie, and Berthold Laufer. The second volume consists of four pieces, one by the English missionary, James Finn, in 1843; a lecture from 1900 by an Anglo-Jewish scholar (and son of the Chief Rabbi), Marcus Nathan Adler; a rambling history lesson by merchant-scholar S.M. Perlmann, from 1913, which is notable for the account of his meeting with several Kaifeng Jews in Shanghai in 1906 and his advocacy for a Jewish national home; and a 1926 essay by Edward Ezra and Arthur Sopher (and Arthur Horne), three members of the Shanghai-based Society for the Rescue of the Chinese Jews, which operated intermittently in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Standing head and shoulders above the many scholars in this small field is the late Donald Leslie, the author of many works on the Jews and Muslims in dynastic China. His book, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews: The Jewish Community of K'aifeng* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), is the most comprehensive scholarly study written to date, covering the history, religion, sociology, inscriptions, and manuscripts of the community. With hundreds of bibliographic references, and despite its dense academic style,

it remains the primary resource for scholars and students.

The last “classic” worth noting is the late Michael Pollak’s far-ranging book, *Mandarin, Jews and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980. 2nd ed., New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1998). This highly readable volume traces the history and culture of the Kaifeng community and, equally important, follows the impact of the awareness of its existence in the Western world, from controversies in the Catholic Church to Menasheh b. Israel’s campaign to persuade Cromwell’s England to readmit Jews.

The Modern

The late Sidney Shapiro, an American Jew who became a citizen of the People’s Republic in 1963, performed an invaluable service by making available to English readers edited versions of Chinese scholarly works from late 19th and 20th centuries, including those by the highly regarded scholars Chen Yuan, Pan Guangdan, and Wang Yisha in his book *Jews in Old China: Studies by Chinese Scholars*, expanded ed. (New York: Hippocrene, 1984 and 2001). The later edition is preferred as it presents more offerings.

Moshe Bernstein, an American Sinologist residing in Australia, wrote *Globalization, Translation and Transmission: Sino-Judaic Cultural Identity in Kaifeng, China* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017) originally as his PhD dissertation in Social Sciences for the University of Western Australia. This awkwardly named book covers both the ancient and modern periods of Kaifeng Jewish history in a comprehensive manner but what makes this book essential reading is the fact that it is one of the few volumes based on extensive first-hand observation and

experience. Part Two covers the most recent period of the community’s history, from its opening up to the world in 1979 to the government’s suppression of the community in 2015. As such, it is one of the few pieces that discusses direct encounters with the Kaifeng Jews in modern times.

The late Jordan Paper, a Canadian scholar of Chinese and comparative religion, wrote *The Theology of the Chinese Jews, 1000–1850* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier, 2012). His book places the religious life of the Kaifeng Jews in its Chinese context, showing how their beliefs absorbed Confucian and Daoist ideas in much the same way as Rabbinic Judaism absorbed Hellenistic ideas and Ashkenazi Jewry took in concepts from European Christian theology and philosophy. His central thesis is that familism, aka filial piety, aka family reverence, is central to all Chinese religions, including the Judaism of the Kaifeng Jews.

Approaching the subject of religion from the opposite direction, Chaim Simons, an Israeli Orthodox rabbi and scholar, in his *Jewish Religious Observance by the Jews of Kaifeng China*, (Seattle: Sino-Judaic Institute, 2010) compares normative halachic practice with that of Kaifeng Jews and, based on primary and secondary sources, finds that in their heyday “there is a source in Rabbinical literature for almost all the activities which the Jews of Kaifeng considered to be Jewish practice.”

Anson Laytner and Jordan Paper’s edited collection of essays, *The Chinese Jews of Kaifeng: A Millennium of Adaptation and Endurance* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2017), reprints notable essays from the Sino-Judaic Institute’s Sino-Judaica series, including the late Nigel Thomas’ fascinating “Radhanites, Chinese Jews and the Silk Road of

the Steppes” and Andrew Plaks’ “The Confucianization of the Kaifeng Jews: Interpretations of the Kaifeng Stelae Inscriptions,” along with other important essays, such as the late Irene Eber’s oft-reprinted “Kaifeng Jews Revisited: Sinification as Affirmation of Identity”. The second part of the book features essays dealing with the Western Jewish encounter with the Kaifeng community, beginning with Alex Bender’s intriguing “A History of Early Jewish Interactions with the Kaifeng Jews,” continuing with observations from the field by Mathew Eckstein in “Identity Discourse and the Chinese-Jewish Descendants” and concluding with a review of the most recent history in Anson Laytner’s “Between Survival and Revival: The Impact of Western Jewish Interaction on Kaifeng Jewish Identity”.

Anyone who delves into the literature of this subject will encounter the name Tiberiu Weisz, an American Jewish scholar, with two books on the subject to his credit: *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China* (New York: iUniverse, 2006) and *A History of the Kaifeng Israelites: Encounters with Israelites in Chinese Literature* (Outskirts Press, 2018). The former offers a new, poetic translation of commemorative stelae to compete with Bishop White’s translation, which the author and others criticize as containing multiple errors and Christian-based cultural assumptions. Weisz remedies this by providing a Jewish context to the texts but his translations also have been disparaged by some scholars as inaccurate. The second volume complements the first with an in-depth review of history based on Chinese, Western and Jewish sources, and seeks to trace the names for Jews/Israelites in Chinese literature in support of his claim that Jews settled in China much earlier than is generally

accepted, i.e., sometime after the Babylonian exile, in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE).

Xu Xin, professor emeritus at Nanjing University, the dean of Jewish Studies programs in China, and mentor to a host of Chinese Judaica scholars, has, in addition to his essays advocating on behalf of the Kaifeng Jews, published two works in English on the subject, his first, with Beverly Friend, *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1995) is a retelling in a popular format of the community's history, while his second volume, *The Jews of Kaifeng, China: History, Culture, and Religion* (Hoboken: KTAV, 2003) is a more scholarly, yet still popular-in-style volume.

Two exhibit catalogues, one based on the other, are worth mentioning. The first, *The Jews of Kaifeng: Chinese Jews on the Banks of the Yellow River* (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, 1984) features a summarizing essay by Michael Pollak, and *East Gate of Kaifeng: A Jewish World Inside China*, M. Patricia Needle, ed. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota China Center, 1992) took papers presented at a symposium when the Beth Hatefutsoth exhibit traveled to Minneapolis and published its own catalogue and volume, with essays by Michael Pollak, Andrew Plaks, Gao Wangzhi, Sara Irwin and others.

Mixed Volumes

Based on the 1992 pathbreaking Harvard conference, "Jewish Diasporas in China: Comparative and Historical Perspectives," Jonathan Goldstein edited two volumes, *Jews of China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999 and 2000), offering a cornucopia of materials dealing with Kaifeng Jews, Indian Jews, Baghdadi and Ashkenazi Jews. The first volume brings together major scholars in the field, often for the first time, including the late Irene Eber, "Kaifeng Jews: The Sinification of Identity," Andrew Plaks, "The Confucianization of

the Kaifeng Jews: Interpretations of the Kaifeng Stelae Inscriptions," Michael Pollak, "The Revelation of a Jewish Presence in Seventeenth-Century China: Its Impact on Western Messianic Thought," and Wendy Abraham, "Memories of Kaifeng's Jewish Descendants Today: Historical Significance in Light of Observations by Westerners Since 1605." Volume two, a sourcebook and research guide, includes essays by Xu Xin, "Chinese Research on Jewish Diasporas in China," Wang Yisha, "New Trends and Achievements in Chinese Research on Ancient Chinese Jews," and an essay by bibliographer Frank Joseph Shulman, "The Chinese Jews and the Jewish Diasporas in China from the Tang Period through the Mid-1990s: A Selected Bibliography," which deals partially with the Kaifeng community.

The late Roman Malek, a German Sinologist, edited *Jews in China: From Kaifeng...to Shanghai* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute and China Zentrum: 2000). A scholar's book, based on proceedings from a 1997 international academic conference, with essays in English, German and Chinese, it devotes about a third of the volume to Kaifeng and the remainder to analyzing different aspects of the European Jewish experience on China's coast. Some of the articles deal with esoteric matters, like the whereabouts of Kaifeng Jewish artifacts today or what became of Jewish property in Kaifeng, others rehash information and ideas found elsewhere. Of particular note, however, are Hartmut Walravens' "Bibliographical Notes on Jews in China," which reviews some German contributions to the subject, and Xu Xin's brief to various political bodies in the People's Republic advocating a change of policy regarding the Kaifeng Jews: "Some Thoughts

on Our Policy toward the Jewish Religion—including a Discussion of Our Policy Toward the Kaifeng Jews."

In Avrum Ehrlich's edited volume *The Jewish—Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* (London: Routledge, 2008) a hodgepodge of materials is presented but the book is notable for essays by Galia Patt-Shamir and Yoav Rapoport comparing Judaism and Confucianism, and a whole section on the Kaifeng Jewish descendants, particularly "The Contemporary Condition of the Jewish Descendants of Kaifeng," by Ehrlich and Liang Pingan, which is marred only by its strange—and needless—use of pseudonyms, and Xu Xin's excellent essay "The Chinese Government Policy Towards the Descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng."

Drawing on presentations made at a scholarly international symposium held at the University of Mainz in 2003, another German scholar, Peter Kupfer, edited *Youtai—Presence and Perception of Jews and Judaism in China* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008). Included are essays by Peter Kupfer, "The Perception and Self-Perception of Jewishness in Kaifeng in the Past and Present"; London-based Maisie Meyer on the little-known Baghdadi Jewish community of Shanghai and their even less-known efforts to rescue the Kaifeng Jewish community from oblivion, "Baghdadi Jews, Chinese 'Jews' and Chinese"; a novel comparison of the Jewish and Muslim communities of Kaifeng by Yin Gang, titled "Between Disintegration and Expansion: A Comparative Retrospection of the Kaifeng Jewish and Muslim Communities"; Zhang Li-gang's "The Understanding and Attitude of Chinese Society Towards the Kaifeng Jews"; and French-Israeli scholar Salomon Wald's enlightening "Chinese Jews in European Thought."

Most significant is the Israeli scholar Noam Urbach's "What Prevented the Reconstruction of the Chinese Synagogue? Kaifeng Jews between Revival and Obliteration," a complex and detailed study of the recent history of the community, the failed municipal effort to rebuild the synagogue in Kaifeng, and the implications that failed endeavor had for the community's fluctuating official status.

Talking of Urbach, also of note is his essay "Kaifeng Judaism Today: Revival or Reintroduction," in Netanel Fisher and Tudor Parfitt, eds., *Becoming Jewish: New Jews and Emerging Jewish Communities in a Globalized World* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), in which he poses the almost-theoretical question of what constitutes Chinese Judaism. Assuming the community is allowed to revive, will it practice some variation of the Sino-Judaic synthesis of the Ming period or should it observe something more in line with Judaism as practiced in Israel and the West? The former, if it were possible to reconstruct, would be truer to its roots and thus more acceptable in China, but the latter would enable the Kaifeng Jews to better connect with Jews elsewhere and vastly improve their chances of making aliyah. Urbach might not write frequently, but when he does, his work is outstanding, and in this case, provocative.

The diverse scope of work of the late Israeli Sinologist Irene Eber is highlighted in a collection of her essays edited by Kathryn Hellerstein. *Jews in China: Cultural Conversations, Changing Perceptions* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania, 2020). It offers two of Eber's most significant essays on the Kaifeng Jews: "Overland and by Sea: Eight Centuries of the Jewish Presence in China" and "Chinese Jews and Jews in China: Kaifeng—Shanghai" in addition to other fascinating ex-

plorations into the far-reaches of Sino-Judaica—like Yiddish literature translations in Chinese—for which Eber was justly famous.

Stand-Alone Essays

A number of stand-alone essays are worth mentioning.

In one of the only examples of a cross-cultural give-and-take (of a sort), Zhang Qianhong, then director of the Jewish Studies program at Henan University in Kaifeng, wrote "Studies on the Confucianisation of the Kaifeng Jewish Community," to which the redoubtable French-Israeli scholar, Shalom Salomon Wald, wrote an even longer response, "Studies on the Confucianisation of the Kaifeng Jewish Community': A Critical Commentary." The gaps in knowledge and the cultural assumptions are large. Both articles appeared in the *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57:2, Autumn 2006.

Two other essays of note are by contemporary Chinese scholars.

The first is by James Peng Yu, who currently teaches in Montreal but formerly taught at Hebei University of Science and Technology. His essay "Revising the date of Jewish arrival in Kaifeng, China, from the Song Dynasty (960–1279) to the Hung-wu period (1368–98) of the Ming Dynasty," in the *Journal of Jewish Studies* 68:2, Autumn 2017, rejects the more commonly advanced entry dates for Jewish settlement in China—the Han, Tang or Song dynasties—and instead hypothesizes them settling in Kaifeng in the Ming dynasty.

The second is by an author using a pseudonym, and all efforts to track her/him down thus far have failed. The author writes under the alias Wu Jinyao, described only as an independent researcher. The essay, "Where Is the Home: Kaifeng Jewish Descendants on the Road of Return," which appeared in the British academic publication *The Asian*

Journal of Social Science Studies 7:9, 2022, is ground-breaking in its scope. It not only treats official Chinese and Israeli positions on the subject of the Kaifeng Jews in a comprehensive manner, it also explores the dual issues of Israeliness (or Jewishness) and Chineseness. Most importantly, it is the first work to present and analyze the views and experiences of Chinese Jews who have immigrated to Israel. The author utilizes primary and secondary sources, in English and Chinese, setting her (or his) work in the context of how minority and marginal populations have been treated both in China and Israel.

Conclusion

If one is seeking the best one volume introduction to the subject, one ought look no further than Michael Pollack's *Mandarin, Jews and Missionaries*. It covers both the Kaifeng community in detail and how awareness of the community had an impact in the West. Xu Xin's *The Jews of Kaifeng, China* is a lighter take, focusing only on Kaifeng proper.

If one wants an understanding of the contemporary situation, the essays by Noam Urbach and Anson Laytner are good places to start, followed up by Wu Jinyao's coverage of the Kaifeng Jews in Israel.

And what, you might ask, of the community itself? Since 2015, the activities of the Kaifeng Jews have been suppressed as part of the government's anti-unauthorized religions campaign. All evidence of their presence in the city removed: they cannot meet collectively; teachers from the Sino-Judaic Institute and Shavei Israel have been expelled; foreign tours are no longer allowed; the museum exhibits have been removed or closed; and the former school site been turned into a government-run surveillance center. And still the Kaifeng Jews persist...

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



Dear Reader,

A Jewish community has existed in Kaifeng, China for over 1000 years! For the last century or so, it has survived just on memories and a sense of Jewish identity.

Only in the 21st century have Jews outside of China been able to help educate interested community members in regaining their Jewish culture.

Now the Sino-Judaic Institute is poised to bring a Kaifeng Jew to America to train as a para-rabbi before returning home to guide his community in its revival.

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.

SJI has raised \$13,200 for this project and needs to raise \$10,700 more. Won't you help us to revive the Jewish community of Kaifeng.

Please send your tax-deductible contribution to SJI online at (www.sinojudaic.org) through the Denise Yeh Bresler Kaifeng Scholarship Fund or mail a check, made out to The Sino-Judaic Institute and note on the Memo Line: "Kaifeng Scholarship Fund" and mail to: Prof. Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer, The Sino-Judaic Institute, 34 Colgate Rd., Unit 1, Roslindale, MA 02131.

The Chinese Jewish community of Kaifeng has been an "endangered species" for far too long. Join us in being a part of their historic revival!

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

Mail to: The Sino-Judaic Institute, Prof. Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer, Sino-Judaic Institute, 34 Colgate Rd., Unit 1, Roslindale, MA 02131, or sign up online at www.sinojudaic.org

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