

Combining Contradictions: Jewish Contributions to the Chinese Revolution

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Abstract

Jews were deeply involved in Communist revolutions in Europe, and primarily in Russia, often in leading positions. This is understandable given their demographic location, extensive education and suffering over the years. However, how could we account for the fact that they also played a role in Communist revolutions in Asia, and especially in China? There were practically no Jewish communities to speak of and those few who lived there had been almost totally assimilated, and had no interest whatsoever in Chinese culture, history and politics. Still, Jews (who arrived out of China) not only took part in the revolution but had also helped igniting it and then stayed on or joined later. While dealing with this puzzle in my paper, I'll try to offer a typology of Jewish activists and revolutionaries in China, to explain their motives (by choice or not), and to evaluate their contributions in perspective. It appears that their Jewish identity did not play a direct role in their revolutionary activism, but it did play an indirect role. Included in this study are Grigorii Gershuni, Grigorii Voitinski, Boris Shumiatsky, Michail Borodin, Adolf Joffe, Pavel Mif, David Crook, Sidney Rittenberg, Israel Epstein, Sidney Shapiro, Solomon Adler, Sam Ginsbourg, Michael Shapiro, and more. Their main value to the revolution was mainly writing, translation, communication and publication. Although they were all deeply committed to the Chinese Communist revolution, some of them were jailed – for years – and occasionally more than once. Nonetheless, they continued to believe in, and even to justify, the Chinese Communist Party.

Keywords: *Jewish activists, Chinese Communist Revolution, Jewish identities, Tikkun 'Olam, Jewish Revolution*

“It is good that you should take hold of this, and also from this you shall not withdraw your hand.”

Ecclesiastes 7:18

1. Introduction

Jewish participation in radical social movements and revolutionary activities is not an exceptional phenomenon in modern history. There is much evidence for it all over the world, especially in Europe. Jews not only joined Leftist and Communist movements, but also assumed leadership positions in many, notably in the Russian Revolution. This is understandable given their share in the population (about three million in Russia in 1917); their infusion with the local language and culture; their political, social and economic persecution and suffering throughout the years under the czars and other oppressors; and their religious background, educational achievements and intellectual level.

At the same time, many Jews firmly opposed communism and upheld capitalism. Occasionally, Jewish families split between those who were for, or against, communism. Common in the West, none of these rivalries had existed in China. There, Jewish communities were not only minute but had no interest in joining a revolution. China became a haven for Russian and European Jews who had escaped persecution and death. In China they gained shelter, freedom and prosperity. Jewish communities that had settled in China before, notably in Kaifeng, assimilated and none survived. Associated with British values, Baghdadi Jews had settled mainly in Shanghai and Hong Kong from the mid-1850s, betraying no interest in revolution, least of all communist. In fact, they had known practically nothing about it. Socialism had been insignificant in late 19th century China. Like most Western doctrines, socialism penetrated Asia via Japan, adopted by expatriate Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese intellectuals and activists.

Initially, of the different kinds of socialism “imported” to Japan, communism (and Karl Marx) were the *least* attractive to Chinese intellectuals. Considered too violent, the notions of “class struggle” contradicted traditional Confucian values of harmonious and integrative society, and the thought that “workers” represented the “universal” and “revolutionary” class, did not conform to pre-modern Chinese beliefs. Unlike Japan, the forerunner in Asia’s industrialization and urbanization, “modern” China remained backward and agrarian. Its bourgeoisie and proletariat, were too weak and underdeveloped, to create revolutionary conditions and incentives. Therefore, intellectuals preferred Western social democracy or *state* socialism, which still accorded predominance to the government, to rule by merit, and to social cohesion – according to traditional values. Whatever socio-political opposition and ideological radicalism existed, they were articulated not by Marxist communism, but by anarchism. Mao Zedong, one of the founders and later

leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), regarded himself as anarchist up to the early 1920s (Mao, 1978: 20). Among “importers” of anarchism to Japan and, indirectly, to China (and East Asia), was a Jewish Lithuanian activist, Grigory Gershuni.

Unlike leading Chinese anarchists who were intellectuals and theoreticians (Zarrow, 1990), Gershuni became a professional anarchist. Although, like other Jewish revolutionaries, he totally absorbed Russian culture, he was still proud of his Jewish origins and ability to fight antisemitism, using violence if needed. A founder of the Workers’ Party for the Political Liberation of Russia, in 1901, after his arrest, he became a co-founder of the Social-Revolutionary (SR) Party. In 1902, he launched the Party’s Combat Organization, which engaged in assassinations and terrorist acts. Betrayed by one of his “colleagues”, he was arrested in 1903, and a year later exiled to a prison (a labour camp) in east Siberia in the region of Nerchinsk (Gershuni, 2015: xi, xvi; 1919; Viktor, 1934). Before his arrest, he agreed to a “temporary alliance with the Constitutional Democrats (Geifman, 1993: 339).” In 1906, stuck in a barrel of *sauerkraut*, he escaped to China and thence to Japan. There, he met 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War prisoners, and Asian activists (like Sun Yat-sen) (Crump, 1983: 218-221, 236). This was perhaps the first time that Asian “revolutionaries” became familiar with *practical* anarchism. Socialism was less attractive because it did not relate to nationalism and lacked the organizational tools of *making* revolution. Gershuni offered some of the tools, turning anarchism into the most popular Western ideology in early 20th century East Asia. Yet, shortly, anarchism was outpaced by Leninism, which handed solutions to both hurdles: nationalism and organization – thereby triggering Chinese communism and launching the most remarkable event in Chinese history, to this very day. Gershuni had failed because he promoted only one aspect of the revolution, the destructive rather than the constructive. Initially impressed, Chinese radicals later found it negative and unacceptable.

According to conventional wisdom, Chinese communism originated in the May Fourth Movement (1919) (Chow, 1960; Elleman, 2002). Allegedly, it was the Versailles Conference decision to give part of Shandong, formerly a German concession, to Japan. Disappointed, thousands of demonstrators expressed their anger against the Western powers, and especially against the United States (and particularly President Wilson’s) “betrayal”, which apparently led students and intellectuals to adopt Marxism-Leninism and the Russian Revolution. Thus, “The CCP was a direct product of the intellectual ferment that accompanied the anti-imperialist demonstrations commonly referred to as the May Fourth Movement (1919) (Saich, 2014).” Yet this may have not been the real story. In 1922, Japan returned Shandong to China. Washington’s “betrayal” was forgotten or ignored, and the US

began to associate with the Chinese Republic – and still does. Furthermore, “intellectual ferment”, or ideology, is not a substitute to organization. And, Marxism-Leninism was not the only option available to Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth era, but there was no other *organization* to promote alternative ideologies. Indeed, Chinese students and intellectuals favoured Marxism-Leninism and the Soviet option, less voluntarily (or in reaction to the West) and more because of Bolshevik endeavours and activities of the Comintern, coincidentally established in March 1919. Comintern “missionaries” not only distributed Soviet-inspired ideology but, moreover, orchestrated the establishment of communist cells, and ultimately of the CCP (Shichor, 2015: 62-77). It was then that Jewish activists began to play a role in the Chinese revolution. Their “Jewishness” was never directly – or even indirectly – related to their activism or influence. Still, their activism had something in common – if not consciously then maybe subconsciously – that had underlay their mission in China. They have promoted China’s revolutionary goals, in different stages and capacities while trying to overcome contradictions, overarch differences, mediate rivalries and unify opposites, thereby merging Chinese and Jewish traditions, East and West.

This article contains three parts. The first concentrates on the Jewish role in the introduction of communism to China, and overcoming CCP-GMD divergence, in 1919-1949. The second discusses the attempts of expatriate Jews, who had entered China mainly in the 1930s and 1940s, to bridge the gap between China and the outside world. The third part explores the role of Jewish advisers in appropriating capitalism – or free market economy – by post-Mao China, as a predominant component of Deng Xiaoping’s reform but also – perhaps not intentionally – as a precondition to the ultimate accomplishment of Marxist communism.

2. 1919-1949: Bridging Communism and Nationalism

Around the second decade of the 20th century, Jews played a role in communist movements far beyond their share in the population of their countries. This is especially true about the Russian Revolution (Frantzman, 2017). Of the seven members of the first Bolshevik Politburo, on the revolution’s eve – four were Jewish: Trotsky (Lev Davidovich Bronstein), Kamenev (Lev Borisovitch Rozenfeld), Zinoviev (Hirsch Apfelbaum), and Sokolnikov (Hirsh Yankelevich Brilliant). Other prominent Jews included Litvinov (Meir Henoah Wallach-Finkelstein), Karl Radek (Karol Sobelsohn), Bela Kun (Béla Kohn). Many of the chief Soviet and Comintern missionaries in China were Jewish: Grigorii Naumovitch Voitinski, Mikhail Borodin (Gruzenberg), Adolf Joffe, Pavel Mif, Nikolsky (Vladimir Abramovich Neumann [Neiman]) (Wilbur & How, 1989: 27-28; Abramov, 2005),¹ Boris

Zakharovich Shumiatsky, and a few others. Without homeland, Jews could overcome nationalist feelings and adopt universalist perspectives. There was also no need to convert and relinquish their religion, which communism rejected anyway; instead, Jews could easily adopt another culture and ideology, especially Marxism-Leninism, a substitute to a genuine national culture they did not have (Slezkine, 2004: 66-70). For them, China's remoteness, geographically and culturally, did not matter. As a universal ideology, Marxism-Leninism could apply to all countries. Jews, not restricted by exclusive national commitments, could (and some felt – should) play a revolutionary role everywhere, China included. And they did, in their own way.

Borodin and Voitinski were among the leading Comintern “missionaries” to China, whose support for the establishment of the CCP was indispensable. While Borodin is usually associated with the Nationalist Party (GMD, Guomindang), his mission was ultimately and fundamentally to promote the CCP. Born Mikhail Markovich Gruzenberg, aged 16 he joined the Bund (the General Jewish Workers' Union), an organization of intellectuals who still upheld their Jewish identity. In 1900, it was the largest social-democratic organization in Russia (Jacobs, 1981: 2). Whatever Jewish religious education and cultural values he had received, he later renounced – like most Jewish revolutionaries if not all of them (33). Like them, he sought better life, not just for Jews but also for humankind. This could not be achieved by a weak minority, or by the social democrats. Universally applied, Bolshevism was supposed to cure social evils everywhere.

Borodin's tools in promoting communism in China were his organizational capabilities, personal impression, and “extraordinary intellect and encyclopedic knowledge”, especially of Marxism and Western philosophy and history (69). Officially, Lenin sent him to China as an adviser to Sun Yat-sen, who led a separate nationalist regime in Guangzhou (Canton). Borodin arrived in Beijing in 1923, proceeding to Guangzhou on October 6. His message to the GMD, only partly accepted, included land distribution; raising workers' wages; and shortening their workdays. He regarded these land and labour reforms as a basis for *uniting* the CCP and the GMD – and China. According to Russian sources, a group of Americans, probably antisemitic, asked Sun Yat-sen if he had known Borodin's real name. Sun reportedly replied: “I know”, it is “Lafayette” (as cited in Jacobs, 1981, 126). Unlike other Jewish Soviet agents who, while in Kaifeng, established relations with the remnants of the Jewish community there (155), Borodin's interests lay elsewhere. His efforts focused on the communists whose influence in the GMD grew quickly, also thanks to him.

His insistence on CCP-GMD unity reflected his belief, which he occasionally stated, that China was not ready for communism, and would not be for decades (Jacobs, 1981: 187; Elleman, 1995: 450-480). In a retrospective

view, he was right. In 2020, as these words are written, communism in China is still far away on the horizon, despite CCP rule since October 1949. But in March 1926, Chiang Kai-shek turned against the communists in Shanghai, and Borodin – whose trust in Chiang vanished – had led the revolution in Wuhan by the end of the year. Without him the Wuhan Government would not have existed, nor survived. Escaping Chiang's reprisal, Borodin began his departure in July 1927, arriving in Soviet soil in late September. Initially backed by Stalin, he managed, for a while, to stay out of jail, and execution. But, as Stalin's antisemitism and suspicions of Comintern activism abroad grew, Borodin, being both Jewish and internationalist, was targeted. In early 1949, he was arrested, never seen again, and died in prison in Yakutsk on May 29, 1951, aged 67. To the end, he defended Stalin's united front policy (Messmer, 2012: 103). While most scholars, as well as CCP leaders, still regard Stalin's China policy as a grave mistake, in today's perspective he may have been right, certainly in Marxist-Leninist terms, and in Borodin's view.

His principal contribution to the Chinese revolution was CCP-GMD unity, which implied that the bourgeoisie is an essential precondition for achieving communism. Disregarded by Mao Zedong (and later by Stalin and most "communist" leaders), some Chinese leaders, especially those who had spent their youth in Western Europe following World War I, agreed (Levine, 1993; Bailey, 1988: 441-461; Hirayama, 2018: 353-374). They included leaders like Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Chen Yi, Li Fuchun and primarily Deng Xiaoping who, since the early 1950s, believed that the attempts to accomplish socialism, and communism, had to be based first on economic development. Yielding to Mao's policy, it was these leaders, headed by Deng, who, after Mao's death, launched economic reforms and free market policies, to lay the infrastructure for future communism.² While this was not exactly what Borodin had in mind, he still regarded collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and the capitalists, as essential to accomplishing communism.

Borodin's views were shared by Adolph Abramovich Joffe, who was briefly the Soviet ambassador to the official government in Beijing (1922-1924). Since his participation in the October 1917 revolution, he had held several posts (deputy commissar of Foreign Affairs and then ambassador to Germany). Born in the Crimea to a Jewish-Karaite family (Lindemann, 1997: 430), he tried hard to convince Sun Yat-sen to trust Moscow. Like Borodin, he believed that a precondition for the success of communism in China (and elsewhere) is a strong bourgeoisie. For Sun, this was a fundamental policy because he relied on rich capitalists. Still, Joffe's appeal, in fact one of the conditions for Soviet support, was rejected. Sun said that communism and the Soviet model could not be introduced in China, to which Joffe agreed. Instead, he emphasized that national unification and independence were essential. Joffe pursued GMD recognition of the CCP, and GMD-CCP collaboration –

regarded as a precondition for Soviet support to the GMD (Wilbur & How, 1989: 54-63, 80).³ Indeed, in September 1922, shortly after Joffe's arrival in China, Sun Yat-sen admitted the first CCP members into the GMD (Pantsov, 2000: 57, 105). Joffe's policy was accepted by the Soviet politburo. Gravely ill, he left China and, having been an ally of Trotsky, Stalin's enemy, he committed suicide in November 1927.

While Marxism-Leninism had existed in parts of China as a *theory*, turning it into an organized *activity* began with Comintern missionaries, headed by Grigorii Naumovitch Voitinski, who dealt with setting up the CCP. Voitinski was not the first Comintern envoy to China: Maring, Burtman, Popov and Agaryov among others, had preceded him, but he was the most important and, in a sense, "the first". "Voitinski would exercise an immense influence on the Chinese Communist Movement (Ishikawa, 2012: 95-119; Hu & Li, 2009: 87-92)." Also, the idea of forming a CCP had already circulated by that time, but no actions had been taken, before his arrival, aged 27, in April 1920.

He was born as Grigorii Naumovitch Zarkhin to a Jewish family in Nevel, Russia, in 1893. In 1918, shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, he joined the Communist Party in Vladivostok. In 1920 he became deputy director of the Comintern's Far Eastern Bureau and left for China, where he met with Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, the future CCP leaders. Although Chen toyed with the Communist idea as early as 1918, he had also been attracted by other ideas (like federalism). It was only after he met Voitinski that he became committed to Communism, not just in theory but also, and more important, in practice. It was following his meetings with Voitinski that the first communist cells had been formed – at least seven in different cities and provinces, before the CCP was organized. Voitinski's promotion of Marxist study groups not only paved the ground for the establishment of Party cells but also for distributing Marxist-Leninist knowledge that Chinese intellectuals had been lacking (Elleman, 2002; Chen, 2016; Lu, 2014). True, socialist and Marxist study groups had existed well before Voitniski's arrival in China, but there is a huge gap between theoretical study clubs and an actually organized party. To organize a party, external professional support was needed. Comintern agents, headed by Voitinski, provided it. His impact was felt not only in the emergence of anti-US feelings among Chinese intellectuals, but also, and more significantly, in fighting anarchism and in its eventual demise. Voitinski helped Chen to organize the Socialist Youth Corps in Shanghai, in August 1920. Earlier, in May, soon after his arrival, he encouraged a group of intellectuals to establish a CCP, in secret. "This should be considered the true date of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, albeit it later officially set the date as July 1921."⁴

Finally, Chinese revolutionaries were exposed to Soviet influence not only in China but also in the Soviet Union. With the inauguration of Sun

Yat-sen University in 1925, a first wave of some 340 Chinese students – both GMD and CCP – arrived in Moscow. Born in 1885 (as Karol Sobelsohn) to a Jewish family in Lvov, Karl Radek became its first rector. Although in his youth he had been a hard-core leftist, later he preferred revisionism, understanding the value of the bourgeoisie. In 1922, after joining the Comintern Executive Committee, he drafted the resolution concerning the entry of Chinese communists into the GMD, sent to Maring in China for execution. Implicitly, the resolution recognized the GMD's and the Chinese bourgeoisie's revolutionary potential. Many, including Trotsky and Zinoviev opposed the resolution, but Radek not only supported and drafted it, but his vote gave those who favoured, the majority (Pantsov, 2000: 47, 51, 102, 105, 114).⁵ By 1925, Radek had been regarded, and was considered by others, as an expert on China, which he studied intensively. Although he never visited China, he taught the history of the Chinese revolutionary movement. As the rector of Sun Yat-sen University, he must have influenced Chinese students – both left and right. To reinforce his call for GMD-CCP collaboration, he claimed that China's modern capitalism had already begun in the 1840s, under the impact of foreign imperialism, and only in the coastal regions. He also argued that landlordism had been a form of capitalism rather than of feudalism (120-121). This implied that the Chinese bourgeoisie was not as weak as had been supposed, and therefore a GMD-CCP alliance was essential. One of his sentences, published in 1925 and related to the prospects of the CCP to seize power, could be regarded, in retrospect, as a prediction: in the course of its revolutionary struggles, the Chinese proletariat, together with the petty bourgeoisie, "will be forced *for the time being* to develop the economic power of the land in a *capitalist* fashion (Radek, 1925: 30, as quoted in Lerner, 1970: 136, 205)." (Emphasis added).

However, in 1926 Radek began (or was forced) to change his mind, at least publicly, both because of the emergence of Chiang Kai-shek's brutal anti-CCP policy and, not less important, Stalin's firm opposition. At the university, Radek and his supporters were obliged to follow the "party line", but they still had some space to express their own views, which they did. Radek's books and other writings, and those of his supporters (Pantsov, 2000: 171, 175, 178, 183, 295),⁶ were still published. However, whatever their influence, it did not last long. On April 6, 1927, Radek was sacked from his university position and expelled from the party. His touch with the Chinese students through the university was cut off. Accused of treason, he was reportedly executed in a labor camp in 1939 (rehabilitated in 1988).

In sum, although the main mission of the Comintern was to promote the CCP and facilitate the communist revolution in China, its emissaries, many of them Jewish, considered CCP unity with the GMD, and the national bourgeoisie and capitalists, on which the GMD relied, as essential for

accomplishing the revolution – definitely in Leninist terms. Although Voitinski had promoted not only the establishment of the CCP, but also its cooperation with the GMD, he still insisted on keeping the CCP’s independence and its right to criticize the GMD, to block a “right deviation” (Zhou, 2016).

Throughout his life, Chiang Kai-shek relied on foreigners, whether Russian, German or American, but never trusted them (and in a retrospective view, for good reasons) (White, 1978: 157). Yet, Jews were different. Aware of the Jewish contribution to the Chinese revolution, this is what he said following his stay in Moscow in 1923:

Most of the Russian leaders holding responsible party and government positions who expressed regard for Dr. Sun and sincere desire to cooperate with China in her National Revolution were Jews, the only exceptions being Kamenev and Chicherin who were Russians [actually Kamenev was also Jewish]. These Jews [...] aroused my special interest. *I found that men like Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek and Joffe were, comparatively speaking, more concerned with the question of cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Russian Communist Party* (Chiang, 1957: 22). (Emphasis added).

3. 1949-1979: Bridging China and the West

Since the late 1930s and the early 1940s, over twenty thousand Jewish refugees escaped to China from Europe, mostly, but not only, to Shanghai. Some of them joined the communists, providing all kinds of services, primarily in medical and academic professions (Ehrlich, 2008; Kaminski, 2002; Pan, 2019). Few, who had been born in China, or arrived of their own free will, were involved in Chinese communism, underlined by their ideological beliefs and a vision of promoting revolution, not just in China but, eventually, also in the world.

Among the Jewish activists who associated themselves with Chinese communism were a number of Americans. Sidney Rittenberg was one of them. Influenced by his grandfather (on his mother’s side), who had been a Russian Jewish revolutionary, Rittenberg joined the American Communist Party in 1940 when he was eighteen, and enlisted in the US Army in 1942. Instead of Japanese, he decided to study Chinese, planning to go to China and support the Chinese revolution, hoping to create a better world (Rittenberg & Bennet, 1993: 13, 31, 144).⁷ When he arrived in China in September 1945, the war was over. As a Jew living in South Carolina, he “never felt completely accepted”. Aware of his religion “I found some comfort in Bible stories and old hymns, but I didn’t believe in a personal God (161).” Usually, Chinese he met did not know what a Jew was. He began to meet Chinese communists and, as a soldier free to move, did them modest favours – including helping several underground activists to escape from the police. He noticed that,

occasionally, people preferred the Japanese occupiers to the brutalities of the Nationalist Government. Sometime by late 1946 or early 1947, Rittenberg became a Party member, approved by the top communist leaders, including Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Ren Bishi and Zhu De (92-93). He was the first US citizen to become a CCP member (Charzuk, 2019). His main role was to make information about communist victories – discounted and ignored outside China – available to the West.

In 1949, Rittenberg was arrested, allegedly on Stalin's orders. Released in April 1955, the Chinese admitted that he had been wrongfully charged and imprisoned. Rittenberg was not the only Jew in Beijing. Others included Jane Sachs Hodes (daughter of Harry Sachs of Goldman Sachs Bank); Josh and Miriam Horn; David Crook; and Sonia, wife of Frank Su, a refugee from Nazi Austria (Hooper, 2016).⁸ For a few months in 1967, he was the head of China's Broadcast Administration (Radio Beijing), when the Cultural Revolution was turning nasty. Envious of his position, Chinese, and foreigners turned against him, using antisemitic comments: "Rittenberg shows all the qualities we have long been accustomed to finding in the Jew (Hooper, 2016: 383)." Arrested yet again, he was interrogated about Israel Epstein and Michael Shapiro, also in jail, as was David Crook, all Jewish. Imprisoned for nearly ten years, Rittenberg was released in November, 1977, and returned to the United States in March 1980. Despite his suffering, he remained committed to Chinese communism and to distributing its message, good or bad, to the outside world. As early as 1949, Beijing considered him "an engineer to build a bridge from the Chinese people to the American people (as quoted in Margolis, 2019)." Indeed, this was his, and his Jewish colleagues', primary mission.

Later in life, Rittenberg began to criticize the CCP and its increasing corruption. However, after his return to the US he continued his mission, to make China more accessible to the West, not in revolutionary vocabulary as in economic one. "He was interviewed on CBS network's '60 Minutes' more than any other individual (Charzuk, 2019)." More significant, he founded a consulting firm for American companies doing business in China. He offered his services, personal connections and familiarity with the Chinese system, turning into a full-fledge capitalist, making millions of dollars (McFadden, 2019; Rivlin, 2004). As such, he personally embodied the combination post-Mao China has been attempting, a socialist market economy, capitalism under a communist system. This unprecedented innovation was introduced to China mainly by Jewish economists, discussed below.

Israel Epstein made a similar contribution and endured similar suffering. Born in Warsaw in 1915, his family moved to China, first to Harbin and then to Tianjin. American and British influence in Tianjin led Epstein to education in English, which became his primary language and ultimately led him to

journalism. Nonetheless, his parents' socialist ideas – and the effects of the 1917 Russian Revolution – shaped his own political orientation for life. To some extent, it was a combination of orthodox Judaism and European enlightened modernism – not all that different from Chinese reformers' attempt to combine traditional Confucianism (*ti*) with practical necessities (*yong*), the difference being that while China was a state (and before that an empire), Jews did not have one of their own. As a child in Harbin, Epstein witnessed brutal White Russian antisemitism against “Bolshevik Jews” who were caught, tortured and killed – along with Chinese communists. Usually rare in China, antisemitism was mainly “imported” by White Russian, Japanese and Westerners, and was “adopted” by some GMD personalities. Epstein recalled that a GMD official, who had accompanied a group of foreign journalists to communist-controlled areas, told their hosts that three of them were Jewish. According to him, they were interested only in money and not really in “news”. Moreover, having no homeland, they failed to understand the meaning of nationalism and national struggle anyway and, therefore, they should rely on him. As expected, his offer and suggestions were rejected (Epstein, 2005: 181-182). A bond was thus created, consciously or subconsciously, between Jews and Chinese communism. Some Jews, who left China to the United States, became trade union activists and members of the Communist Party. Inevitably, as the Russian impact increased, Jewishness faded. Epstein wrote:

Though both [had been] brought up in pious homes, my parents had long since become strong atheists. It was long before I even saw the inside of a synagogue (though Harbin had several I never set foot there). Nor was I taught Hebrew. [...] We did not attend synagogue, or fast in Yom Kippur, or keep a kosher or Passover diet, nor did I ever undergo bar mitzvah, the confirmation for Jewish males at the age of 13, when they are supposed to shoulder the moral responsibilities of adults. [...] *But our atheist household was very Jewish indeed, in a secular way* (35, 39). (Emphasis added).

While secular, Epstein studied and knew Jewish religious and historical stories and he – and his family – never concealed their Jewishness nor changed his name. However he, and his parents, rejected theism *and* Zionism. Instead, he adopted communism, and considered it his mission to propagate China's version to the outside world. He worked for news agencies like UPI (United Press International) and newspapers (*The New York Times*). In his writings, Epstein was “a tireless champion of the [Chinese] United Front (Messmer, 2012: 208).” One of *China Reconstructs* founders, he became, in May 1979, its editor-in-chief. In 1983, he was admitted to the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference). Half of its ten non-Chinese members at one time were Jewish (209). Jews played constructive roles in most of China's media, directed to the outside world. In addition to

Epstein at the *China Reconstructs*, and Sidney Rittenberg at Beijing Radio and the International Broadcasting Institute, Sidney Shapiro worked at the Bureau of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and then, at the Foreign Languages Press; Michael Shapiro at Xinhua; and David Crook at the Foreign Languages Institute.

Another Jewish-American who helped building bridges between China and the world was Sidney Shapiro. Born in Brooklyn, New York, in late 1915, he studied law and Chinese, sharing a room with Julian Schuman, another Jew who later found his way to China (Schuman, 1979). Shapiro was well aware of his Jewish origins although he, and his parents, had regarded themselves primarily as Americans. His last “encounter” with Judaism was in 1928 when he turned thirteen and made his *Bar Mitzvah* address at the synagogue, in Hebrew. In 1989, he visited Israel, which he had ignored earlier. “But,” he later said, “here was where it started, the primary essence of me as a Jew began here. I found an origin (Shapiro, 1979: 204-205; 2000: 274).” After graduating, he joined a prominent firm of Jewish Wall Street lawyers. He left New York in March 1947, not for any ideological motives or communist inclinations, but hoping to improve his Chinese while seeking a job as a business lawyer for an American firm in Beijing. Through his would-be Chinese wife, he approached the communists, realizing that he wanted more meaningful life (Shapiro, 1979: 24). Shapiro did not reach the communists (like Rittenberg) – they reached him. Having nothing else to do, he used his knowledge of Chinese and began translating Chinese literature to English, “hopefully for the American market”. It turned out to be the first Chinese communist novel to be published in the US. Soon employed by the Bureau of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Shapiro became a translator of books and pamphlets. He still insisted that he “wasn’t much of a Marxist” (39, 42).

In 1953, Shapiro joined China’s just established Foreign Languages Press. Later he wrote: “I had a sense of purpose, and accomplishment, and a goal, for the first time in my life (85).” By 1961, he had translated a dozen novels and scores of short stories, mostly related to the war against Japan. He regularly worked in *Chinese literature* and then in *China Pictorial*. In addition to demonstrating the quality of modern, and classical, Chinese literature, these translations, done for over thirty years,

served a useful purpose in presenting the real China to the world. They supplied the flesh and bone and sinew that many of our articles so sadly lacked. It seemed to me no ordinary person in another land could help but like and admire the Chinese once they got to know them as I did. Short of actually meeting face to face – very difficult in the existing “hate-China” atmosphere – the literary medium was probably the next best thing (200-201).

In the early 1960s, Shapiro finally decided that he had the kind of life he wanted most. He realized he “could do more useful and satisfying work in Peking than in New York”, and in 1963 applied for Chinese citizenship, which he received a few months later.

David Crook was born in 1910 to a Jewish family of Eastern Europe origins, in London (Crook, 1990; Devin, 2000; Zhang, 2015). As a child he received Jewish education, learned some Hebrew, ate *Kosher* food, celebrated the holidays – and was even slightly infected by Zionism. Influenced by George Bernard Shaw’s writings, he was slowly abandoning religion, a tendency intensified as he was traveling abroad, in Paris, Germany and New York. Instead, his reading, work, and the Great Depression, ignited his interest in the Soviet Union and in socialism, and his criticism of capitalism, unemployment and the spread of fascism in the world. Unknowingly, Crook became involved in communism while at Columbia University (1931-1935). He soon joined the Communist-led National Students League, where he felt comfortable with his colleagues, as well as with their ideology: he read Lenin’s *On the State and Revolution* for the first time. Upon his return to England in 1936, he joined the Communist Party and in early 1937, the International Brigades’ British Battalion Anti-Aircraft Battery, fighting Spanish fascism. Arms, training and support came from the Soviet Union. Western democracies adopted “non-intervention”. Recruited by the KGB, by April, he began spying on leftist ‘elements’ who opposed the Soviet Union, and especially Stalin. Not hiding his Jewishness, he was given a new identity.⁹

In May 1938, on Soviet orders, he left for Shanghai, influenced by Edgar Snow’s *Red Star over China*. Officially, he was teaching literature at St. John’s University and later at Suzhou University. Unofficially he spied, especially on “Trotskyists”. He used *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (1938) by Harold Isaacs, then a committed Trotskyist (and Jewish himself). In the summer of 1940, Crook left for Chengdu to teach at the exiled Nanjing University, and in 1942 returned to London where he married Isabel, a daughter of Canadian missionaries from Chengdu. They were socially broad-minded to withstand his communism *and* his Judaism, long shed anyway. He joined an RAF intelligence course for monitoring and deciphering of Japanese radio communications, becoming an officer. Stationed in India, Ceylon, and Burma (where he was promoted Flight Lieutenant), he finally arrived in Hong Kong, by which time the war was over.

Crook was soon transferred to Singapore. Suspected of spying for the Soviets, he was demoted and by the end of his three years overseas service, returned to England. In 1946, he and Isabel decided to return to China. Crook began to study Chinese (though avoiding the characters until twenty years later when he was in jail), and Chinese history, both at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London). As these ended, he

was discharged from the RAF and given free passage to China. While Crook continued his activities for the Communist Party, he still felt ill-at-ease with his Jewish identity and failed to join the Association of Ex-Jewish Servicemen.

In Hong Kong, on their way to Beijing, they met Qiao Guanhua, future foreign minister, and his wife Gong Peng, CCP spokesperson in Chongqing, as well as Zhang Hanfu, future vice foreign minister. In Tianjin they met Han Xu, later ambassador to the US. After a short visit to Beijing, in late November 1947 they settled at the Ten-Mile Inn village for eight months, and wrote three books. During their stay in the countryside, they met Liao Chengzhi (then Xinhua head), Bo Yibo, and Deng Xiaoping. In June 1948, they left for Shijiazhuang. There, asked by Wang Binnan – one of China’s leading diplomats – they agreed to teach at the newly initiated Foreign Affairs Training Class, launching a lifetime career. Ye Jianying, then head of the nearby military academy and later a People’s Liberation Army marshal, minister of National Defense and CCP vice chairman, was involved. This assignment delayed the publication of the Crooks’ first book by ten years, to 1959.

By the early 1950s, Crook had become the English Department deputy dean. Few foreign teachers could not overcome their antisemitism, but some Chinese appreciated his Jewishness, and Crook, who had earlier concealed his religion, never again tried to hide, nor to flaunt it. Meanwhile, the school was renamed Beijing Foreign Languages Institute (later Beijing Foreign Studies University). Crook’s teaching concentrated on training interpreters and translators who would escort foreign visitors, rather than “wasting” time on teaching literature he considered “impractical” at best, and “intellectual” at worst. Many of his thousands of students “reached the highest ranks in the foreign ministry and in academia (Devin, 2000; Epstein, 2001: 37).”

In 1957, Crook left for six months in Canada and England, making propaganda speeches in favour of China. In 1958, he returned to China via the Soviet Union and in summer 1966 made a mistake of leaving China on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, and an even more serious miscalculation of returning. Upon his return, in February, 1967, he joined the Red Flag Battalion, and later the Bethune-Yan’an Revolutionary Regiment, composed mainly of foreigners. On October 17, Red Guard students seized and took him to Qincheng, Beijing’s top security jail, blamed as a British spy. While in jail, he finally studied Chinese. He was released in January 1973. Fully rehabilitated, his verdict was reversed three times – each for the better. In a March 1973 speech, Premier Zhou Enlai – already ill and frail – spoke about the injustice suffered by foreigners, mentioning some by name: “David Crook is now free and we express our apologies to him”. Jiang Qing, the ultimate person responsible for the persecution of foreigners in China, was sitting there, probably forced to do so (Crook, 1990: 189). In 1979, the Ministry of Education appointed David (and Isabel) “Advisers to the Institute,” an

equivalent rank to that of a University president (ibid. 190). Resuming his teaching in Beijing, Crook started a six year stint as chief native speaker consultant to the *Chinese-English dictionary*, begun in 1972.

In sum, Crook felt that he had made certain contributions in education and, for want of a better word, “propaganda”; that is, in writing books, articles, circular pamphlets and broadcasting but, most of all, in teaching English at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, one of China’s leading academic institutions (ibid. 203-204). He also proposed reforms of China’s education system and promotion of relations between Chinese and foreigners. His suggestions led to the removal of many signs that prevented foreigners from visiting certain places, open only to Chinese.

Shortly after his release from jail, Crook left on a three months tour where he spoke in favour of the Cultural Revolution and China, to audiences as naïve as he was. Slowly, however, he admitted he was wrong on many issues related to China but, despite his personal suffering, still found it difficult to criticize the Cultural Revolution, let alone Mao. By the late 1970s, and still under the influence of the Gang-of-Four, he enthusiastically condemned Deng Xiaoping. In 1979, he visited national minority areas in Inner Mongolia, and a year later Xinjiang and Tibet. Throughout his China years, Crook remained a British subject and, unlike other “foreign experts”, never applied for Chinese citizenship and, therefore, could not become CCP member. Crook was fully aware of the “unfair” privileges given to “foreign experts” and occasionally protested to the authorities, but silenced (ibid. 23-24).

Although he considered himself an atheist and anti-Zionist, Crook never abandoned his relations with Judaism. In October 1979, although he laughed at the idea of fasting on Yom Kippur and did not have a Jewish prayer book, he still remembered “bits of Shabbat melodies” (Schwarcz, 1984: 174-175). Following the establishment of *The China Daily*, he sent some 25 letters to the Editor, on a variety of issues. A few of his letters were rejected, e.g. on antisemitism, arms sales, and China’s relations with Israel and the Arabs (Crook, 1990: 243-245, 250, 255). On January 17, 1984, Crook sent this letter to *The China Daily*:

The cartoon in today’s *China Daily* is racist [...] The typical Jewish nose on the face and the six-pointed Shield of David on the backside of the hammering plough-shares into swords is doubtless intended to denounce the belligerent expansionism of past and present Israeli governments. It is right to denounce them – especially for a socialist country. But not by resorting to mockery of physical characteristics or emblems which have for centuries inspired the mass of the Jewish people in its struggle against anti-Semitism [...] They, the people, should be united with. Not insulted (ibid. 255).

The letter was not printed, nor answered. By that time, China was buying Israeli arms and military technology, some of which was displayed in the 1984 military parade commemorating 35 years to the PRC – though Crook was unaware of it. His (and Michael Shapiro's) views on China often suffered slanderous allegations in the *Guardian* (by John Gittings), and in the *Daily Telegraph* (ibid. 266).¹⁰

In 1986, not without a sense of guilt, Crook visited Israel, aged 76. Before leaving, he had met an Israeli professor and an Israeli official of the United Nations, in New York. He and his wife travelled to Israel through Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula, reliving his Judaism. In an interview held in 2009, Isabel said: "Our role was to be the West in China (Hooper, 2016: 11)." Yet, this comment exposed a condescending Western and missionary approach. David would have modified: "Our role was to be China in the West," or to provide a bridge between China and the West. This is what the Chinese said about him in 2010, ten years after his death in 2000, and hundred years after his birth: "He wrote and spoke about China, providing the outside world with an accurate picture of New China against the backdrop of the oversimplifications of the Cold War (Li, 2010)."

Another British Jew who became full-fledged pro-Chinese spokesman, was Michael Shapiro (Redfern, n.d.; Crook, 1990: 160). He was born in East London to a secular Jewish family but, although undoubtedly experiencing anti-semitism in his youth, never referred to his religion in public, or privately. He showed no interest in Jewish affairs and considered class as the main determinant of human beings. After studying at the London School of Economics (LSE), Shapiro joined the British Communist Party in 1934. In 1949, or 1950, he left for China, reportedly "at the invitation of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, and on the assignment of the British Communist Party (as quoted in Redfern, n.d.: 7),"¹¹ and was attached to the China Information Bureau. His book, *Changing China*, published in the West in 1958, led one reviewer to write: "Shapiro has managed to compress not only a concise summary of eight years of change but also an expert analysis of the content of that change (Hinton, 1962)." Unlike his colleagues, his work was directed mostly to foreign *communist parties*, criticizing Soviet "revisionism" and "reformism", compared to China's revolutionary purity. Nevertheless, both he, and Rittenberg, who had officially been members of foreign communist parties, and had for a while participated in Red Guards activities during the Cultural Revolution, suffered more than other expatriates (Brady, 1996; 2002).

Michael Shapiro never returned to the UK. Until his death in 1986, a total of 36 years, he worked at Xinhua News Agency and Foreign Languages Press, copy-editing English commentaries for the Department of Home News for Overseas Service, as well as translating the works of Mao Zedong and

Liu Shaoqi. This was the Western “foreign experts” – many of them Jewish – main mission, as demonstrated in the following episode.¹²

In late 1959, the CCP Central Committee decided to form a team to translate a fourth volume of Mao’s *Selected Works* into English, and to revise the outdated English translation of the first three volumes, issued by the mid-1950s. Work began in early 1960 by a team of fourteen, of which nine were Chinese (Oxford-educated scholars, Foreign Ministry, Foreign Languages Press and Foreign Languages Institute officials) and five foreigners: Sydney Rittenberg, Frank Coe, Israel Epstein, Sol Adler, and Michael Shapiro – all Jewish. In January, 1964, after nearly two years of work, Mao hosted the team for dinner, located at the Qing Dynasty Shrine for Diligent Government. Frank Coe, Sol Adler,¹³ Israel Epstein and Rittenberg arrived together. Anna Louise Strong was also invited. It had been her arrest in Moscow as a spy that led to Rittenberg’s arrest in China. Mao almost apologized to him: “We made a very bad mistake in his case. He is a good comrade and we treated him wrong (Rittenberg & Bennet, 1993: 273; Ginsbourg, 1982).” In 1967, Sam Ginsbourg, born in 1914 in Chita to a Jewish family, which had escaped Byelorussia, spent several months “checking word for word the English and Russian translations of the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* with the Chinese original and making suggestions for improvement (Ginsbourg, 1979: 39).” While in jail, Crook (excluded from the translators team) tried “to do it better”: “I dabbled in translation, or re-translation, not being satisfied with the stiff style of the authorized version of Mao’s works in English, but wanting one which did justice to his often racy, earthy and even poetic original (Crook, 1990: 181).” It is in this field of journalism (especially translation and editing) as well as teaching foreign languages, that the Jewish expats in China made a significant contribution to the PRC in its first thirty years, exposing it and making it accessible to the world.

4. 1979-2019: Combining Socialism and Capitalism

During its first thirty years, PRC communism followed the assumption, implied in Mao Zedong thought, that it could be achieved by leapfrogging the capitalist stage. Initially Marx regarded capitalism, of which he was an expert, as an indispensable basis and a precondition for achieving communism. Yet, since there was no evidence that a communist revolution had ever originated in a capitalist society, and there was no sign that this was going to happen soon, Marx, impatient toward the end of his life, offered the option of relying on traditional communalism (primarily in Russia) as a shortcut to communism, while sidestepping capitalism (Shanin, 1983).

Forty years later, Lenin tried to tread in Marx’s footsteps and launched the revolution in Russia, but may have realized that it would not work. Russia’s

peasant economy was too backward and weak to create the wealth to be distributed among the society. Consequently, he introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) (Pethybridge, 1990), which allowed elements of free market and trade to reinvigorate economic development. This policy was so successful that it instigated internal Party opposition, much of it Jewish, alarmed that “capitalist restoration” would derail the revolution. Stalin’s Soviet Union abandoned free market, and ultimately disintegrated. Evidently, although there were ups and down in Sino-Soviet relations, basically, the PRC imitated the Soviet way in trying to achieve communism while bypassing capitalism. Mao regarded capitalism and socialism as contradictory concepts, whose combination is reactionary (The Revolutionary Mass Criticism Writing Group of the Party School under the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1971). Nonetheless, long *before* the Soviet collapse, Deng Xiaoping and other leaders concluded that without free-market capitalism, communism could not be accomplished. However, they were not sure how to develop a free market economy in a country *already* ruled by a Communist Party, which from the moment it seized power, steadily stifled any sign of capitalism, and targeted “capitalist roaders” – including among the leadership. Given their limited knowledge of capitalism, and the absence of a solid capitalist basis, China’s post-Mao reformist leaders sought external advice.

In the late 1970s, as soon as Beijing’s post-Mao leaders decided it was time to undertake wide-ranging economic reform (which some had in mind since the early 1950s), discussions were held with leading foreign economic experts, invited to China. Intentionally, or not, most of them were Jewish. Historically, Jews were usually associated with money (capital), for better or for worse. Skilled in commerce and banking, educated, urban yet highly mobile, and with worldwide family connections – Jews represented modernity, and a most significant driving force behind capitalist growth and development (Slezkine, 2004: 60; Sombart, 2001). Marx himself specifically equated capitalism with Judaism (Marx, 1975). Jews also excelled in research: 40 percent of all Nobel Prize winners in economics and 51 percent of all US economics Nobel Prize winners were Jewish. Some of them helped China to become the second – perhaps the leading – world economic power. The first group of experts consisted of Americans, who represented pure capitalism, and the most advanced, respected and prestigious scholarship on free market economics.

Milton Friedman, University of Chicago professor and Nobel Prize laureate (1976), “the world’s leading advocate of free-market fundamentalism (Gewirtz, 2017: 84),”¹⁴ was invited to China in late 1979. When he arrived, in September 1980, Friedman realized that the Chinese scholars/economists were not familiar with free market economy. In his second visit, in September 1988, he underscored the need of “free private economy”, and dismissed the “dual

track” system, which combined Soviet “command economy” and “market economy”. Although some of Friedman’s ideas, especially on the need for political reform, were initially rejected, ultimately they were partially accepted. His book, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), was published in Chinese in 1993.

Another delegation visited China in 1979. Headed by the University of Pennsylvania Professor Lawrence Klein (who won the 1980 economics Nobel Prize), it included professor Irma Adelman, the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, the Graduate School of the University of California, Berkeley; and Kenneth Arrow of Harvard University (who had won the Nobel Prize in 1972) – all Jewish. They toured China teaching courses and seminars. In 1980, Klein returned to teach an intensive seminar in econometrics for officials and academics, and the year after, was appointed a “technical consultant” to China’s important State Planning Commission (8, 58-59, 78-79, 253). Stanley Fischer, chief economist and vice president for developing economies of the World Bank (and vice chairman of the US Federal Reserve System, later appointed Governor of the Bank of Israel, 2005-2013) met Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang in November 1988. They discussed inflation control and price liberalization (215). In 1991, Franco Modigliani, MIT professor of a Jewish-Italian family, and an expert on household and firm behaviour (who had won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1985), held seminars at the People’s Bank of China (253). Joseph Stiglitz from Columbia University, professor of economics and winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in economics, also Jewish, gave a speech at the China Development Forum in Beijing in March, 2007. Then, and for some time, he urged Beijing to adopt pragmatism and to adapt their economy to the needs of the global market system. He praised China’s economic achievements and creation of a new and unique economic model (Stiglitz, 2008).

The second experts group included leading East European economists, originally from Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – where novel economic experiments had been proposed, and undertaken, well before the disintegration of communism. One of the first was Włodzimierz Brus (originally Benjamin Zylberberg), who first visited China in late 1979. An Oxford University Polish exile, he produced a sensation in China when he insisted that the free market concept does not contradict socialism – and would not substitute it either (Brus, 1972). He regarded regulated market mechanisms as a means to make the central plan work better, more efficiently, and make profit. His views greatly affected China’s leading economists, including Sun Yefang (a leading Chinese economist, who had been influenced by Yevsei Liberman, a well-known 1960s Soviet economic reformer, also Jewish).

Another East European socialist reformer, who helped guide China’s post-Mao economic reforms was Ota Šik, a Jewish Czech who had survived a German concentration camp, and later became deputy prime minister and

economics minister under Alexander Dubček's 1968 Prague Spring (Ota Šik, 1969; Author n.a., 1969).¹⁵ Since the mid-1960s, he was advocating a reduction of central planning and expanding the role of the market. Visiting Yugoslavia in 1968, exactly when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, he moved to Switzerland where he spent the rest of his life (he died in 2004). In 1981, he visited China and, in line with other foreign advisers, underscored the combination of plan and market. Central planning, he said, could not make correct and efficient decisions with regard to the entire economy – since it ignores the diversity and precision of the market, particularly of prices, which determine supply and demand, thus creating material incentives to increase production – and profits. Yet, unlike in capitalist economies, the socialist market is not entirely free, but operates within limits, determined by central planning (Šik, 1967). Šik's recommendations attained widespread enthusiasm and were integrated into China's economic policy, leading to the establishment of a Price Research Center. Šik was more popular in China than in his homeland.

While inviting leading Western and East European economists to China, Chinese experts began to attend international conferences. The Athens forum of the International Economic Association (August, 1981), offered them an opportunity to meet some well-known economists, including Leonid Kantorovich, a Russian Jewish scholar who was the only Soviet ever to win the Nobel Prize in economics (in 1975) – for his contribution to developing a mathematical model of resource allocation. Another delegation of East European economists visited China in July 1982, including Włodzimierz Brus and Julius Struminsky, Polish price commissioner; former Czech deputy prime minister Jiří Kosta (born Heinrich Georg Kohn) and Péter Kende, a Hungarian official and political commentator, all Jewish. They unanimously proposed to reform China's economy following the East European model (Gewirtz, 2017; Kosta, 1987). But, the one who attracted most Chinese attention in those years was János Kornai.

Among the East European economists, the most prominent, whose ideas influenced post-Mao China's economic development, was János Kornai. Born Kornhauser to a Jewish-Hungarian family he moved to the US and joined Harvard University in 1984. In 1985, he was a dominant guest at a conference the Chinese held on a cruise ship, the *Bashan*. His book, *Economics of Shortage* (1980), was an offensive on the socialist bureaucratically planned economies and the chronic lack of investment for increasing production. "The Hungarian János Kornai is the most famous, and certainly the most influential, economist to have emerged from postwar Communist Europe (Skidelsky, 2007; 2006)."¹⁶ Having met Kornai, China's scholars–economists now realized the value of Western economics for China's development, occasionally invoking the Hungarian experience, referring to Kornai's writings.

Advocating a combined “socialist-market” system as a *stage* in economic transition, the advisers did not regard this stage as stable or long lasting. Planned economy and market economy could coexist symbiotically for a while, but would ultimately lead to capitalism rather than to socialism. However, Kornai, and his colleagues – who represented the East European transition style, which favoured political reform as an inevitable way to salvage their own countries’ economy – avoided such a solution for China. Kornai’s call to reduce state “paternalism”, or too much intervention in the economy, underscored the Chinese “contract responsibility system”, thereby diminishing compulsory plans, and emphasizing indirect management. Zhao Ziyang’s 1987 “new economic policy” advocated, and adhered to, Kornai’s theory of combining “macroeconomic management” with “microeconomic marketization (Gewirtz, 2017: 188-191).”

China’s leading economists and economic publications praised Kornai’s employment of advanced mathematics, and his synthesis between Western and Marxian economic theory and thereby the applicability of Eastern Europe economic reforms, specifically Hungarian, to the Chinese case. His ideas provided a bridge between West and East. At the same time, he said that this combination of planned economy and market forces is just a “transition”. Over one year, “Kornai’s reputation in China had grown to an astonishing level,” reaching the dimensions of “Kornai Fever” (*ke’ernai re*) (166). It reflected not only his intellectual abilities and skills (which Western economists also had), but also his experience in Eastern Europe (which Western economists lacked).

Notwithstanding their enthusiasm about combining central planning and free market, not all Chinese leaders, and economists, accepted the socialist reformism model, either East European or Western. Some hardline conservative Marxists (like Chen Yun and Hu Qiaomu), still promoted Soviet-style command economy and relied on other economists. One of them was Ernest Mandel. Born in Frankfurt to Polish-Jewish parents, he relocated to Belgium where he defended Marxism until his death in 1995. Published in 1962, his book, *On Marxist Political Economy*, was translated into Chinese in 1979, and in the next years was used by those who opposed reform to fight the reformists, unsuccessfully as it turned out (77-78).

In sum, it is unlikely that post-Mao leaders were aware of the Jewish identity of most of their foreign economic advisers, Western or East European. It is similarly unlikely that these advisers considered their Jewish identity as an input, or a tool, in promoting economic reform in China. In fact, some Soviet intellectuals and officials implicated Kissinger and prominent American Jews in a “Zionist conspiracy” to introduce capitalism into China (as well as into the Soviet Union) (Lukin, 2003: 150). However, even if both sides were unaware of, or ignored, the Jewish origins of these

advisers, Jewishness may have shaped the root of China's post-Mao reform. It reflected unprecedented combinations, never accomplished in a socialist framework, let alone successfully. Whatever economic reforms East European countries had undergone, none of them remained "socialist", let alone "communist". It may be that Jewish thinking offered flexible intellectual originality and conceptual innovations, which others could not, and did not, conceive. Transforming China from its backward centralized command and old-fashion economy, to a modern advanced economy that incorporated capitalist elements, has been a huge challenge of the kind Jewish intellectuals dared and were ready to confront. Most scholars, politicians – and the media – doubted if such large-scale transformation was possible. However, so far, its success over forty years is incredible. It is also unprecedented, although its future remains uncertain.

5. Conclusion

All the otherwise diversified contributors to the Chinese communist revolution discussed in this paper have two things in common: one objective, that cannot be argued, is that all were Jewish; the other, subjective, is that, apparently, their Jewishness was not an essential identity. I disagree with the second. True, Jewish revolutionaries in China (or elsewhere) may have never set foot in a synagogue, but they could not but absorb their Jewishness for generations.¹⁷ Communism and even Socialism – real rather than utopian – as formulated by Karl Marx (Jewish, in Chinese eyes) may be regarded as an atonement for, or correction of (*Tikkun 'Olam*, "putting the world alright", a Hebrew-Jewish term), capitalist evils. Jewish revolutionaries in China must have been defined as Jewish, consciously or not. Epstein mentions Zhou Enlai who, while at a reception on official visit to Warsaw, asked about Professor Leopold Infeld, a leading Polish mathematician. Excluded at a corner because he was a Jew, Infeld watched Zhou walking across the hall to shake his hand "in an unmistakable gesture of disapproval of anti-Semitism in a socialist country (Epstein, 2005: 242)."

Indeed, the ultimate question is not just how these Jewish activists defined themselves but, not less so, how others defined them. One reason why Jews joined the communist movement had been that it was supposed to be internationalist and universal. Having no homeland, and living mostly as a Diaspora, this suited them perfectly. But, if they had not understood it in the 1920s, they must have in the 1930s, when scores of Jewish revolutionaries were purged and executed, when it finally turned out that the revolution was nationally and particularly *Russian*. Jews were excluded not only because of traditional antisemitism but also because they rejected the narrow Russian identity of the revolution. Either way, both attitudes underlined their Jewish

religious identity, however far they felt, and were, from its theory and practice (Shapiro, 1961).

What is common to the Jewish contribution to the Chinese revolution in the three periods is their attempts to “correctly” handling ideological contradictions and bridging over differences – inside and outside China. As Alexander Lukin commented, the differences in the Soviet China policies, as well within the Chinese Communist movement, were not institutional but mainly ideological (Lukin, 2003: 82, 109). In essence, in the 1920s as much as in the 1980s, they concerned the gap between a “leftist” view – which dwelt on the communist nature of the revolution, and a “rightist” view – which focused on the bourgeois precondition of the revolution. To be sure, ultimate policies had been made in Moscow, usually by the Party. Yet, considerably more familiar with China’s local situation, Soviet emissaries had a certain leeway, and their own preferences. Very much in line with the Chinese traditions, what the Jewish advisers suggested was “both”, a combination of left and right. This conformed to the Marxian dialectical and materialist *weltanschauung*, that capitalism is *inevitably* a precondition for communism. And, even if they were not consciously aware of it – and some definitely were – these ideas conformed also to the fundamentals of Chinese philosophy, namely the unity of opposites, *yin-yang* principles, and some Western and Hegelian concepts (McGill & Parry, 1948).

In the first period, most Jewish advisers, representing either the Soviet government or the party, underlined the importance of maintaining good relations with the GMD. In line with Marx, and especially Lenin, they appreciated the GMD’s promotion of nationalism and independence – and its reliance on capitalists for the development of China. Both were regarded as a precondition to the achievement of communism. In the second period, while Chinese socialism had supposedly been “achieved”, most Jewish participants in the revolution tried to bridge the gap between the Chinese and the outside world by translating and publishing Chinese documents and writings, in order to make them available abroad. As reforms were about to begin in the third period, Jewish advisers – not necessarily communists themselves – still revived the 1920s’ notions of Marxist-Leninist beliefs that capitalism is an essential base of communism. Like their predecessors, they offered ways to combine socialism with capitalism to bridge the gap, and “correctly” handle the contradictions between the two. Turning Marx upside down, they, probably unintentionally, led the way for a new kind of revolution, whose prospects of success, though still questionable, are the best ever.

Finally, while these “mediators” were, consciously or not, Jewish – to what extent were Chinese leaders and activists aware of it? Again, if they were not – and most probably were – it was the exogenous inputs, which reminded them: antisemitism in the past, and access to media outlets at

present. A recent indication of China's awareness, and appreciation, of the Judaic role not only in Chinese but in Asian (and world) civilization, is in PRC President Xi Jinping's opening speech at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing on May 15, 2019: "In building our civilizations over the course of several millennia, we the people of Asia, have made splendid achievements. I think of literary classics such as *The Book of Songs*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Talmud*, *One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Rigveda* and *Genji Monogatari* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2019)."¹⁸ (Emphasis added). Interestingly, and perhaps meaningful, Xi mentioned the *Talmud* and not the Bible. I can think of two reasons. First, that the Bible, although originally and uniquely Jewish, is also shared by Christianity and Islam, which both regard as part of their heritage. And second, because the *Talmud*, more than the Bible, is not only an *exclusively* Jewish property, but also represents and reflects better the Jewish spirit, and essence, of arguing and debating, of not accepting things at face value; advocating unification of opposites; reconciliation of differences; and matchmaking of contradictions.

It is expected that Xi would mention Chinese classics (the *Book of Songs* and Confucius' *Analects*) at the top of Asian cultural achievements; it was *not* expected that he would mention the Jewish *Talmud* at the *second* place. Only then, he mentions Arab, Indian and Japanese contributions. If not Xi Jinping himself, someone else among the Chinese leadership, or intellectuals, must have proposed giving such a high prominence to Judaism. And, since little – or nothing – is coincidental in Chinese politics, this is significant.

Notes

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- 1. Two Comintern agents attended the first CCP congress in July 1921. One was Maring (Sneevliet) and the other was Nikolsky (alias Victor Alexandrovich Berg, Jewish).

2. In early 1952, Zhou Enlai led a team to draft the first Five-Year Plan, which included Li Fuchun and Nie Rongzhen – all witnessed European capitalism in the 1920s.
3. Joffe regarded the GMD as “the organization closest to being a genuine political party in China, serving as the meeting point for nationalism and revolution,” (Wilbur & How, 1989: 57).
4. Chinese sources prefer to say that Chen and Li had discussed the establishment of a Chinese Communist Party *before* they met Voitinski, to underline the Chinese, rather than the Soviet, origins of the Party (Chow, 1960: 248). “However, we cannot say that Chen and Li discussed forming a Communist party before Voitinsky arrived in China” (Ishikawa, 2012: 103).
5. Initially, Trotsky also supported the resolution “which was correct and progressive for a certain epoch.”
6. Some of them Jewish, like Bella Epshtein, Abram Grigorievich Prigozhin, and Mikhail Volin (Semen Natanovich Belenky, a well-known Sinologist, and Director of the Scientific Research Institute for Chinese Studies, 1928-1930). At least some of the Chinese students praised them.
7. Much of the information in this section derives from this book.
8. Jane Hodes, a long-time Communist Party member, spent five years in China in the 1950s, editing English-language publications, teaching English and broadcasting over the English-language radio (Hodes, 2009; Su, 1979). She worked at the French Section of the Foreign Languages Bureau.
9. Of the roughly 40,000 volunteers in Spain, it is estimated that about 8,000 were Jews. Of the roughly 2,000 British volunteers, about 200 were Jews – i.e. 10 percent, which was ten times their share in the British population. In December 1996, Crook returned to Spain, with 300 International Brigades veterans, invited by the Spanish Government.
10. On Israel’s arms sales to China, see: Shichor, 1998; 2020).
11. According to the main speech at his memorial meeting, Xinhua, October 6, 1986.
12. The following paragraph derives from: Rittenberg and Bennet, 1993, pp. 249-252.
13. On Sol (Solomon) Adler, see Messmer, 2008: 22-23. On Frank Coe, see Waggoner, 1980. He lived and worked in China for 22 years, from 1958 to 1980.
14. Much of the discussion below derives from this book which, however, hardly mentions the Jewish identity of the “Western economists”.
15. “Ota Sik, Eduard Goldstuecker Return to Czechoslovakia, Plan to Leave Again,” (Author n.a, 1969). However, later he publicly denied being Jewish: “Jews Surprised by Denial of Jewish Ancestry by Former Czech Premier Dr. Ota Šik (1969: 1-2).”
16. Born in 1939 to a Jewish father in Harbin, China, Lord Skidelsky belonged to a family of “oligarchs” (his term) which played an important role in the regional Jewish community and in northeast China’s economics.
17. They were “faithless Jews” (Deutscher, 1968). Having no homeland, Jews were different wherever they stayed, which helped them keep their identity, without necessarily being religious.
18. “Full Text of Xi’s Speech at opening of CDAC,” available at: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/home/rolling/90755.htm>, accessed on July 12, 2019. Talmud

is the fundamental compilation of Jewish religious law, theology and ethics. It originated from the 3rd to the 5th centuries and governed Jewish daily life until the modern period, covering history, philosophy, customs, folklore, and rabbinic religious opinions and teachings.

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