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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.

Key Words: Jewish Activists, Chinese Communist Revolution, Jewish Identities, Tikkun 'Olam, Jewish Revolution