

# Chinese view of Israel and the Jewish people

It has been a few days since I wrote my latest blog entry. Sorry, I was really busy. Preparing for a mid-term exam last Thursday (enormous amounts of reading), collaborating with one of my professors on an article for the Washington Quarterly, Orbis (working title: “Why is there a singling out of Israel by Western countries? - Possible causes and implications for understanding International Relations”), teaching English to 3 grade 12 high-school students (volunteering), teaching English to a mature university student (for a fee – 120 NIS/hour) and preparing a presentation/lecture for a Start-Up accelerator workshop, just to name a few, and of course attending my 5 regular courses. Wow!

There is a lot going on in Israel and I am not even going to attempt but to mention the “hot” topics: The orthodox’ assault on women status in society that got even Hillary Clinton so ticked off as to openly criticize Israel at the Saban Forum; the election results in Egypt that signal the dawn of the “Arab Winter” and the political bickering between the Knesset and the Supreme Court on the process of appointing high court judges. But that is not what I plan to write about today.

This morning while waiting for my first lecture I was approached by one of my classmates Allen, a Chinese student from Shanghai. He wanted to know where I was from and how and why I joined the OSP program. Now, mind you it is a most obvious question as I really stand out on campus being the oldest and baldest student. I was startled at first as I took Chinese people (stereotyping?) to be shy and reserved and his direct approach threw me off for a second. Now you know me and I am not one to miss an opportunity to tell people all about myself (I was actually quite brief) so I told him. This is still not what I was going to write about. It is his answer to my reciprocal question. Here is what he told me and I thought you may find it interesting.

He said that Chinese in general like and respect Israel a lot. Even more so they like and respect the Jewish people. Chinese according to Allen believe that there are two people who stand apart from all other societies and they are (of course) the Chinese and (listen to this) the Jews. According to Allen both are the smartest, most innovative, thrive to excel and share similar work ethics. He went on to say that since childhood he worshipped (his word) the Jewish culture and heritage. So he jumped on the opportunity to study at Tel-Aviv University. (We share two courses: U.S. Foreign Policy from Truman to Obama and Fundamental Islam)

I asked him what in particular surprised him about Israel. First, he said, was the realization that Israel and Israelis are not constantly engrossed in conflict and violence and that life in Israel (Tel-Aviv?) is so “normal”. Secondly he was surprised to discover that almost every Israeli speaks anywhere from reasonable to excellent English which made him feel really comfortable. Finally he was in awe of Israel’s high tech achievements. What were the things he did not like about Israel, I asked. He mumbled something to himself in Chinese which I immediately understood: Israel is so bloody expensive. There you have it from 1 of almost 2 billion Chinese, not a statistically valid sample but an interesting nevertheless.