

MORDECHAI Z. COHEN
Professor of Bible and Associate Dean
Founding Director, Chinese-Jewish Conversation
Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Yeshiva University
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Academic Profile

Mordechai Z. Cohen is Professor of Bible and Associate Dean at Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies. A member of the American Academy of Jewish Research, his scholarship focuses on Jewish biblical interpretation, intellectual history, and the transmission of classical traditions across cultures. Through books, articles, and international research collaborations, he has explored how communities preserve, interpret, and adapt foundational texts across changing historical and cultural settings, with particular attention to the interaction of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretive traditions. Building upon these comparative interests, Cohen's more recent research and educational initiatives have expanded to include Chinese intellectual traditions and the continuing role of classical texts in shaping modern cultural, ethical, and political life. He has presented invited lectures and conference papers in the United States, Israel, Europe, and China, including at Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Fudan University, Peking University, Shandong University, Shenzhen University, and the World Congress of Philosophy (Beijing).

Selected Books

- *Rashi, Biblical Interpretation, and Latin Learning in Medieval Europe: A New Perspective on an Exegetical Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- *The Rule of Peshat: Jewish Constructions of the Plain Sense of Scripture and Their Christian and Muslim Contexts, 900–1270*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Edited with Adele Berlin.
- *Opening the Gates of Interpretation: Maimonides' Biblical Hermeneutics in Light of His Geonic-Andalusian Heritage and Muslim Milieu*. Brill Academic Press, 2011.
- *Three Approaches to Biblical Metaphor: From Abraham Ibn Ezra and Maimonides to David Kimhi*. Brill Academic Press, 2003 (Second Edition, 2008).

Leadership Initiatives

- Founding Director, Chinese-Jewish Conversation (CJC; 2018–present). Interdisciplinary initiative fostering dialogue across cultures and civilizations through scholarship, public programming, educational media, and international partnerships.
- Course Designer and Instructor, Foundations of Western Civilization: Chinese and Jewish Perspectives. Credit-bearing undergraduate online course offered annually since 2024, introducing Chinese students to the intellectual foundations of Western civilization through engagement with Jewish and Chinese traditions.

- Founding Academic Director, M.A. in Humanities West and East (launching Fall 2027). Interdisciplinary graduate program introducing international students to the intellectual foundations of Western civilization through the study of historical, literary, philosophical, and cultural traditions.
- Mentor to Chinese Undergraduate and Graduate Students. Provides academic and professional mentoring to students in the United States and China, helping them pursue studies in the humanities, deepen their understanding of Western and Chinese intellectual traditions, and prepare for advanced academic and professional opportunities.

Highlights of the Chinese-Jewish Conversation

A. *Academic Symposia and Public Programs*

Organizer, moderator, and principal discussant for a series of interdisciplinary symposia bringing leading scholars of Chinese and Jewish civilization into dialogue.

Featured speakers included:

- Roger T. Ames (Peking University), one of the world's leading interpreters of Confucian philosophy.
- Anping Chin (Yale University), a leading historian of Chinese intellectual and political thought.
- Daniel K. Gardner (Smith College), an authority on Confucian and Neo-Confucian traditions and a pioneering scholar of contemporary Chinese environmental policy and the emerging concept of an ecological civilization.
- Yidan (“Debby”) Li (Beijing, NYU, and Oxford), archaeologist and scholar of early Chinese civilization.

Symposium themes included:

- The emergence of ancient Chinese and Israelite civilizations.
- Chinese and Jewish approaches to classical texts and traditions.
- Confucianism and Jewish thought as responses to periods of socio-political crisis.
- Ecological values in Chinese and Jewish traditions.
- The role of classical traditions in shaping modern cultural, ethical, and political life.

B. *Educational Media and Public Scholarship*

Developed educational resources introducing Jewish culture to Chinese audiences in the format of a blog and video library distributed through Bilibili and YouTube, including:

- 走进犹太文化 (“Introduction to Jewish Culture”) Chinese-language blog comprising more than thirty essays introducing Jewish history, customs, ethics, philosophy, and culture.
- 犹太文化探秘，从这里开始 (“Exploring Jewish Culture—Begin Here!” Interview series answering questions about Jews and Jewish culture)
- 光明节：犹太人也过年 (“Hanukkah: Jewish Festival of Lights”)
- 穿越安息日的心灵之旅 (“Spiritual Journey Through Shabbat”)

Current Academic Appointments at Yeshiva University

Professor of Bible and Associate Dean, Bernard Revel Graduate School (2008–present)

Founding Director, Chinese-Jewish Conversation (2018–present)

Prior Academic Appointments

Yeshiva University

Associate Professor of Bible, 2000–2008

Assistant Professor of Bible, 1994–2000

Instructor of Bible, 1992–1994

Adjunct Instructor of Bible, 1988–1992

Yeshivat Har Etzion (Israel)

Bible Instructor, 1987–1988

Education

Ph.D., Bible, Yeshiva University, 1994

M.A., English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University, 1991

M.A., Bible, Yeshiva University, 1989

Rabbinic Ordination, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, 1989

B.A., *summa cum laude*, Philosophy and Mathematics, Yeshiva University, 1987

Visiting Appointments and Research Fellowships

- Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, Jerusalem — Coordinator, International Research Group, *Encountering Scripture in Overlapping Cultures: Early Jewish, Christian and Muslim Strategies of Reading and Their Contemporary Implications*, 2010–2011
- Hebrew University of Jerusalem — Lady Davis Fellow and Visiting Professor; Fellow, Center for the Study of Rationality, 2011
- Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania — Research Fellow, 2002; 2012–2013
- *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Walter de Gruyter Academic Publisher) — Division Editor for Medieval Judaism, 2008–2011
- Shandong University, China — Visiting Professor, 2016–2019; 2024

Honors, Grants, and Distinctions

2024 — Member, American Academy of Jewish Research

2024 — Provost's Faculty Research Grant, Yeshiva University, for CJC blog expansion

2022 — Sino-Judaic Institute Grant for Shanghai WWII Jewish Refugee video project

2021 — Provost's Faculty Research Grant, Yeshiva University, for CJC blog launch

2010 — Outstanding Professor Award, Stern College for Women

2003 — Outstanding Professor Award, Yeshiva College

1996 — Baumel Award for Excellence in Jewish Studies

1995 — National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Research Grant: Arabic poetics