

Translation / Traduction

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**History as a Bridge:
Chinese-Jewish Community Dialogue in Canada**

Translator's Introduction

This instalment of the "Translation" subsection features translations of two special reports published in the *Ming Pao Daily News* (Western Canada Edition) in January and February 2000. Launched in Vancouver, British Columbia in October 1993 under the Hong Kong-based Ming Pao Group, this centrist Traditional Chinese-language daily maintained a longstanding editorial commitment to objective, impartial coverage of local political and economic events, catering to a core readership of Chinese immigrants across the Greater Vancouver area. It ceased publication and news operations in January 2026 after thirty-two years in circulation; it was the last full-service Chinese-language daily newspaper in Canada at the time of its closure.

The articles translated here record efforts by Chinese and Jewish leaders in Vancouver to foster grassroots dialogue between the two communities at the turn of the millennium—a period in Canadian history after the heyday of official multiculturalism had petered out. By this time, multiculturalism had become mainstream and bureaucratized. As critics emerged from both the right (arguing that it undermined national unity) and the left (arguing that it masked structural inequality), specific ethnic minority communities sought in-depth connection with one another. It is in this context that the Canadian Chinese community turned to the history of the Jewish people in China as a narrative link in their efforts to promote mutual understanding and build consensus on ethnic harmony between the two immigrant communities of Jewish and Chinese descent.

The first article focuses on a Chinese New Year book exhibition devoted to Jewish-Chinese relations. The second examines an exhibition on the life and deeds of the Chinese diplomat and writer Ho Feng-Shan, who rescued thousands of Austrian Jewish refugees during the Second World War. Together, these two articles connect some key threads of Jewish history in China: the history of the Jewish community that settled in Kaifeng more than one thousand years earlier and deeply integrated into Chinese society; the stories of Russian Jewish migrants who settled in Harbin, Shanghai, Tianjin, and other Chinese cities during the First World War and the Russian Revolution; and most prominently, the righteous acts of Ho Feng-Shan, China's consul-general in Vienna during the Second World War, who issued more than four thousand "Visas for Life" to Jewish refugees, enabling tens of thousands to escape Nazi persecution by fleeing to Shanghai.¹ In emphasizing themes of anti-racism and shared historical and cultural experiences of migration and resettlement, these articles illuminate a meaningful and little-known history of friendly interactions between Chinese and Jewish communities in Canada.

Translating these texts was not straightforward. As a PhD candidate from mainland China studying in Canada, I have navigated the idiosyncrasies of Canadian English,

American English and British English; translating Canadian Chinese newspapers has likewise been a new linguistic experience for me. Many people assume that there are insurmountable reading barriers between Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese. In reality, for any native speaker who has received basic Chinese language education, converting the most commonly used Chinese characters from simplified to traditional forms, and vice versa, poses little difficulty. The real challenges lie in the differences in writing conventions, as well as the divergent translations of specific terms.

First, there are discrepancies in the Chinese translation of proper nouns. For example, Righteous Among the Nations is translated as “国际义人” (International Righteous People) in mainland China, while in the news reports translated here, it is rendered as “國族正義” (Nations Righteousness). The Traditional Chinese translation “國族正義” emphasizes the multiethnic nature of this behaviour, which denotes “Righteous Gentiles.” In contrast, the Simplified Chinese translation “国际义人” centers on the framing of “cross-border acts of righteousness.”

Furthermore, the Chinese language frequently uses abbreviations, some of which are spontaneously formed and conventionalized expressions rooted in local their local contexts. For instance, “列市” (列治文) in the Vancouver context refers to the City of Richmond; to avoid ambiguity, the City of Richmond Hill, north of Toronto, is written as a different homophone “烈市” (烈治文山) in local Chinese media. Direct translation can lead to information loss and errors, so the translator must find the accurate original English term corresponding to these specific terms. This process in fact forms a translation cycle of “English → Traditional Chinese → Simplified Chinese → English.”

These two articles document grassroots bridge-building practices of the Canadian Chinese community, which used the history of Jews in China as a narrative link to promote mutual understanding and build consensus on ethnic harmony between Chinese and Jewish immigrant communities in Vancouver. They invite readers to reflect on the meaning of cross-cultural dialogue, as well as the power of language to connect people across time and space while preserve living history. These two reports demonstrate that Canadian Jewish life was—at least in one particular time and place—tangibly embedded within Canada’s Chinese-language sphere. They also hint at a much deeper yet-to-be-written history of Chinese-Jewish relations in Canada.

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1. 猶太社區中心新春書展 介紹猶太人與華裔關係

Friday January 28, 2000

【本報專訊】為了響應華裔的農曆新年，大溫哥華猶太社區中心的公眾圖書館現正舉行一個展覽會，展出一些華裔和猶太裔人士之間互相有關聯的書籍，使中心的會員和公眾有機會了解華裔人士和華裔的歷史。

有關的展覽設於溫哥華西四十一街九百五十號該中心地下介乎停車場與大堂之間的通道。該中心指出，這個展覽會展出的書籍種類繁多，當中包括一套由Ja"acov Liberman編寫名為《My China》一書，講述一些居住在中國哈爾濱、上海和天津等城市的俄籍猶太人，他們在第一次世界大戰和俄國大革命期間因為要逃避迫害而逃離歐洲和俄國，到達中國的城市居住。在這些城市，他們有自己的醫院、學校、報紙和文化活動。有關的書籍是以回憶的方式表達。

另一套由Xu Xin和Beverly Friend Strange編寫的《Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng》指出，在一千年前已有猶太人在中國居住。這個為數達到幾千人的猶太社區居住在開封，並且從事耕種、商業、手工藝，在政府管理和軍事上都有成就。展出的書籍還有Gish Jen的《Mona in the Promised Land》、Sonia Levitan的《The Golem and the Dragon Girl》和George W. Butler的《East Meets West》等。

I. Jewish Community Centre New Spring Book Exhibition: Exploring Jewish-Chinese Relations

Friday, January 28, 2000

[Special Report from Ming Pao Western Edition] In response to the Chinese Calendar New Year of the Chinese community, the public library of the Greater Vancouver Jewish Community Centre is currently holding an exhibition, displaying a number of books related to the mutual connections between people of Chinese descent and people of Jewish descent. The exhibition provides an opportunity for members of the centre and the general public to learn about people of Chinese descent and the history of the Chinese community.

The exhibition is located in the corridor between the parking lot and the lobby on the underground floor of the JCC at 950 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver. The centre notes that the books on display at this exhibition are of a great variety. They include a set of works titled *My China*, written by Ya'acov Liberman, which recounts the stories of Russian Jews who fled Europe and Russia to escape persecution during

the First World War and the Russian Revolution, and arrived to live in the cities in China such as Harbin, Shanghai, and Tianjin. In these cities, Jews had their own hospitals, schools, newspapers, and cultural activities. The book is presented in the form of memoirs.

Another book, entitled *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng*, compiled by Xu Xin and Beverly Friend Strange, points out that Jews had already lived in China a thousand years prior. This Jewish community had a population of several thousand people residing in Kaifeng. Jews there engaged in farming, commerce and handicrafts, and achieved accomplishments in both government administration and military affairs. Other books on display include *Mona in the Promised Land* by Gish Jen, *The Golem and the Dragon Girl* by Sonia Levitan, *East Meets West* by George W. Butler, among others.

1. 何鳳山拯救猶太難民 生平事蹟展文化中心

Tuesday, February 22, 2000

【本報專訊】國會議員、聯邦亞太事務國務部長陳卓愉，日前在中華文化中心文物館主辦「逃命簽證——何鳳山博士拯救猶太難民生平事蹟」展覽揭幕茶會上，頌揚何鳳山的正義和英勇行為，被譽為「中國的辛德勒」。辛德勒(電影《辛德勒的名單》中主角，亦曾於二次大戰中，在德國統治的地區，拯救了不少猶太難民)。他指出最近出席在印尼的經貿會議上亦表達了加拿大政府對人權的立場，讚揚由文化中心與猶太族裔合作促成的「逃命簽證」展覽，對種族和諧具有特別的意義。同時出席展覽的溫哥華猶太浩劫教育中心(Vancouver Holo-caust Education Centre)主席韋斯曼(Robbie Waiseman)是二次大戰的生還者，他的家人則遭到納粹殺害，他表示若他們獲何鳳山簽證逃難奧國，也許可以逃過災劫。

何鳳山為中國於一九三八至四二年駐奧地利維也納的總領使。因奧國於二次世界大戰時被德國吞并，何被遣派處理外交事務。他的人道精神和洞悉世界政情的智慧，使他不顧國民政府的反對，給猶太難民簽發了超過一萬八千簽證，讓二萬五千多人前往上海暫時寄居，得以避免災難。何氏於一九七三年退休，並移居美國三藩市。九零年出版了他的著作《外交生涯四十年》，九七年九月廿八日病逝於三藩市。上月廿八日以色列政府正式通過頒予何氏最高榮譽「國族正義」勳章，表揚這位拯救猶太難民的偉人。該項榮耀為以色列自一九五三年立國以來第一次頒贈給中國籍人士。

日前，以色列社會及世界猶太會社部主任賀恩(Udi Cohen)及總理社會政策顧問伊撒高娃(Anna Isakova)亦拜訪了中華文化中心文物館，並特別參觀了「逃命簽證——何鳳山博士生平事蹟」圖片展覽。賀氏和伊氏此行特別為研究猶太移民在加拿大落籍和適應的情況，並順道了解加拿大在

推行多元文化的成功例子。他們對何鳳山博士於二次世界大戰時，曾經簽發上萬簽證給猶太難民前往上海，逃離納粹迫害致以敬意。

「逃命簽證」展期至二月二十七日。地址：哥倫比亞街五五五號，電話：六八七·零二八二。

I. Ho Feng-Shan Saves Jewish Refugees: Exhibition of His Life and Deeds at the Cultural Centre

Tuesday, February 22, 2000

[Special Report from Ming Pao Western Edition] Raymond Chan, a member of the Canadian House of Commons and the secretary of state for the Asia-Pacific Region of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, was at the opening tea reception of the exhibition “Visas for Life—The Life and Deeds of Dr. Ho Feng-Shan Who Saved Jewish Refugees,” hosted by the Heritage Museum of the Chinese Cultural Centre a few days ago. Chan praised Ho Feng-Shan for his just and heroic acts and hailed him as “China’s Schindler.” Schindler, (the protagonist in the film *Schindler’s List*, also saved many Jewish refugees in the areas under German rule during the Second World War). Chan commented on the Canadian government’s stance on human rights at the economic and trade conference he had recently attended in Indonesia and noted that the “Visas for Life” exhibition, co-hosted by the Cultural Centre and the Jewish community, has a special significance for racial harmony. Also attending the exhibition was Robbie Waisman, chairman of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, a survivor of the Second World War whose family was killed by the Nazis. Waisman said that if his family had obtained visas from Ho Feng-Shan to flee Austria, they might have escaped the disaster.



Seventy-five-year-old Ho Feng-Shan and his daughter, Ho Manli, photographed in 1976. Reprinted in article.

Ho Feng-Shan was the Chinese consul-general in Vienna, Austria, from 1938 to 1942.² As Austria was annexed by Germany during the Second World War, Ho was assigned to handle diplomatic affairs. With his humanitarian spirit and the wisdom of insight into world political situations, he issued more than eighteen thousand visas to Jewish refugees against the opposition of the National Government of the Republic of China, allowing more than twenty-five thousand people to take temporary refuge in Shanghai and thus escape the disaster. Ho retired in 1973 and moved to San Francisco. He published his book, *My Forty Years as a Diplomat*, in 1990 and passed away in San Francisco on September 28, 1997. On the 28th of last month, the Israeli government officially approved the conferment of its highest honour, the “Righteous Among the Nations” medal on Ho in recognition of this great man who saved Jewish refugees. This honour marked the first time that Israel has awarded this medal to a Chinese national since its founding in 1953.



Israeli official Udi Cohen (first from right) and Anna Isakova (second from left) visit the “Visas for Life” exhibition.

A few days ago, Udi Cohen, director of the Israeli Ministry of Social Affairs and World Jewish Communities, and Anna Isakova, social policy advisor to the prime minister, also visited the Heritage Museum of the Chinese Cultural Centre and specially viewed the photo exhibition “Visas for Life—The Life and Deeds of Dr. Ho Feng-Shan.” The purpose of Cohen and Isakova’s visit this time was to study the situation of Jewish immigrants settling and adapting in Canada, and to take the opportunity to understand Canada’s successful examples of implementing multiculturalism. They paid tribute to Dr. Ho Feng-Shan for issuing tens of thousands of visas to Jewish refugees to go to Shanghai and escape Nazi persecution during the Second World War.

The exhibition “Visas for Life” runs until February 27. Address: 555 Columbia St.
Tel: 687-0282.

1

The exact number of visas issued by Ho Feng-Shan is unknown, but it is certain that the figure exceeds four thousand.

2

These dates are incorrect. Ho Feng-Shan served as the consul-general of China in Vienna, Austria, from 1938–1940.