



# Points East

THE SINO-JUDAIC INSTITUTE 中國猶太研究院 מכון סיני יהודי

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## Catch and Release in Kaifeng

By David Stavrou

Excerpted from Haaretz, English edition, <https://www.haaretz.com>  
24 May 2023

In mid-April, Noam Urbach received a worrying letter by email. "I am Guo Yan, a descendant of the Jews of Kaifeng," the letter began. "Seven days ago, on April 7, 2023, in the evening, I was abducted by a number of men as I was walking in the street, and was forced into a car in which there were two men wearing civilian clothes who did not present identification documents. They claimed they were government employees. After driving several hours far from the city, I was taken to a hotel room under guard. Not having my mobile phone with me when I was kidnapped, I asked to use a phone in order to inform my family, so that my sudden disappearance would not make them anxious, but they wouldn't let me."

"After five days, I was driven back to Kaifeng and taken to an empty room, where I was interrogated by four men. One of them was wearing a police uniform and claimed he was a police officer. They recorded the entire conversation. At no stage did they state the reason for abducting me or claim that I had violated any law or regulation. I was released after the interrogation."

Urbach, a China scholar and commentator on Chinese affairs who has spent many years studying the history of China's Jews, was only one of the people who saw the letter – which was sent to a group of Jewish activists who are connected with the U.S.-based Sino-Judaic Institute, which maintains ties with the descendants of the historic Jewish community in Kaifeng...

Why was Guo disappeared for five days? Why did a large number of government agents wander about the vicinity of the building where she lives while she was gone? The abductors didn't explain, but Guo, who also uses the Hebrew name Esther, has a theory. On the days she was absent, the Polish ambassador to China visited Kaifeng. Guo is certain that the two events are connected: that the authorities removed her from the city as a preventive measure, so that she would not be there should the ambassador request to meet her or other descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng. "I was held as a captive not because of something I did," she wrote, "but because someone wanted to meet with me."

That might sound paranoid to those unfamiliar with the background. In the past few years, the Chinese government has taken a hard line against ethnic and religious minorities across the country. From the Buddhists in Tibet to the Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and the Christians in the east of the country, the authorities object to every manifestation of religion that is not authorized by the government. This persecution has also affected the tiny Jewish community of Kaifeng. Urbach terms this a policy of "total totalitar-

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## Igud Yotzei Sin at Seventy

By Cecilia Lyubman

Excerpted from *The Bulletin of Igud Yotzei Sin* #420

### History

The wave of emigration of Jews from China to Israel, from 1949 to 1952, occurred during the period of the largest influx of emigrants from all over the world to the newly created state. Jews left China in the final stages of the civil war in that country when the Chinese economy was going through a period of galloping inflation. As a result, many "Chinese" emigrants, went to Israel without financial means or professions suitable for the new country.

One route from China to Israel was a train ride to Tianjin, a boat to Hong Kong, and a plane to Israel. Another route was a long sea voyage by ship to Haifa with a stopover in Italy to board Israeli steamers. Most of the arrivals went through the Shaar haAliya reception camp near Haifa and were then assigned to various immigration camps by the Jewish Agency, the "Sokhnut". Later on, they were settled in different cities and towns of Israel, or founded an agricultural settlement, a "moshav", such as Amikam.

One group of immigrants from Shanghai began building a residential area in the immediate vicinity of Tel Aviv, which was first called Shikun Shanghai and is now known as the Ramat HaHayal district.

At the initiative of Leo Piastunovich, former chairman of the Tianjin Jewish community, a compatriot association, Igud Olei Sin, Association of Former Residents of China in Israel (1951-2021), was created to provide assistance and support for the former Jewish residents of China.

The historic meeting took place at the Palatine Café in Tel Aviv on November 4, 1951. A year later, on October 27, 1952, in the Shikun Shanghai area near Tel Aviv, a Special All-Israel meeting was held, in which 14 members of the Provisional Committee and 22 delegates of our countrymen participated. The meeting elected the Interim Central Committee of the Association of Immigrants from China, Igud Olei Sin, which was later renamed Igud Yotzei Sin (IYS). Questions were raised about attracting as many countrymen as possible to the organization to help those in need of finding jobs, to provide financial assistance, cultural activities, learning Hebrew, etc. A small office was rented on Rothschild Boulevard as the IYS headquarters.

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## SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	117
China	17
Israel	8
England	5
Canada	3
Germany	3
Taiwan	2
Australia	2
Japan	2
El Salvador	1
Greece	1
Mexico	1
Total:	162

## FROM THE EDITOR

What makes a person heroic? In the Hebrew classic, Pirkei Avot 4:1, Ben Zoma says "One who subdues his passions, as it is written "One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city (Proverbs 16:32)."

Ben Zoma's criterion is self-mastery. But sometimes one becomes heroic by standing against external forces. Such is the case of Esther Guo Yan of Kaifeng. She is definitely heroic in her resolute assertion of Jewish identity and for her decision to maintain her private Jewish museum in Kaifeng despite the authorities' harassment. Not everyone in China is willing to take such a stand. You can read about her on our front page.

I'd be tempted to call her a Chinese refusenik except that, unlike Russian Jewish refuseniks, who got that appellation because they were refused emigration visas, she has no desire to leave her homeland. Esther hasn't been refused anything, except the right to live as a Chinese Jew and practice her ancestral faith as she chooses.

I stand in awe of her brave defiance and her willingness to risk so much for her own sake and that of her community. So far, she remains free.

Elsewhere in this issue, three other heroes are hiding. I had the pleasure of meeting Fabrice Sapolsky when he came through Seattle recently and I think you'll find his story and the topic of his book fascinating—it's not every day that one discovers a comic book that features a Kaifeng Jewish female superhero. And then there's the article about the Chinese restaurateur in London who, besides running a famous kosher Chinese establishment, claims to have perfected a drink to cure cancer. If true, that would also make him a hero.

I'll give you a hint about the third one: he's hiding In the Field.

**Anson Laytner**

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Editor

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## FINANCIAL REPORT AVAILABLE

SJI members interested in receiving a copy of the annual financial report should send a self-addressed envelope to: Prof. Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, 34 Colgate Rd., Unit 1, Roslindale, MA 02131 USA

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## In the Field

### • Shabbat Celebration in Chinese

Mordechai Z. Cohen, Professor of Bible and Associate Dean, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, and Director of the Chinese-Jewish Conversation, let SJL know that the five Shabbat videos produced by Jiuxin productions for the Chinese-Jewish Conversation have been posted on YouTube, in a dedicated playlist “Shabbat with Chinese friends” on the CJC YouTube channel, which they created recently. (They will be posting other CJC videos in the coming weeks and months.) CJC has posted materials on Bilibili in China, and their young participants (whom you see in the videos) will also post it on Douyin—and possibly Youku as well, per Dr. Wendy Abraham’s suggestion.

Cohen writes, “We are very grateful for the financial and moral support of the SJL.”

Here is the link: [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4vC7IYmKF Mii3KV55C-nfggGlZHtaxl\\_](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4vC7IYmKF Mii3KV55C-nfggGlZHtaxl_)

### • Ostoyich Is a Busy Man

Prof. Kevin Ostoyich continues his quest to get plays about Shanghai performed around the world! On January 31 Broughton High School in Edinburgh, Scotland performed *The Singer of Shanghai*. (See: *The Singer of Shanghai*, Broughton High School – YouTube.) Now the U.S. Embassy is sending him around Germany to lecture to teachers about these plays in hopes that they will be performed. He presented in Chemnitz, Rostock, Munich, and Nuremberg. Already there are two schools interested in staging plays (one in Saxony-Anhalt and one in Saxony). Meanwhile, *The Singer of Shanghai* will be performed in Cleveland.

He and his colleague, Kari-Anne Innes, are applying the finishing touches to a new play, *Three Girls of Shanghai*. The play presents the lives of Ester Shifrin (Sephardic community), Liliane Willens (stateless Russian community), and Helga Silberberg (refugee community). The play is written as a one-woman play with other actors performing tableaux behind her. Kari-Anne Innes will perform and

organize the first production of the play. The play is based on multiple interviews he conducted with Ester, Liliane, and Helga. Ester Shifrin is composing a song specifically for the play.

**In other news:** Ostoyich is currently making a documentary film with Luk Productions (Berlin) titled “Gary’s Letter.” It is based on the life of Gary Sternberg (a former Shanghai refugee) and his telephonic friendship with a woman in Cuxhaven who lived in Gary’s childhood home for many decades. He is also curating an exhibition titled “Textile Histories of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees” for the Textile and Industry Museum in Augsburg, Germany and his *The History of the Shanghai Jews: New Pathways of Research* (Palgrave Macmillan) came out toward the end of 2022. It will be the focus of a roundtable discussion at the German Studies Association conference in Montreal in October.

### • Shi Lei Checks In

Shi Lei, perhaps the first Kaifeng Jew to study in Israel, and a pioneer in the field of Jewish tours of Kaifeng and China, has a new email and travel website. Email: [chijju@yeah.net](mailto:chijju@yeah.net) and website: [chinajewishtours.notepin.co](http://chinajewishtours.notepin.co). He adds, “Now the Jewish tourists are allowed to visit Kaifeng.”

### • Harbin’s Museum of Jewish Music Opens

After two years of research and collection of items for display, the Museum of Jewish Music in Harbin has opened. The museum contains Judaica items, historical photographs of Jewish musicians and Jewish orchestras in Harbin, collections of recordings of songs in Yiddish, English and Hebrew, as well as cantorial chants, some of them 100 years old, videos, lyrics, melodies and musical notes. A proposal to erect a garden of sculptures depicting biblical musical instruments on the great lawn between the museum’s branches is being considered by the authorities. The Museum of Jewish Music in Harbin is located in a special wing inside the Harbin Music Museum, which occupies the entire first floor of the city’s new opera building located in the northern bank of the Songhua River (in Russian - Sungari).

### • Chen and Xu Honored by Israel

Ravit Baer, consul general of Israel in Shanghai, honored five persons from different fields for their contributions to “promoting the China-Israel partnership”: doctor Xiao Bo, curator Chen Jian, artist Jin Xing, Shanghai Diamond Exchange president Lin Qiang, and Jewish Studies professor Xu Xin. The ceremony was part of a joint China-Israel celebration marking 31 years of diplomatic relations and Israel’s Independence Day.

Chen has been curator of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum since 2007. In 2009, he helped establish friendship relations between the neighborhoods of Kiryat Hayyim in Haifa and Hongkou District in Shanghai.

Professor Xu, China’s leading Judaic scholar, from Nanjing University, was the first Chinese scholar to visit Israel and to be a guest speaker at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1988. He has visited the country 15 times.

### • Sugihara Honored with Concert in NYC

Chiune Sugihara’s legacy was honored recently at “A Concert for Sugihara,” held at Carnegie Hall on April 19, 2023. It was the U.S. premiere of *Symphony #6, Vessels in Light* by composer Lera Auerbach and showcased the Japanese American cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper. Cooper, who is married to the son of a Sugihara Survivor, was inspired by the diplomat’s story; that’s how the symphony came to be commissioned by Yad Vashem—which honored Sugihara in 1984—and the American Society for Yad Vashem. Also on the program was Karen Tanaka’s *Guardian Angel*.

### • Shanghai Sonatas Premiere

*Shanghai Sonatas* had its world premiere at The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, in Los Angeles, March 16 - 18, 2023. The musical tells the story of a Shanghai Jewish refugee, a violinist, who takes on a troubled Chinese teenager as his student, and a connection is made that helps both overcome their trauma and survive the war. Concept, music, and produced by Sean (Xiang) Gao; book by Alan Goodson; lyrics by Joyce Hill Stoner; conducted by Noreen Green.



## Shanghaiander Zoom Reunion

By Joel Epstein

Shanghaianders and their descendants have been getting together, both in the US and in Shanghai, for many years. The most recent gathering took place on February 10, 2023. It was a Zoom meeting organized by Faith Goldman and Meixing (Max) Ren. Although not technically a Shanghaiander, Faith is the widow of Robert Goldman, who was born in Shanghai in 1940 and remained there until 1958. Max is a distinguished film producer and was the Co-Producer of "Survival in Shanghai", a documentary about European Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai in the 1930's and 1940's to escape Nazi persecution. Working together, Max and Faith gathered about a dozen participants including Director Chen and his associate Mingxin Jin of the Shanghai Jewish Museum. Director Chen invited participants to come to Shanghai and visit the museum. He mentioned that the museum has recently been enlarged and now has a lot more room to display its extensive collection of photos and items of daily life among Jewish residents of Shanghai.

The Shanghaianders who attended were mostly of the generation that was born in Shanghai or emigrated there from Europe as babies. A few were born in the US to parents who met or were married in Shanghai. All the participants were eager to share their life stories or the stories of their parents who traveled from Europe to China and then to the US. Several talked about visiting Hongkou, the former Jewish ghetto, and the incredible experience of meeting people who still lived in the buildings where they had lived as children, including some very elderly residents who remembered them and their parents. Other stories concerned the long journeys that they made from Shanghai to a US port of entry and from there on to their new American or Canadian hometown.

The zoom lasted almost two hours. At the end several participants expressed a desire to continue to have Zoom gatherings. Faith and Max both stressed the importance of inviting the next generation i.e., children of the Shanghaianders, to participate in these meetings. These people grew up hearing stories about the lives that their parents lived in Shanghai in the 1940s and 1950s and might be very interested in sharing these insights into Jewish life in Shanghai. Faith also requested that anyone with experience in setting up a second-generation group contact her at [faithnamdlog@aol.com](mailto:faithnamdlog@aol.com).

Participants: Faith Goldman, Ren Meixing (Max), Edward Posner (and spouse), Bernice Rayburn, Gitta Martin, Judith Lavitt, Ellen Krackow, Sonja Muehlberger, Steve Emanuel, Bea Bergerman, Ruth Resnick, Eva Schwarz, Barbara Goldstein, Chen Jian, Jin Mingxin, Joel Epstein.

Catch, continued from page 1

ianism," which reaches down to the lowest resolution: persecution of every expression of religious life, however small and local.

Guo, who is in her early 40s, can be said to represent that small, local level. She is a significant figure among the descendants of Kaifeng's Jews – indeed, Urbach has written about her activity in his academic work and she has spoken to Western journalists in the past. "She stood out especially because of her unique stance," Urbach says. "Instead of focusing on hopes of immigrating to Israel or the United States, she advocated the reconstruction of the unique Jewishness that existed in Kaifeng."

Guo's home is adjacent to the site where the historic synagogue in Kaifeng once stood. The ancient structure was demolished in the 19th century, but the family preserved objects associated with the Jewish community. Today, Guo maintains a private, unofficial museum at the site that is devoted to the city's Jewish heritage. These days, the authorities prohibit the public display of anything identified with Jewishness, and as such they are opposed to the use of the venue as a historical or religious site.

Although Guo is fearful for her fate, she is no longer reluctant to go public. After all, the authorities know who she is, and international exposure might make it more difficult for them to persecute her. In an interview with Haaretz earlier this month, she agreed to talk about the abduction. She requested that we communicate by email, as her mobile phone is under surveillance by the powers that be, she says. She responded to questions in English with answers in Chinese, which have been translated here.

"I was born in 1980," she wrote, by way of background. "My mother is a descendant of the Kaifeng Jews; her father was born to a Jewish father." She attached a photograph from 1906 of her great-great grandfather standing next to a stone tablet from the year 1679. In the past the stone stood next to her house, near the synagogue site, but it is now apparently in the possession of the municipal museum of Kaifeng and is not on display. "In the year of my birth there was a reform that allowed foreigners to enter China," she adds. "The appearance of foreigners from all over the world in Kaifeng, among them Jews, led me to infer from what my parents, my neighbors and visitors said, that I am Jewish."

Guo is devoting her life to documenting Jewish history and culture in Kaifeng. "If there are visitors who want to learn about the culture or history of Kaifeng's Jews, they are invited to contact me." She says she is not connected to any organization or religion, does not cooperate with or-

ganizations and activists in China or elsewhere, nor, she adds, is there any element of extremism in her work, as the authorities are liable to allege. "I am only telling about history," she says. "The interpretation – extreme or not extreme – is in the eyes of the beholder."

The recent incident was unusual, she says, but it wasn't the first time she was harassed. "I am frequently harassed," she notes. "In some cases they removed and wrecked informative signs outside my home that advertised my research activity and ways to contact me. In one case, when I held a reception in my apartment, cameras and inspectors showed up below the building. When my mother came to visit me, I was detained and asked what she wanted."

She adds that people who identified themselves as government officials have knocked on her door many times and said they wanted to talk to her. They also informed her that her telephone was being monitored.

Do you expect help of any sort from Israel or from the world Jewish community?

"No, I don't expect help, because the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews are not recognized as Israelis (or Jews) by the government of Israel or the government of China. I have only a Chinese ID card. What I went through is the result of the Chinese government's conception that Jewish history and culture are not an appropriate subject for the Jewish descendants to tell foreign visitors about."

"I want to learn about the development of Jewish culture in Kaifeng. Leaving Kaifeng would mean giving up that work. I can't just give up the work because of danger. They might hope that I will give up and leave, but I do not want to leave, at least not at this stage"...

The encounter with the Kaifeng community was meaningful for Urbach, too. "In 1999, I was in Kaifeng as a student for half a year," he says. "I didn't find a functioning Jewish community when I was there, but I discovered the immense importance of the story of the local Jewish community for the city, as well as the tension and sensitivity around the question of its existence. I've been back to visit a few times, the last was in 2018."

Urbach is currently writing his doctoral dissertation on the subject of Christian influences on the Kaifeng Jewish community. He spent two years as a researcher and a teacher of Hebrew and Talmud at what was the first center of its kind in China for the study of Judaism at Shandong University in eastern China. For more than a decade Urbach taught Chinese at universities in Israel and helped Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in translation of texts, films and other

Holocaust related material into Chinese for Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center. Parallel to his academic research, he also collected material for a documentary film about the Jewish community in Kaifeng. However, fearing for the consequences for the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews who took part in the filming, he decided to shelve the project for the time being...

According to Urbach, at the time there was no active Jewish community in Kaifeng, but there were potentially hundreds or even thousands of descendants who might identify themselves as Jews given the right conditions. Most of them were not actively engaged with questions of their Jewish identity, but there were always a few dozen activists who did deal with the subject. They were in contact with the foreign visitors, requested support from the authorities and from abroad, and some said they wanted to immigrate to Israel.

At the end of the 1990s there was in fact a small aliya (after official conversion), and during the 2000s there was something of another Jewish awakening, which the authorities chose to ignore. "People organized to mark Shabbat and Jewish festivals at a community level," Urbach says, "and two unofficial study centers were opened in rented apartments with foreign teachers and foreign financing."

Who was behind all that?

"The Sino-Judaic Institute in the United States and the Jerusalem-based Shavei Israel organization...There was also support from Christian groups."

What is Israel's position in this?

"The approach in Israel, at least in the diplomatic context, was to see it as an historic symbol of friendship between the nations. China too had an interest in promoting this message: an ancient Jewish community, a thousand years old, that had never suffered antisemitism. It's a slogan that both sides, and especially the Chinese, liked, and still do."

Urbach also offers an illustration of the complex relations between Israel and the descendants of the Kaifeng community, who are not considered Jews by the Chief Rabbinate. "Israel's first ambassador to Beijing, Zev Sufott, decided that his initial official visit as ambassador outside the capital would be to Kaifeng. He sought to carry out a historic gesture by the government of Israel toward China, and it was actually his Chinese hosts who introduced him to the community's descendants. I interviewed him for my research, and he told me that it was plain to him that the descendants of the Jews whom he met 'are Jews like I am Chinese.'"

The final stage in the story of the Kaifeng community began with the rise to power of the current president of China, Xi Jinping, a hardliner when it comes to ethnic and religious minorities. "In the middle of the past decade, there was a clear change for the worse in the attitude toward the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews," Urbach notes. "The change is related to the Chinese policy that opposes any manifestation of religion that goes outside the official organizations which are supervised by the Communist Party. However, in my opinion there is also a specific apprehension about importing a Jewish-Muslim conflict into China, given that in the old part of Kaifeng there is also a significant Muslim-Chinese population."

According to Urbach, "It actually started with an optimistic report in The New York Times, possibly too optimistic, about a Passover seder held in Kaifeng in 2015. The report drew attention in Beijing and angered the authorities. Afterward the two Jewish study centers were shut down. One of the families of the descendants arrived in New York and requested political asylum on the grounds of religious persecution. The request was apparently granted."

"After that event, the authorities began cracking down, and prohibited any public manifestation of Jewish historic existence in Kaifeng. A stone monument that had been installed outside the historic synagogue [site] a few years earlier by the authorities themselves was suddenly removed. The municipal museum, which had an entire wing devoted to the city's Jewish history, was shut down in order to construct a new building. When the new museum opened, in 2018, there was no longer a trace of the Jewish wing and no mention whatsoever of the Jewish past. They simply erased the Jewish history that was unique to the city. Instead of taking pride in the historic stone tablets, they are hiding them."

In the same year, according to Anson Laytner, the president of the Sino-Judaic Institute, Jewish communal gatherings were barred and an SJI teacher was expelled from Kaifeng. The national authorities, he tells Haaretz, "are attempting to obliterate all traces of Jewish life in Kaifeng, present and past, not as a result of antisemitism, but as an extension or consequence of the government's campaign against non-authorized religions. Judaism," he explains, "despite a 1,000-year history in China, is not an authorized religion, nor are Jews a recognized ethnic minority."

Laytner adds, "If Israel were to express its concern in a non-confrontational, friendly way, China might be inclined to find an internal resolution to its 'Jewish problem' by talking with the

Kaifeng Jewish descendants."

In the meantime, Urbach discerns extreme caution also among Chinese academics, who are afraid to address the subject of Chinese Jews. A case in point, he says, is a study by a Chinese anthropologist who investigated the story of the two dozen or so Jewish descendants from Kaifeng who underwent conversion to Judaism and immigrated to Israel. Her study included an analysis of their complex identity. But in complete contrast to academic custom, her article, which was published in English in a scientific journal last September, appeared under a pseudonym.

"After looking into the subject, we know almost for certain who wrote the article," Urbach says. "She is a Chinese research student who learned Hebrew in Beijing and did the research within the framework of M.A. studies at a prestigious university in England. But she has since returned to China, and it was apparently made clear to her that publishing the article in her own name was liable to be harmful to her."

There was hope that in this period, with China reopening after Covid, the government would show renewed acceptance of Kaifeng Jews or at least ignore the community's barely noticeable activity, as it had in the past. "But events such as the abduction [of Guo] and the publication of an article under a false name are a clear indication that things are moving in the opposite direction," Urbach says.

Guo, for her part, says she will continue with her work, but that she is genuinely concerned for her safety. "What will happen the next time a foreign visitor wants to talk with me about the Jewish community?" she wrote in last month's letter. "Suddenly, I will be abducted again. And if I resist strongly, maybe the abductors will decide simply to solve the problem once and for all. It might be, say, that a drunk truck driver will run me over the next time I'm out in the street. Therefore, while I am still able to speak out, I am writing this and trying to send it to you."

The letter ends by cautioning the letter's readers not to call her, because, she says, her cell phone is under government surveillance. "Your reply will only bring you unnecessary troubles," she notes, and sums up: "I am sending you [this information] not to ask for help or a response from anyone, but simply to complete my work: to document and tell the history."

No comment was received from the Embassy of Chinese in Tel Aviv.

*David Stavrou is an Israeli journalist based in Sweden and writing for Israeli daily Haaretz.*



## **Igud, continued from page 1**

During the first ten years, from 1951 to 1961, funds for social aid, constructive assistance, etc. were created. Over time, contacts were established with immigrants from China who lived in other countries who had already organized their own compatriot associations in San Francisco, Sydney, Los Angeles, etc. They offered assistance to the association in Israel, sending donations for the active work of the IYS and for small loans to those in need. Gradually, this activity developed and took on a much wider scale.

The first chairman of the IYS was Leo Piastunovich (1951-1952), followed by Boris Kotz (1953-1971) and Teddy Kaufman (1972-2012). The leadership was carried out by elected bodies – the Central Committee of the IYS and the Presidium of the Central Committee which annually approved the budget of the IYS.

The Presidium met regularly eight times a year, and the Central Committee – four times a year. Permanent or temporary assistance was offered to those in need, interest-free loans were provided, and elderly and sick fellow countrymen were given financial assistance.

## **IYS conferences**

In just 70 years of the existence of the IYS, 15 conferences were held (once every 4 years), at which delegates heard a report on the activities of the organization and discussed plans for the future. In addition, two more meetings were held: a Special All-Israel Meeting of Representatives on October 27, 1952 and an Extraordinary Conference chaired by T. Kaufman on October 2, 1971.

On December 8-9, 1999, the 50th anniversary of the mass wave of emigration of Jews from China to Israel, the 14th IYS Conference was held... The 15th and last IYS conference took place on February 14-15, 2004 in Tel Aviv, at Beit Ponve. No further IYS conferences have been held.

## **Branches of Igud Yotzei Sin**

In Jerusalem, the IYS branch committee organized meetings 3-4 times a year. The committee in Haifa, in addition to meetings twice a year, organized visits to the sick and lonely living in Haifa and its suburbs. In Tel Aviv, Sunday lunch meetings were held regularly.

IYS members took an active part in the work of the Central Committee, the

Presidium, the Economic Commission and the Commission for Culture. Donations received from Israel and abroad were transferred to the Eleonora Piastunovich and Bella Volskaya Scholarship Fund, as well as to the IYS Social Aid Fund.

## **Immigrants from the Sephardic community of Shanghai**

In 1996, a group of people from the Shanghai Sephardic community (about 120 people) joined Igud Yotzei Sin and became an integral part of the Association. The Sephardic committee was headed by Yaakov Guri. The section held meetings twice a year at Beit Ponve. The planting of a forest in memory of Sir Ellis Kadoorie near Kfar Tavor was organized. The section within the IYS Bulletin published an English-language insertion in the IYS Bulletin called "New Israel Messenger" edited by Sassoon Jacoby.

## **Jewish Refugees in Hongkew**

This section of the IYS (about 130 people) consisted of Jewish refugees who arrived in Shanghai from Germany and Austria in 1939-1940. It was organized in 1990 under the leadership of Kurt Maiman, who edited the "Chusan Road Chatter" in the English supplement of the Bulletin, and its members met regularly 2-3 times a year at Beit Ponve. Igud

## **Activities**

- Social Aid

The first and main task throughout the years of the IYS existence was social assistance, caring for those in their declining years, or in poor health, were unable to work and had little income. This was especially true of those who did not have any relatives or friends. Those in need received a monthly cash benefit from the Social Aid Fund. Over the years, their numbers gradually decreased. In the 1990s, when new immigrants from the former USSR, who were born or previously lived in China, arrived in Israel, they needed material and moral support which was provided by Igud Yotzei Sin.

- IYS Bulletin

In 1954, the first issue of the Bulletin magazine was published in Russian. Its pages covered the economic, political and cultural life of the country and the daily life of new immigrants in the young state. The magazine then began to appear with supplements in English

and Hebrew. By the 50th anniversary of the IYS, the Bulletin was published in three languages five times a year with a circulation of 1100 copies, 550 readers in Israel and 600 abroad, distributed in 24 countries. After the restoration of diplomatic relations between Israel and China in 1992 and the formation of the Israel-China Friendship Society (ICFS), an English-language supplement "The Voice of Israel-China Friendship" was also released. The Bulletin's mission is still relevant today: to maintain constant communication between the former residents of China in the diaspora with their compatriots in Israel, to strengthen their ties with Israel, to report on the areas of IYS activity, and to restore and publish materials on the rich history and culture of Jews in China.

- Synagogue and Cultural Center

When the local authorities in Shanghai in 1954 demolished the Ashkenazi synagogue in accordance with the plan for the development of the area, the Chinese government transferred to Israel a sum of money that was considered equal to the value of the demolished synagogue, on condition that the money be used only for the construction of a synagogue in Israel. The Tel Aviv Municipality donated a land plot on HaGolan Street in the Ramat HaHayal district. Construction of the synagogue began in 1959 and on September 6, 1961, the Synagogue in memory of the Jewish communities of China and the Cultural Center were inaugurated.

The synagogue is owned by Igud Yotzei Sin and is supported by donations to the Synagogue Fund. The Torah scrolls from the Harbin Main Synagogue are kept here. There are memorial plaques on the wall in memory of community leaders and former residents of China in Israel and around the world who donated money for the construction.

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the synagogue in 2001, Teddy Kaufman emphasized that "our synagogue is not only a monument to our past in China, it is also a constant concern for the preservation of the memory of many of our fellow countrymen, whose names are immortalized on the walls of the Synagogue, and all those for whom prayers are performed every Saturday on the Yartzeit (Memorial Day). Caring for the Synagogue at 31, HaGolan St. in Tel Aviv is an integral part of our work".

- Monuments on the graves of friends

Igud Yotzei Sin keeps watch over the monuments on the graves of many of our countrymen who have no relatives in Israel. When someone does not leave any family or funds after death, a monument is erected to him at the expense of the IYS.

- Scholarships for students

In 1956, the Ladies' Committee of the American Far Eastern Society in New York established a scholarship fund for university students who are children of former Chinese residents in Israel. Today, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren still receive scholarship awards from the IYS. After the opening of Beit Ponve on 13 Gruzenberg Street in Tel Aviv, the tradition of awarding scholarships to students on Hanukkah were held annually...

- Gifts for soldiers

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah and Israel's Independence Day, Israel Defense Forces servicemen – grandchildren and great-grandchildren of former residents of China – receive congratulations from the IYS with a monetary gift. This builds a bridge between the generations of the former Far Easterners and ensures that the descendants of China Jewry will know about their roots.

- Beit Ponve

Until 1972, the Tel Aviv office of Igud Yotzei Sin moved from place to place several times to rented premises. Thanks to the response of donors especially the generous donation of the Ponve (Ponevezhsky) family, two neighboring apartments were purchased at 13 Gruzenberg Street in Tel Aviv. The apartments were connected together to form a meeting and reception hall, as well to provide office space. Beit Ponve has served as a center for the life and work of Igud Yotzei Sin for over 40 years.

The IYS office and the editorial office of the Bulletin, an archive, a library, and the office of the Israel-China Friendship Society, established in the spring of 1992, were located here. The traditional Sunday meetings, reception of foreign guests, and birthday celebrations were held there. The Sunday meetings hosted by the Tel Aviv Ladies' Committee were very popular and were usually attended by 25-30 people. A light meal was served, after which it was time for communication, conversations and mahjong playing in the meeting hall. When guests came from abroad, many

rushed to meet with them, and then up to 50-60 people gathered. Conferences, lectures and even concerts were also held in the Beit Ponve meeting hall.

- Archive of IYS

The IYS preserves the personal archives of Dr. Abraham Kaufman and of Mikhail Klyaver, complete sets of magazines "Yevreyskaya zhizn" ("Jewish Life"), "Gadegel", "Tagar", "Un-zen Leben", sixteen volumes of the "Jewish Encyclopedia" by Brockhaus and Efron until 1915, seven volumes of the "Concise Jewish Encyclopedia", published under the editorship of Yitzhak Oren, many documents concerning the history of the Jewish communities of China, and a large number of albums with photographs. To preserve these archives, compile a catalog and prepare materials for future studies by specialists, an archival commission was created under the general leadership of Professor Boris Bresler. The archives of the Tianjin Jewish community and the archives of Rabbi A.M. Kiselev were transferred to the Archives of the Jewish People in Jerusalem.

In the 1990s, historians from China, the USA, Japan, Russia, Great Britain, France, Israel came to work with the archives of Igud Yotzei Sin. In 2004, at a conference on the history of the Jews of Harbin held in Harbin, participants from different countries made presentations.

- Israel-China Friendship Society (ICFS)

In 1992, following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and China and on the initiative of the IYS, the Israel-China Friendship Society was created, which began to hold various public events and receive delegations from China.

Over the years, a supplement to the IYS Bulletin was published in English, "The Voice of Israel-China Friendship", which was a report on the activities of ICFS and was distributed among our friends in China and contributed to the strengthening of friendship

with the Chinese people. A group from IYS led by T. Kaufman visited Harbin in 1992 and 1994. The purpose of the visits was to visit places associated with the Jewish past and the cemetery, which was transferred by the Harbin Jewish community in 1957-1958 outside the city. For a number of years, on the Passover holiday, familiarization walks were held around the country organized by the Friendship Society for the officials of the Chinese embassy, led

by the Ambassador of China to Israel in which representatives of our countrymen from the IYS took part. In turn, the Chinese ambassador arranged a meeting with members of the ICFS and representatives of the IYS at his residence.

- Jewish cemetery in Harbin

The maintenance of China's only surviving Jewish cemetery was constantly on the agenda of the IYS. Thanks to the contacts of the leadership of Igud Yotzei Sin and the Israel-China Friendship

Society with the Chinese side in Harbin, this cemetery was put in order. In IYS office there is a plan of the cemetery, indicating the burial places, drawn up after the visits to Harbin by our delegations in 1992 and 1994. Since then, the former residents of the city who come to Harbin in search of their roots can visit it and find the graves of their ancestors. IYS and ICFS took part in the creation of the Museum of the History of Jewry in Harbin in the building of the former New Synagogue (Diagonalnaya St., Artilleriyskaya corner). Many documents, artifacts and photographs have been donated to this museum.

- All-Israel Hanukkah meetings

The traditional All-Israel Hanukkah meetings at which scholarships are awarded to students – children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of former residents of China – are held in rented halls where refreshments were offered to everyone. Representatives of the Chinese Embassy headed by the Ambassador of China to Israel also come to the Hanukkah meetings as guests of honor who take their places in the podium on the stage. After the welcoming speech of the IYS chairman and the ceremony of lighting Hanukkah candles, a musical program is offered to the public. Then Israeli students and Chinese students receive their scholarship awards from Presidium members, the Chinese Ambassador to Israel, members of the IYS board and the founders of registered funds and their good wishes for success in their studies.

- Financial resources

The various activities mentioned above have always required significant funds. This money was received from generous donations made by members of associations of immigrants from China abroad and in Israel, which are regularly reported in the Bulletin in the "Donations" section. Strong financial support is received by the Social Aid Fund and the Scholarship Fund, as well as the IYS Bulletin magazine, which fosters a sense of community among IYS members and with its sister organizations abroad.



Donations are also sent to the IYS "In Lieu of Flowers" fund instead of sending traditional New Year and Passover holiday bouquets to friends. Two of the most generous donors to the IYS were Asya Kogan in Tokyo and Izador and Ira Magid in Melbourne. For all the years of its existence, Igud Yotzei Sin has not received a single shekel either from the Israeli government, or from the Jewish Agency, or from municipalities or party organizations. IYS has always been active thanks to donations from former Chinese residents in Israel and around the world.

The cost of publishing the IYS Bulletin is covered mainly by subscription and various announcements, as well as from the IYS budget. The purpose of the IYS Bulletin magazine is to maintain constant communication between the former residents of China in the diaspora with their compatriots in Israel, to strengthen their ties with the State of Israel, to inform readers about the activities of Igud Yotzei Sin, and to restore and preserve the rich history and culture of the former Jewish residents of China and their memories.

Igud Yotzei Sin...is registered with the Ministry of Justice as a non-profit organization. Its financial activities are monitored by an auditor in accordance with the law. The peak of activity of Igud Yotzei Sin came in the late 1990s – early 2000s, when the association celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Over the next decade, the financial situation of Igud Yotzei Sin began to deteriorate. One after another, many members of the Tel Aviv Committee and regular participants in traditional Sunday meetings, our fellow countrymen in Israel and in other countries, died...which has seriously affected the financial situation of the Association. The question then arose about the expediency of maintaining the Beit Ponve premises.

On December 27, 2011, the All-Israel Hanukkah meeting dedicated to the 60th anniversary was held at the Einav Hall in Tel Aviv. In his article dedicated to the 60th anniversary, Teddy Kaufman wrote that "Igud Yotzei Sin will exist as long as our countrymen in Israel and the Diaspora will help us morally and financially. As long as our organization is needed, it will exist".

It was the last meeting chaired by Teddy Kaufman. Six months later, on July 15, 2012, he passed away at the age of 87, after having given 60 of them to Igud Yotzei Sin. After the death of Teddy Kaufman, Yossi Klein took over the leadership of the Association, and Ran Veinerman and Teddy Piastunovich became his deputies.

The activities of the IYS continued in spite of a sharp decrease in the volume of donations, but the management of IYS was forced to make a decision to sell the two apartments in Tel Aviv so that the Igud Yotzei Sin could continue its activities. On the advice of lawyers, over the next three years, the management of IYS persistently sought recognition of Igud Yotzei Sin as a non-profit organization existing solely on donations, which gave the right to exemption from the payment of tax on the sale of real estate.

When permission was obtained, the Beit Ponve premises were sold and a modest office space was rented in 2016 in Tel Aviv's Ramat HaHayal district on 31 HaBarzel St., not far from the Synagogue in memory of the Jewish communities of China.

The Kaufman and Klyaver archives, sets of "Yevreyskaya zhizn" (Jewish Life), all the issues of the IYS Bulletin, other magazines and important documents were transported to the new IYS office, and other archival material was deposited in the Cultural Center at the Synagogue.

IYS activity in the new location continues as before. Needy countrymen receive monthly financial aid and support. On Saturdays, services and commemorations are held at the Synagogue in memory of the Jewish communities of China. The IYS Bulletin continues to be published once a year on Rosh Hashanah, prepared by the editorial staff consisting of Yossi Klein, Judith Sandel, Flori Cohen, Cecilia Lyubman and Inna Baksheeva. The issues are gradually being digitized and made available on the Association's website. At present, work is underway to compile a bibliography of all journal articles in two languages – Russian and English, representing the complete set of the IYS Bulletin from the first issue in 1954. A bibliography of the issues of the IYS Bulletin in Hebrew is also being planned.

From December 2012 to early 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the long tradition of the All-Israel Hanukkah meeting of former residents of China and the indispensable student scholarship ceremony continued to be held as usual. The meetings are annually held in the Bnei Zion auditorium of the Beit HaTfutsot Diaspora Museum (Tel Aviv University campus), attended by distinguished guests from the Chinese Embassy, and often led by the Chinese Ambassador to Israel or his first deputy, as well as Israeli and Chinese students.

Recently, the donations of our countrymen to the Scholarship Fund have been reduced to a minimum, and the nomi-

nal funds have practically disappeared... Through the Israel-China Friendship Society, the Scholarship Fund has been replenished with a donation from the Chinese Embassy.

In 2017, the Chinese Cultural Center was opened in Tel Aviv, Ramat HaHayal. The Center cooperates with the IYS and ICFS. The former residents of China have the opportunity to attend all kinds of events: concerts, exhibitions, various courses. At the IYS office lectures and meetings are held, as well as classes for studying the Chinese language.

Before the onset of the pandemic, the Israel-China Friendship Society traditionally organized annual trips around the country or representatives of the Chinese embassy, led by the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Israel, with the participation of representatives of the IYS. In turn, a friendly meeting was held annually for representatives of the IYS and ICFS at the residence of the Chinese ambassador.

All this changed in 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the conditions of quarantine, the premises of the IYS office were temporarily closed, but the activities of the IYS and the office continued remotely, "from home". It was in such conditions, remotely, in the summer of 2020, that the editorial board of the Bulletin prepared for publication and published the issue of the Bulletin No. 419 for Rosh Hashanah.

Under quarantine conditions, the traditional Hanukkah meeting in December 2020 could not take place, although the students received their scholarships. The meeting of the students with the leadership of Igud Yotzei Sin took place on February 21, 2021, in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Health, through ZOOM...The Chinese language study group also continued to study through ZOOM during quarantine.

The main task of Igud Yotzei Sin is still to provide material assistance to those in need in spite of the pandemic and the difficult financial situation. Today our Association is 70 years old.

Many of our countrymen who helped voluntarily and supported the IYS financially both in Israel and in other countries are no longer with us. Time is relentless. Nevertheless, there are people who are interested in continuing the work begun 70 years ago by their predecessors and in passing on to their descendants the history of the Jews who once lived in China.



## Meet Fabrice Sapolsky

One of the wonderful things about toiling in the field of Sino-Judaica is the people I meet. A recent encounter that began online and then happened in person was my meeting with Fabrice Sapolsky.

On his dad's side, his family came from a shtetl outside of Odessa. They fled to France in 1902 after Cossacks burned down their village. On his mother's side, they've been in Tlemcen, Algeria (which was French territory when his grandparents were born) for generations. His grandmother used to say that they were of Berber descent. Sapolsky is French by birth but has been living in New York for the past eight years.

Though he might be known to general audiences as the co-creator/co-writer of *Spider-Man Noir* for Marvel Comics (with David Hine), through his twenty-five plus years in publishing Fabrice Sapolsky has served as editor and packager for multiple companies in France and the US including Albin Michel, Heavy Metal, Panini to Jungle Comics, DC Comics, Humanoids, Tapestry Productions, and Ablaze Comics.

So why is he being featured here in Points East? I'll let him tell his own tale:

"It all started in February 2015, with a trip to China for an ambitious comic book project (that never happened).

"That trip opened my eyes. I was a few weeks from relocating from Paris to New York when I went to Beijing. And, at the time, I was collecting a lot of ideas for *Spider-Man Noir*, in case Dave Hine and myself would be brought back for more issues after *Edge of the Spider Verse* #1 (but Marvel had other plans). It struck me that had Peter Parker been an immigrant, his life would have been radically different. After a week in Beijing, I saw and heard a lot of things that impacted me greatly, especially after I understood that they were referring to me as "the Jew Sapolsky" with their business and media contacts. I found this very offensive until I realized how little the Asian world knew about Judaism except for tropes that would label them as fierce antisemites on this side of the world. It was time to bridge the gap.

"On the plane back to Paris, I wrote an outline for a story simply called 'The Spirit of the Earth'. There was Kung-Fu and super-powers already. A philosophical and mystical Chinese background was included, but something was missing there too. And when it appeared that I wouldn't go back



She comes to us in a thrilling 76-page special issue. Our heroine escapes Kaifeng and a forced marriage to the mobster Yuk-Wong, who sends his goons all the way to Chinatown in New York to find her, but Leah, meanwhile, has met Juan Jin, the Spirit of Earth, and begun to realize her own super-power as Champion of the Water Element, which Lady Xia, the previous champion, had passed on to her just before she was murdered. Now Leah fights alongside the Spirits of the Earth, Wood, Fire, and Metal to maintain balance in the universe, while still striving to live a Jewish life.

to writing my *Spider-Man Noir* anytime soon, a whole bunch of my ideas morphed into the project that would be called *Intertwined*."

The *Intertwined* series, centers on the adventures of the superheroes called the Spirits of WuXing (the Five Elements), is set mostly in New York City, and features types of people not usually found in comics but quite common in New York: immigrants, Asians, Jews, Blacks, LGBTQ folk, Puerto Ricans and more.

Sapolsky found a willing collaborator in Fred Pham Chuong, a young artist who not only practices Kung-Fu, but whose grandfather was a Kung-Fu master. A year later, they had a deal with Dynamite Comics. Between 2016 and 2019, they sold 2000 copies through Dynamite Comics. On top of that, Sapolsky personally also sold over 450 copies of *Intertwined* at Comic Conventions around the country. (And since the book was reprinted at FairSquare Comics they sold an additional 1500 copies of that edition.) As he says, "Not bad for an indie project with very little brand recognition."

Eventually the team split from Dynamite Comics and, after they got their publishing rights back, Sapolsky founded his own publishing company, FairSquare Comics, in 2019, with *Intertwined's* 'Spirit of the Earth' as its centerpiece.

Now Sapolsky and his team have created a spin-off, centered on the Spirit of Water, "Leah Ai Tian, the Last Jewish Daughter of Kaifeng"—the only Asian Jewish character in comics. When she first appeared in the original *Intertwined*, she was like the "Asian Yentl", but here the reader learns her back story.

Sapolsky set the comic in 1970s because that pre-tech era allows for more interaction between the characters. (Today everyone would just be on cell phones.) This comic is a stand-alone volume, but it is also part of the *Intertwined* series and Leah will continue to live in future volumes of *Intertwined*.

Although created by Fabrice Sapolsky and Fred Pham Chuong, this comic boasts work by sensational new artists, Fei Chen and Ho Seng Hui, with colors by Exequiel Roel, not to mention covers by the two creators, and alternate covers by the Nick Bradshaw, Gerald Parel, Franck Uzan, and Will Torres. The concept behind multiple cover choices is that a) for the publisher, it creates additional demand by collectors, b) for the retailer, it brings more chances of selling the book, and c) for the audience, it's more choice and the possibility of seeing one cover becoming a valuable collectible.

This new addition to the series is sure to captivate readers with its thrilling storyline, beautifully rendered artwork, and thought-provoking themes. So, join Leah and the Spirits of WuXing as they take on the challenges of the universe, and discover what it truly means to have faith, stand up for what one believes in, and fight for the greater good.

**Intertwined:** The Last Jewish Daughter of Kaifeng is distributed by Diamond Comics and is sold in stores, online, and via FairSquare Comics ([fairsquarecomics.com](http://fairsquarecomics.com)).

If you'd like to meet the author, look for Sapolsky and the FairSquare booth at your nearest ComicCon (Comic Convention) or attend the Jewish Comic Convention ([www.jewce.org](http://www.jewce.org)), November 11-12, at the Center for Jewish History in NYC.

## Israel, China, and the USA

By David P. Goldman

Blog in the *Times of Israel*, 28 Jan 2023

Israel's alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of its foreign policy and should remain so. But a preponderance of common interests is not the same as an identity of common interests. Russia, for example, gave Israel a nearly free hand to engage Iranian assets in Syria even while Russia supported the Assad regime against American-backed rebels. Israel put its own security interest first, and Washington accepted this. The same should apply to China.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warns that China may destabilize the Indo-Pacific region, echoing earlier charges by Trump administration officials. Whether this characterization of China's role in East Asia is true or not, China may well be a stabilizing force in Western Asia. Israel's strategic interest in East Asia is limited while its interest in Western Asia is existential.

On Dec. 9, while President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia, China signed a Gulf Cooperation Council call "to address the Iranian nuclear file and destabilizing regional activities, address support for terrorist and sectarian groups and illegal armed organizations, prevent the proliferation of ballistic missiles and drones, ensure the safety of international navigation and oil installations, and adhere to UN resolutions and international legitimacy," according to a summary published by MEMRI.

China's first public criticism of Iran reflects its self-interest as the largest importer of oil from the Persian Gulf. China needs a steady supply of hydrocarbons at low prices. It wants stability in the region. Its exports to Saudi Arabia have tripled to about \$42 billion a year in 2022 from \$16 billion a year in 2017, while its exports to Iran fell to \$8 billion a year in 2022 from \$16 billion a year in 2017. China's exports to Israel are about \$17 billion a year, according to Beijing's data.

China's economic interests in the region center on the Persian Gulf and Israel. China shares with Israel a common interest in stopping Iran from destabilizing the region. Henry Kissinger's observation that the United States has no friends, only interests, applies to China as well.

Israel has made a firm commitment to the United States to withhold military technology from China. But American policy now focuses on suppressing the technological advance of China's civilian economy as well as its military capacity. This effort is unlikely to succeed. Indeed, no established power has ever succeeded in holding back a challenger by hoarding know-how. With six times America's count of university engineering graduates, China has a decisive

advantage in human capital and will find ways to work around American restrictions and eventually develop substitutes for American intellectual property.

Israel can't afford to sacrifice its technological edge to accommodate a poorly conceived and ill-executed American policy. It should not accept restrictions on collaboration with China in non-military technology. In some critical AI fields, for example medical research, China dominates in data collection. Engineering professor Edward Dougherty warns that American researchers can choose to "abandon a promising line of research, or collaborate with a laboratory in China that has the needed data."

Israel has discouraged Chinese participation in infrastructure projects to placate Washington. That is pointless. Western security won't suffer if a Chinese construction firm builds light rail lines or desalination plants. But it is also fairly harmless. Infrastructure as such is low-value-added business and of secondary importance in the Sino-Israel relationship.

More broadly, China's economic ambitions center on the global south, where its advantages in broadband and physical infrastructure have a transformative impact. Chinese shipments to the Global South rose from \$700 billion a year in 2016 to nearly \$1.5 trillion in 2022. Israel excels in agricultural and environmental technologies for which China's infrastructure investments will create new markets.

Israel should stick to its commitment to withhold military technology from China, while proactively exploring collaboration with China in agricultural, environmental, medical and other non-military fields. It should monitor but not necessarily exclude Chinese investment in Israeli companies, and find new ways of using the soft power of its technology sector to influence China's perception of Israel.

After nearly a decade of discussion with Chinese officials about the Middle East, I am convinced that China remains unsure about its prospects in a region where American willingness to commit blood and treasure is diminishing. China is rethinking its position. Israel should make China a diplomatic priority, rather than an afterthought.

Washington won't like this, any more than it liked Israel's refusal to provide arms to Ukraine this year, but its authority to dictate policy to Jerusalem has well-defined limits. The main fact on the ground is that America doesn't need Persian Gulf oil and China does. That presents opportunities as well as risks for Israel, and Israel should put its own security interests first.

*David P. Goldman is Deputy Editor of Asia Times and a member of the advisory board of SIGNAL (Sino-Israel Government Network and Academic Leadership).*

## Remembering Tianjin's Minyuan Grounds

By Israel Karni

Reprinted from *The Bulletin of Igud Yotzei Sin* #420

We returned to Tianjin in 1944. When I say we, I mean my father, mother and me. I was six at the time.

For the previous five years we lived in Shanghai. Under the Japanese occupation life in Shanghai was extremely difficult. The city was the largest port for the Japanese forces in China and was kept under very strict control. The small European community in the city had to overcome the hardships imposed by the military government and food was scarce.

My dad's parents lived in Tianjin, quite a large city, with a population of a few million. It was situated a few hours' drive from Beijing and was not termed as an important strategic target by the Japanese. Tianjin's lack of significance in the Chinese socio/political scheme, and the great distance from Shanghai made life bearable for the Europeans living in the city.

The Japanese garrison in the city of Tianjin was much smaller compared to Shanghai. It was a military force not involved in the war machine but was a force to keep law and order in the city. This did not mean that they were less cruel and demanding of the Chinese population. It meant that there was more food available and life seemed to flow in a more routine and orderly manner.

For quite a while my grandparents wrote letters to my dad trying to persuade him to move to Tianjin, where there was a better food supply and personal safety was much better. They pointed out that this was very important for my safety and health.

So my parents and I moved to Tianjin in 1944. My parents packed their essential possessions and moved by train to Tianjin, to join my paternal grandparents. After a three-day train ride, we arrived at night to Tianjin. We were very lucky to find a rickshaw to carry our meager luggage, as there was a nighttime curfew for rickshaws.

We reached our destination, my grandparents' house, in the early hours of the morning and I will never forget the special smell of fresh bread being baked in the kitchen in honor of our arrival.



I felt that a new world had opened up before me. I met my grandparents. I was enrolled in the Tianjin Jewish School where I met new friends. We were living in a house in the English concession and not an apartment in the French concession.

The English seemed much nicer to me.

All large cities in China were divided into concessions. This was the result of European countries invading China during the historical Boxer Revolution. Foreigners from different countries used to settle down in the concessions of their home countries. During Japan's occupation of China, the Japanese occupied all the concessions imprisoning all foreigners from enemy countries.

Slowly, I started to expand the geographical radius of my adventures from the house: The Jewish School. The Empire Cinema building, Victoria Café, The Kunst Club and Minyuan Grounds.

The Minyuan Grounds were located some ten minutes walking distance from my home. It was a very large plot of land, larger than a few football fields, stuck in the middle of an urban area.

I used to go there to ride my bike, play, fly kites when there was a wind and sometimes just have a good time with some of my friends.

During my visits there, I used to see Japanese soldiers training in the Grounds. The soldiers were from the garrison stationed close to the Grounds and used to have their physical training there.

They held competition races and engaged in gymnastics, which I was intrigued to watch.

On a foreboding and more sinister level, at one of my visits to the Grounds, which were larger than a few football fields stuck in the middle of an urban area, little did I comprehend that these were the last years of the Second World War and that everyone felt the tension in the air that surrounded us. Food was becoming scarce, the Japanese became nervous and the Chinese became bolder.

Japanese high ranking officers and civilian officials, started to search for ways to transfer to Japan, the riches they plundered from China.

A year went by. I was advanced to a higher grade in school. This meant that in addition to the regular subjects, I was required to learn a number of languages as part of the curriculum: English, Russian, Hebrew, Chinese and Japanese. I studied English, because this was the

language of the Europeans living in China. Russian, since my parents and most of the Jewish community came from Russia. Hebrew, since it was the language of our heritage. Chinese, because we were living in China and had to know the language of the land; and we were ordered to study Japanese by the Japanese Forces.

This situation did not improve my linguistic capabilities and I sometimes reflect that I may not have mastered any language well due to trying to learn too many.

Among all of my daily routines, I still enjoyed going to the Minyuan Grounds. On one occasion, it was in the afternoon, I decided to walk to the grounds. Walking along familiar streets towards the Grounds, I saw a lot of Chinese People running in the same direction. At first I thought that there must be some kind of an attraction on the Grounds or at least a parade. Coming closer to the Grounds, I heard shouting, screams and the sound of shots being fired.

I understood that something extraordinary was happening. My curiosity was aroused. I moved with the crowd but tried to keep myself close to the walls and fences of the houses. Coming close to the Japanese garrison camp, I was shocked by the sight before me. Hundreds of Chinese were attacking the compound with their bare hands and were physically pummeling the Japanese soldiers with vengeance, dragging the bodies through the streets. Frozen for a moment, I realized that I was witnessing a horrific picture of humanity at war. Hate, distrust and revenge ruled the day.

I understood that I was in mortal danger. It was only after running away frightened from the Grounds and reaching home, that I was told that the War had ended and that the Japanese had capitulated. Two Atom bombs were dropped on Japan making them realize, that continuing the war was a futile effort. The Japanese lost control of China and the Japanese garrison was left to its fate. It was after this terrible case of witnessing the revenge of the Chinese people on their Japanese oppressors that I stopped going to the Grounds.

China was going through a period of upheaval, turmoil and instability. The Japanese were gone. The American Forces came in. Communists started their march out of North China. Chiang Kai-Shek was trying to consolidate his

power in the New China.

World War II had ended but to everyone's dismay. China plunged into an internal war of revolution. Chiang Kai-Shek, backed by the Americans, fought against the Mao Zedong Communist forces, backed by Russia. The people of China were not given respite from one Great War to another and continued to suffer from this internal strife.

I continued my studies and improved my skills in Chinese and Hebrew. The Communists were pushing the forces of Chiang Kai-Shek out of North China. This relentless push reached Tianjin, culminating in the city being surrounded by the forces of Mao Zedong's Eight Army (Pa Loo). The Kuomintang forces of Chiang Kai-Shek found themselves surrounded and trapped in the city. This was the period where I used to watch large aircraft using parachutes, drop arms and ammunition into the Minyuan Grounds. On one occasion I ventured out and tried to reach the Grounds, but was stopped by the military, not before seeing the great amount of military equipment marked with U.S. markings being moved from the Grounds by trucks. It took less than a month for the city to fall into the Communists Eighth Army's hands. One year after the city fell into Communist hands, we left for Israel.

Fifty years later, a few years after the Peoples Republic of China recognized the State of Israel, my wife and I went on a trip to China and visited Tianjin. Traveling with a small group of close friends who all wanted to see China, I was pleased that they were willing to accompany us by taking a detour in our travels so that I could see the place where I spent part of my childhood years.

This tour led to my last time at the Minyuan Grounds. There is a very modern and beautiful athletic stadium built on the grounds. The area around the stadium has been modernized and gives a feeling of permanence as if this is the way it had been forever.

Amazingly, we found that a small part of the area around the Minyuan Grounds where the house in which I lived still remained the same. While we walked the narrow street towards the Grounds it was only I who heard the voices of the past blowing in the wind, from the Minyuan Grounds I remembered.



## The Entertainer: Mark Newton's Raison d'être

By Kevin Ostoyich

Excerpted from the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies 2 March 2022

...Mark Newton is an entertainer—and he learned his craft from Polish parents who fled from the Nazis.

[His mother] Mina Kaplan was an entertainer. She grew up in Pinsk, attended a music conservatory, studied the piano, and sang Yiddish songs. She was the youngest and only girl of four children in the wealthy family of Mottel (Mordcha) and Rachela (née Lipszyc) Kaplan. Mottel built ships and owned apple orchards. He knew Syzja Nowomiast, a wealthy landlord in Warsaw, and the Kaplan and Nowomiast families were friendly...The families felt that the oldest of the Nowomiast sons, Mojzesz, who was born in 1904 and was known by his nickname, Mietek, was a good match for Mina. Mietek had been educated at the University of Nancy and the University of Antwerp and was a businessman. Mietek was a stereotypical rich man's oldest son: He was used to luxury and getting his way. He did what he wanted. Mietek ran a motorcycle store with his youngest brother, Stanislaw...

Mietek and Mina were married in 1933 and lived in one of Syzja's houses in Warsaw. Mina gave up her musical studies at the conservatory. Mietek continued to run the motorcycle store in the city. Mark knows that his father tended to sell motorcycles from Germany. From old photographs from Warsaw, Mark knows that his father drove a motorcycle with a sidecar. He also remembers being told that his mother often rode in the sidecar. Mietek and Mina lived a life of luxury in Warsaw with servants, a chauffeur, and the like. Mina did not work and spent much of her days meeting up with other ladies in cafés. Mark says that his parents "enjoyed six years of bliss in Warsaw," but then their lives were upended with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Mietek—knowing immediately that they needed to get away—decided that he and Mina should leave the city at once. Along with Mietek's brother Stanislaw and Stanislaw's wife Mina, Mietek and Mina journeyed to Pinsk and lived in the countryside on a property owned by Mina's father, Mottel Kaplan. Thus, they were gone from Warsaw by the time the city was occupied by the Germans in

late September 1939.

Mark explains what happened next for Mietek, Mina, Stanislaw, and Mina: "They couldn't stay there [in Pinsk] either. It was really too close. So, they made their way to Vilna (Vilnius today), Lithuania." ... "Then things started to get heavy in Lithuania, and that is when it became a crusade to get out of Lithuania before it was too late. So, they were part of a number of Jewish people who went to Kaunas, Lithuania, and were begging in front of the Japanese consulate for a man who was the [vice-] consul from Japan named Sugihara. A big hero." [Mark starts to cry.] "I get emotional when I think about that. That one man can have such an effect on the lives of at least 3,000 people. And he provided, as many as he could, transit visas."

The man behind Mark's tears was Chiune Sugihara. This Japanese man helped save the lives of Mietek, Mina, Stanislaw, Mina, and a few thousand other Jewish refugees. The Jews required transit visas to travel from Kaunas. Seeing the desperate plight of the Jewish refugees in the city that was under Soviet occupation, Sugihara issued thousands of transit visas from the Japanese consulate. In addition to a transit visa, the refugees needed a destination. The destination of Curaçao was provided by Jan Zwartendijk of the Dutch consulate. It did not matter that the refugees had no intention of going to Curaçao. With the Japanese travel visa and the Dutch "destination," the refugees could travel through the Soviet Union and get to Japan. Both Sugihara and Zwartendijk have been officially recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Israel. This high honor is bestowed to those non-Jews who assisted Jews for no material gain to themselves. On August 7, 1940, Mietek, Mina, Stanislaw, and Mina were issued Sugihara Visas 1380, 1381, 1382, and 1378, respectively.

With their Sugihara transit visas and their Curaçao "destinations," Mietek, Mina, Stanislaw, and Mina went through the Soviet Union on the Trans-Siberian railroad with all of their possessions. They then took a boat to Japan. Eventually, they went from Kobe, Japan, to Shanghai. In Shanghai, they got off the boat and stayed, for the simple fact—and yet highly unique at the time—that they could do so without an entry visa.

In Shanghai Mietek, Mina, Stanislaw, and Mina lived together in a one-room

apartment and did what they needed to survive. Unfortunately, Mark does not know much about what his parents and aunt and uncle did in Shanghai but knows it would not have been a pleasant time, especially given that Mietek and his sister-in-law, Mina, did not get along well. Mark explains that his father was a natural leader and was used to getting his way. He also had a tendency of reminding the other three that he had saved their lives. Mark thinks that both his father and uncle may have worked for the United States military at some point, perhaps for the 4th Marines who were stationed in Shanghai until November 1941 or much later when the Americans entered Shanghai at the conclusion of the Second World War.

On February 9, 1944, Mina gave birth to Mark. Although he was formally given the name Marjan, his family called him Marek. Mark would be Mina and Mietek's only child. Mark says that he was really the only child for two sets of parents in Shanghai: Mietek and Mina and his Uncle Stanislaw and Aunt Mina. Mark's first memories of Shanghai are of fear—fear of the disabled Chinese in the streets. He does not remember much else about Shanghai, but he does remember that he attended kindergarten and that he grew up speaking multiple languages.

In Shanghai Mark had an amah. He says the woman helped his mother not only with tending to him but also with housework. He says he does not know if his mother had to go out to work while they lived in Shanghai, but he does remember that she did do a lot of knitting to make extra money for the family.

After the war, the scramble was on to leave Shanghai. The question was where the Jewish refugees would be accepted. Given that Mietek, Mina, Uncle Stanislaw, and Aunt Mina were from Poland, the prospects of going to the United States were not good. United States immigration policy was still based on the restrictive quotas that had been so prohibitive to visa applicants prior to and during the Second World War, and the Polish quota was one of the lowest. A relative in Brazil agreed to sponsor Uncle Stanislaw and Aunt Mina, and they left Shanghai for Rio de Janeiro in 1947.

Mietek, Mina, and Mark had to continue their wait to get out of Shanghai. Mietek applied for visas to the United States, but when he put down "Stanislaus Nowomiast" as his brother on the application, eyebrows were raised

among the consular officials. These officials wondered if this could be the same as one "Stanislaw Novomiast" whom they believed had participated in the Pan-Slavic movements in Shanghai. This was deemed problematic, because they thought this movement "had connections with the Soviets and later attempted to unite itself with the Yugoslavian Group and Czech Group."

Given the suspicion with respect to Stanislaw, Mietek was interviewed by Vice-Consul Norman B. Hannah. Hannah wanted to know exactly what Mietek knew about the various Polish organizations in Shanghai. Notes dating from August of 1948 in the declassified files reveal that the officials did not believe they really had anything to keep the Nowomiast family from coming to the United States. Unfortunately, not everything in the Nowomiast file has been declassified, so the full story of their visa application cannot be told at this time. Whatever the circumstances may have been, in 1949, Mietek, Mina, and Mark were permitted to board the S.S. General M. C. Meigs for San Francisco. The plan was not to stay in the United States, however. Mark explains,

"My parents had a visa out of Shanghai to go to Paraguay, and the plan was that my mother had an aunt in Buenos Aires. And they had arranged that if we got to Paraguay, the aunt in Buenos Aires would come and get us and bring us to Argentina. And that was the plan, except, when we landed in San Francisco, my mother also had an uncle who lived in New York City. And he came to California and filled out some paperwork or pulled some strings, whatever, and, instead of us continuing on to go to Paraguay, he found a way for us to stay in the United States."

Rather than Buenos Aires, the family set out for Manhattan. They moved into a one-room apartment on 106th Street at West End Avenue.

Mietek started to use the Anglicized name of Marvin and once again turned to German motorcycles. He set up an office for General Merchandise Co. at 170 5th Avenue. He rekindled his relationship with Triumph-Werke Nürnberg. This had been a German branch of the famous British company that manufactured Triumph motorcycles in Coventry, England. The German branch became independent in 1929, but production of motorcycles ceased there in 1957. Marvin eventually opened the motorcycle store on 172nd Street and moved the

family to 148th Street in Harlem so he could live closer to the store. Mark sums up his father's motorcycle business by invoking the late comedian Jackie Mason who said that any Jewish businessman will say that he would have been a millionaire if it hadn't been for his partner. Mark says that his father was one of those who had a series of business partners, who, according to him, were dumb, stupid, and were the cause of his lack of success...

Mina passed away at sixty-six in 1973... Mina Newton—the diminutive Jewish woman from Pinsk and lover of a good dirty joke—was more angelic than religious. Mark glows as he says, "She was the most angelic soul that I could ever imagine." In this sentiment, both father and son were agreed. Marvin often said of Mina—who had fled with him from Warsaw to Pinsk; from Pinsk to Vilna; from Vilna to Kaunas; from Kaunas through the Soviet Union then on to Japan; from Kobe, Japan to Shanghai, China; and then spent twenty-four years together in New York City: "She was the soul of every gathering."

Mark attended elementary school at P.S. 179 on 102nd Street. He remembers wearing dog tags that identified him as a displaced person: "We had a dog tag that had our name—and my name was still Nowomiast at the time—and it said 'Displaced Person' ...and I think we were instructed to wear them...I don't recall my parents having them, but I had one, and I was supposed to wear it." Mark says he wore it around his neck and remembers wearing it while attending school. He says when he started attending school in New York City he was placed in the first grade. He thinks maybe he wore it during the first and second grades but maybe did not have to wear it after that (perhaps until 1950 or 1951). He says he does not remember any stigma or feeling ashamed or anything. If he showed friends at school, they probably did not understand what "Displaced Person" meant. He and his parents became citizens of the United States of America in 1954. They changed their surname to "Newton" given that Nowomiast means "new town" in Polish.

When spliced together or "intertwined," the odds and ends that adorn Mark's condominium and the stories he tells convey a message of humor and love; collectively they are a testament to the life Mietek Nowomiast from Warsaw and Mina Kaplan from Pinsk provided for him...Humor is often a conscious or

unconscious way to confront sadness with optimism. Both Mietek and Mina had their share of sadness. Not all their relatives had been as fortunate as they...

Despite the sadness and loss of their past, both Mietek and Mina lived their lives in the United States with humor—perhaps Mietek more unconsciously with his natural demeanor and Mina more consciously armed with a good dirty joke. When thinking of the meaning of his parents' life journey, Mark says, "The first word that comes to mind is 'survival.'" I believe that especially in America, none of our young people or middle-aged people have any idea of what it's like to be in a foreign country, survival where you don't have home, you don't have the security and support of home. You just have to survive. You don't have a choice. And we've never really been physically attacked or taken over by other forces of other countries. So, we don't know what it's like to be under that threat. And if you can go back and on what you've learned about China and the Japanese occupation in Shanghai, you learn that these were people who were dominated and had no choice, but the only choice they had was to survive. And that was the daily mission. And most Americans cannot imagine it. So, give tribute to those who survived it and always remember that it could always be you. We don't expect that in our modern times. But it always could happen. And how would you cope with that? Because we've never seen anything on this land like that before ever."

It was Mina—the original Entertainer—who launched Mark on his own path toward bringing laughter and joy to his friends. Mark thinks back: "All the old refugees would gather together—many from Shanghai—in New York. And there would be a party and drinking and eating. And they'd say, 'Mina, could you play something for us?' She would play and sing in six different languages. And then, of course, at the end of it, she'd say, 'And now, my son, Mark, will sing.' And drag me in there. Part of my early indoctrination into entertaining." As Mark thinks about his mother entertaining her friends, tears start to well in his eyes: "I was a firm believer in the last few years of searching for my *raison d'être*. Why am I here? I need to define that. And once I was able to put it into words, my life has been pretty easy, since that point, which was about five, six years ago. And I determined that my



raison d'être was to entertain my friends. That's why I'm here. And then when I just started to say that to you, and I said that about my mother, it makes me quite emotional because that's exactly what she did. Without even realizing it, that that was her *raison d'être*."

For both Mina and Mark Newton, there is nothing better than to entertain one's friends.

Kevin Ostoyich is .... He is grateful to Dean Jon Kilpinen and Prof. Colleen Seguin of Valparaiso University for their support of his research endeavors. He also wishes to thank Dixon W. and Hertha E. Benz for their generous support.

Note: The main sources for the article are interviews of Mark Newton conducted in-person by the author on December 29, 2021, in Yardley, PA, and by phone on January 22, 2022. The author conducted follow-up written and verbal correspondence with Mark Newton in order to provide fine-tuning on specific points.

## Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Visits Taiwan

By Jordyn Haime

Excerpted from the JTA, 1 March 2023

In what is likely a first, an Israeli chief rabbi visited Taiwan last week, marking a milestone both for the island nation and the Jewish community there.

Last week, the Jeffrey D. Schwartz Jewish Community Center in Taipei welcomed Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau on a three-day visit which included a dedication ceremony for the community center, a regional summit of rabbis and a meeting with Israeli and Taiwanese officials.

About 30 rabbis from the region, including from Sydney, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Cambodia, attended the summit to promote cultural exchange throughout the region and celebrate the opening of the Jewish center, according to the Jeffrey D. Schwartz and Na Tang Jewish Taiwan Cultural Association, or JTCA.

COVID-19 travel restrictions had delayed Lau's original plan to attend the official opening to the public in 2021...

Over the past decade, Taiwan's Jewish community has undergone a dramatic

revival thanks to the arrival of Rabbi Shlomi Tabib, who is affiliated with the Hasidic Chabad-Lubavitch movement, in 2011, and the efforts of the Taiwan Jewish Community, a non-denominational community with its own vibrant congregation in Taipei. Jeffrey Schwartz, a local businessman, split from the Taiwan Jewish Community group to start his own association and the \$16 million center, which houses Tabib and his family.

The synagogue in Schwartz's center is now used as an event venue by both Schwartz's Chabad-run congregation and the Taiwan Jewish Community, which for years remained separated over intra-community squabbles.

With a goal of promoting cultural exchange between Jews in Taiwan and non-Jewish locals, Schwartz's community center includes a Judaica museum, a mikvah and kosher restaurant, and it hosts tours and events open to the Taiwanese public. The volume of visits from local Taiwanese visitors over the center's first year of operation is "one the most heartwarming accomplishments," Schwartz said...

Don Shapiro, one of the earliest members of the TJC, which first officially registered with the government in 1979, attended the ceremony on Feb 21.

"I never imagined I would ever see a visit to Taiwan by the chief rabbi of Israel, let alone as part of a conclave of rabbis from all around the Asia-Pacific region," he said. "It was a testament to how the Jewish community in Taiwan — now home to two vibrant religious congregations and a Jewish cultural association — has been thriving in recent years after a period of great uncertainty."

**"Dan Wyman Books has a list of over 50 titles related to the Jews in China, including 16 original rare constitutions from Jewish organizations in Tianjin and Harbin. Go to [danwymanbooks.com](https://danwymanbooks.com), keyword: Chinese Jews."**

## Chinese-Jewish-American

By Christopher Michaelson

*The Forward* 23 June 2022

Years ago, when I first told my mom I was converting to Judaism, she worried that I would become less Chinese. More recently, when I told her I was legally changing my name, she wondered if "Christopher" was not Jewish enough, not realizing that I meant I was adopting her surname, Wong, as my middle name.

Growing up in a majority white, Christian community in the Upper Midwest, I did not fit in as a multiracial kid in a sea of Caucasian faces. I was neither white enough to fit in with my classmates, nor Chinese enough for Chinese school classes on the weekends, where my sister and I were the only half-Asian students.

While studying for my doctorate in philosophy, I fell in love with a Jewish woman and traded my secular identity for a Jewish one. As an adult, I am part of the new math of the Jewish American Diaspora — a world where increasingly more Jewish families look like mine. Between 12% and 15% of American Jews identify as Jews of color.

When my wife Beth and I were engaged, family members on both sides speculated that our marriage would work because her Jewish and my Chinese cultures shared the same family values. Journalist Rachel Gross joked that being part Asian American and all Jewish means "I really, really like Chinese food."

In my experience, both of these claims — about family and food — may be true, and yet, of course, not quite so simple. As well-meaning as the search for common ground between cultural and religious identities can be, discovering our uncommon ground is also critical to our appreciation of the diverse histories that we each bring to the changing faces and futures of Judaism.

Jewish and Chinese cultures do both revolve around familial bonds. Our wedding procession honored four living grandparents, including my Gong-Gong (maternal grandfather) and both of Beth's bubbes. Through them, we learned the oral histories, which our children now know by heart, of the improbable series of events that allowed our lives to intersect.

My wife's ancestors had emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States,



while my mother's journey to the same destination began in China and went through Brazil. Both families fled threats in their respective homelands, one from antisemitic persecution, the other from wartime enemies. Many nights, I feel grateful to fall asleep listening to my wife retelling to her mother every detail of her and our children's days, continuing the oral tradition and cementing the intimate knowledge of each other's lives.

There is also truth to the cliché that Jewish and Chinese familial bonds are both strengthened by food. Before every Rosh Hashanah, my wife and her cousin spend a full day making their grandmother's potato knishes from scratch. These re-creations of inherited recipes for matzo ball soup, cheese bake and poppy seed cookies are our children's comfort foods and our most tangible connection to Jewish tradition.

Much like my wife grew up having Shabbat dinners at home with her family, our children put eight-course Chinese banquets at my mother's home ahead of most other social activities. We eat noodles for long life on birthdays, fish to symbolize the abundance we hope for in the new year, and we always go home with bags of mantou (steamed bread), baozi (filled steamed bread) and jiaozi (dumplings). The filial piety our children exhibit by prioritizing family is inseparable from their gastronomic self-interest.

Notwithstanding these parallels, our family conventions are as different as our food traditions. After our engagement, my in-laws asked that I call them "Mom and Dad" instead of "Mrs. and Mr. Winnick."

I understood this to be not only a personal gesture of affection but also a celebration of the growth of the Jewish population by one. My Chinese inclination to dutifully accede conflicted with my sense of loyalty toward my own parents, whom I already called "Mom and Dad." My in-laws and I settled on "Ma and Pop."

By contrast, at a Wong family reunion, the spouses who married into the family are more likely to take the pictures than appear in them. My Chinese relatives do not love my wife any less than her Jewish relatives love me, but being left out of photos can come across as insulting for the uninitiated.

Family bonds are not all alike to my Chinese family, whose story of constant physical separation due to war and its aftermath leads them to hold blood relationships in especially high esteem.

Perhaps these different yet strong familial ties in Chinese and Jewish culture are informed by their experiences with loss. Nazis killed six million Jewish people in the Holocaust (including relatives of my wife's ancestors), and at least 10 million Chinese civilians (including my step-grandmother's sister) were killed in the war with Japan between 1937 and 1945.

Although the absolute scale of loss of Jewish and Chinese people was comparable, the relative scale of loss was not. On the eve of the Holocaust, the global Jewish population was only 16.6 million people, whereas China's population around the same time was estimated to be half a billion. Our Jewish family gatherings are often intimate celebrations of individual births and accomplishments, whereas our Chinese reunions bring as many of us together as possible to exalt the family. I have wondered if this is typical of others with my mixed heritage and if the relative scale of loss has influenced history's remembrance of these tragedies and how our cultures balance the relative priority of individuals within collectives.

As part of their b'nai mitzvah, my children each lit candles in memory of specific Jewish children killed in the Holocaust, to whom we were related by religion but not by blood, who did not live to reach their b'nai mitzvah. The only time in my childhood that I can remember ceremonially lighting candles was during a large family homage to my maternal grandmother, who died when my mother was an infant during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

I have also wondered whether attitudes toward cultural assimilation have been affected by these historical tragedies and cultural orienta-

tions. Expressing Jewish identity is a sacred duty to my wife's family in significant part because some of their ancestors were persecuted and killed for expressing theirs. In contrast, since my physical appearance is not conspicuously Asian, expressing my part-Chinese identity can be a choice.

As a child, I yearned to assimilate into the majority culture. Even within my extended Chinese family, there used to be a social hierarchy among my generation that favored cousins who were perceived to be more Westernized. While my mother succeeded as a high school teacher who taught thousands of non-Chinese students how to speak Mandarin, I rebelled against learning her family's native tongue. Ultimately, my mother could not force me to continue my Chinese education, and I gave it up until I chose to take Chinese art and history classes in college.

As an adult in an era in which both antisemitic and anti-Asian violence are rising, I am ever more concerned about the threat that extermination and assimilation pose to the histories of peoples who do not belong to the dominant culture. At the same time, as a part Asian American and all Jewish person, I am inclined toward optimism about the new math — that the inverse of not fitting in anywhere is the hope of fitting in everywhere.

*Christopher Michaelson is a member and former board member of Temple Israel in Minneapolis and a professor of business ethics at the University of St. Thomas and New York University.*

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## Indonesia's Jews Come Out

By Johannes Nugroho

Excerpted from *Tablet Magazine*, March 20, 2023

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, is currently home to around 500 Jews, out of a population of over 275 million. But as Indonesians of Jewish ancestry have started to publicly reclaim their heritage over the past two decades, the community is thriving like never before.

Rabbi Benjamin Meijer-Verbrugge leads the United Jewish Indonesian Community, a nondenominational group with 180 registered members across the country; while he identifies as Ashkenazi and Orthodox, his organization is open to all traditions within Judaism. "We have also had several conversions," he said, "mainly from Christians."

[Ezra Abraham, a 29-year-old resident of Cirebon, West Java] belongs to the Sephardic branch of Indonesian Jewry, one with a history stretching back to the Iraqi Jews who arrived in what was then known as the Dutch East Indies in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Led by Emma Mizrahie, these Iraqi Jews joined Surabaya's existing Jewish community—made up of Jews from Dutch, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Polish backgrounds—under the leadership of Izaak Ehrenpreis and Rechte Grunfeld. The community registered with the colonial government under the name of Israelitische Gemeente van Soerabaia (the city's old spelling), East Java, and went on to build the first synagogue in the city in 1923: Beth Shalom, which gradually went into decline after WWII. The communal organization was resurrected in the early 2000s some 1,000 miles away in Tondano, North Sulawesi, under the name Shaar Hashamayim Indonesia (Israelitische Gemeente Indonesie in Dutch), and now runs the only legally recognized synagogue in the country: Kahal Kadosh Shaar Hashamayim, which follows the Portuguese and Spanish rites under the supervision of Rabbi Yaakov Baruch.

Abraham, however, lives more than 1,200 miles from Tondano in Cirebon, a city of around 340,000 on the northern coast of West Java. Starting out as a fishing village in the 15th century, it soon became the seat of power for the Sultanate of Cirebon, from whose lin-

eage Abraham's mother is descended. A port city in the old days, Cirebon attracted multiethnic settlers to its shores, including Jews, Chinese, and Arabs.

Abraham was born out of a union between his Jewish father and Muslim mother. After being raised Muslim, he decided to convert to Reform Judaism in 2012. Three years ago, he returned to the Sephardic roots of his father's ancestors, who had immigrated to Indonesia in the early 1900s...His father, Frederick Ludwijk Patty, is still alive but is an agnostic. Both his parents approved of his decision to convert. Abraham now has siblings who are Christian and Muslim; it's a multifaith family, he said.

Abraham and one other friend who also discovered his Jewish roots are the only Jews in their hometown. Abraham now meets up with his Sephardic brethren in Tondano and Jakarta—130 miles from Cirebon—for communal worship whenever possible.

An avid activist for religious pluralism, Abraham has for the past few years appeared on talk shows and podcasts to represent Jewish Indonesians—something that was unthinkable until recently. "When I was about to go on a talk show hosted by a Muslim cleric for the first time, many of the old [Jewish] folk here tried to talk me out of it, saying it was risky," he said.

Caution, he said, was the principle older generations of Indonesian Jews lived by. Abraham said, given their past trauma, he could understand why so many of his predecessors chose to keep their Jewish identities secret.

Most Jews in Indonesia are descended from the thousands of Ashkenazi Dutch Jews and other Europeans who migrated in the early 19th century and subsequently intermarried with the non-Jewish local population; others trace their Sephardic roots to immigration from Iraq and elsewhere. Today, however, almost all Indonesian Jews were born and raised in the country.

Abraham's father was born here. So was Meijer-Verbrugge's father. But they were raised in a time when Indonesian Jews had to hide their identity.

After invading the Dutch East Indies in 1942, the Japanese interned more than half of the local Jewish population of around 3,000, classifying them as Dutch combatants. Things turned worse the following year when non-Dutch Jews were detained and subsequently

forced to work in labor camps. Those who managed to evade arrest fled overseas or obscured their Jewish identity by converting to other faiths.

"My grandmother, Miriam Frieda, who grew up during WWII, had to hide her Jewish identity for fear of being arrested by the Japanese," said Abraham. "She did this by converting to Roman Catholicism. But my grandmother never made it a secret within the family that we had Jewish blood."

After WWII, when most Jews were interned or fled, those who came back found that their properties, like all those belonging to the Dutch, had been seized by Indonesians. Most decided to leave the country for other Jewish communities in Southeast Asia, notably Singapore, or start over in Israel. The remaining Indonesian Jews have had a low-profile existence since then, subsisting as a hidden subculture of secret heritage and public conformity.

Today's Jewish community is largely made of native-born Indonesians like Abraham who have begun to reclaim their Jewish identity. No longer feeling they need to live double lives, more Indonesian Jews are now open about their faith in their daily lives, and more importantly, on social media, where more than 60% of Indonesians interact with one another.

The internet had helped usher in a new age for Judaism in Indonesia, said Avshalom Benayahu, who lives in Manado, North Sulawesi, about 20 miles from the synagogue in Tondano. Being online helps Indonesian Jews, who are scattered across the archipelago, to connect with each other. In celebrating Purim recently, for instance, different small communities in various cities held their own rituals but came together online via Zoom.

"Like most Jews here, my family also converted to another faith to avoid stigma," he said. "I was raised as a Christian, like most Manadonese."

But growing up, the 42-year-old heard stories from older family members that he was Jewish. Retracing the family ancestry in the early 2000s, they constructed a family tree and managed to identify their Jewish ancestors and established their Jewishness beyond doubt. Benayahu converted to Orthodox Judaism in 2009 and is currently training to be a rabbi under Meijer-Verbrugge.

"Before my conversion, I felt isolated and alone in Manado," he said. "Thankfully, social media provided me with a means of reaching out to other Indonesian Jews, which is how I first made contact with Rabbi Benny [Meijer-Verbrugge]."

Meijer-Verbrugge, 52, was born and raised a Muslim in Jakarta to a Jewish mother and Javanese Muslim father. In his adult years, he decided to become a Christian before converting to Reform-Conservative Judaism in 2011 and Orthodox Judaism in 2021 following the death of his German Jewish maternal grandfather, Benjamin Verbrugge, who died in 2003. "My grandfather charged me with the duty of reviving my Jewish heritage," he said. "This was his final wish."

The senior Verbrugge had played an important role in his grandson's discovery of his Jewish identity from an early age. "When I was 5," he said, "he used to gather his grandchildren around him to tell us we were Jewish."

The Indonesian state only recognizes six religions; Islam, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The freedom to adhere to other faiths is guaranteed by the constitution, although discriminative practices against minority faiths—in job promotion among civil servants, school dress code for non-Muslims, and, in extreme cases, forced evictions from homes—are common.

The rabbi pointed out it's still impossible for an Indonesian Jew to have his or her faith listed on the mandatory National ID Card, called a KTP: "As things stand, even if you have all the proof that you practice Judaism, you will get put under 'other faiths in God' category."

Meijer-Verbrugge said that despite the growing visibility of Jews in Indonesia, prejudice and stigma still exist. Hostility comes largely from the country's Muslims, most of whom grew up with the notion of Jewish people as enemies of their religion. A public poll carried out in May 2022 by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting found 51% of Indonesian Muslims had serious misgivings about having Jewish neighbors, 57% opposed having Jews teach at public schools, and 61% objected to Jews becoming government officials.

Abraham said, however, he had never experienced extreme prejudice living in a Muslim-majority city: "Part of the

problem is that the decades long invisibility of the Jewish people has made us into the convenient, never-seen bogeyman," he said, stressing that greater engagement outside the faith will help dispel the prevalent misconception and disinformation about Jews. "At past interfaith events, Muslim participants were initially uncomfortable when I told them I was Jewish. But by the end of our frank discussions, most would've modified their stance."

He said putting real faces to Judaism in Indonesia makes it far less surreal, adding some of his biggest supporters in the interfaith community used to be skeptical of Judaism.

Aan Anshori, a Muslim cleric and pluralism activist working in Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, the Nadhatul Ulema, described the antipathy toward Jews among Muslims in the country as "culturally deep-seated."

Anshori said most Indonesian Muslims grew up hearing the story of how the Prophet Muhammad died after being given poisoned food by a Jewish woman. He added that the issue of Palestinian independence has given a modern-day context through which Indonesians see the Jewish people as villains. In 2013, for instance, following protests by Islamic groups over the Israel-Palestine conflict, Surabaya's Dutch-era synagogue was sold to a developer and razed to the ground, despite being previously declared a heritage site.

"The key to turning this around is to instill the importance for coexistence between Islam and other faiths today," Anshori said passionately.

The Rev. Irma Simanjutak, a Christian pastor and activist for religious pluralism, is also a firm believer in dialogue between all faiths. The last week of January, she attended the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference in Manado. The Shaar Hashamayim synagogue hosted the interfaith meet-up, which also commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

"What struck me most about the conference was the informal and relaxed atmosphere," Simanjutak recalled. "Muslims and Christians had been having a dialogue in Indonesia for a long time and it was refreshing to have our Jewish brethren present for the last three years."

North Sulawesi, a Christian-majority part of Indonesia, remains the only region to have allowed the construction of

a new synagogue. Simanjutak believes there is a lot of goodwill among Indonesian Christians—who make up about 10% of the country's population—toward Judaism, many of whom see it as the precursor to their faith. She said that when she spoke to Christians in Manado, the capital city of North Sulawesi, they kept referring to Tondano's Shaar Hashamayim synagogue as "gereja Yahudi," or Jewish church.

Shaar Hashamayim's Rabbi Baruch, a 40-year-old native of North Sulawesi who grew up in a Christian family in Manado, said establishing rapport with other faiths in Indonesia sends a clear message that Judaism is a religion of peace. "It also signifies to the other faiths that we are a people open to all," he said. "By taking part, we are being included in the conversation between religions at the national level."

Meijer-Verbrugge, though he remains optimistic about the future, said that Indonesian Jews have a number of challenges stacked against them, both internal and external. "Our small number means coordination and communal events are more difficult and expensive to organize," he said. Not all Indonesian Jews are high-income earners, he added; many earn the minimum wage, around US\$132 to \$333 a month. "This means many can't afford memberships in international Jewish organizations or travel to meet with their brethren overseas."

Another challenge is more fundamental, he said: "It's still very difficult for us here to find life partners who are also Jewish. The implications are obvious for the next generation."

Abraham said he has ruled out marrying outside the faith. "Fortunately," he said, "my girlfriend is willing to convert" to Judaism.

Baruch, however, has some sobering advice for his fellow Indonesian Jews, saying the greatest enemy often comes from within. He gave an example of how new converts to Judaism openly disparaged their former faiths on social media. "It falls on the leaders of our community to rein in such fanaticism," he said, "because we want Indonesian Judaism to be an inclusive faith."

*Johannes Nugroho is a journalist based in Surabaya, Indonesia. Follow him on Twitter @Johannes\_nos*



## The Kosher Kaifeng Restaurant Cancer Cure

By Michael Levin

Excerpted from the *Jerusalem Post* 18 February 2023

Most people go to Kaifeng, the legendary kosher Chinese restaurant north of London, for outstanding Chinese cuisine. However, a small minority go there for something much more important – an opportunity to save their own lives.

Norman Han, 80, co-owner of Kaifeng, is twice a cancer survivor and says that the restaurant has been a lifesaver for him because it gives him the opportunity to save the lives of others.

Han went into the restaurant business in 1958, working for a decade at the Hilton on Park Lane in London. He left the Hilton chain when he realized he did not want to join the team of employees to open up other properties, traveling from city to city, across continental Europe, even to Hong Kong...

Han opened one of the first restaurants in London's Chinatown in the mid-1960s, and then in 1967, he opened Kaifeng. His first mashgiach (kashrut supervisor) was a legendary rabbi who, as part of the Allied Armed Forces, had helped to liberate the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

"We would meet for two hours every week," Han recalls fondly. "I would listen to his stories about Bergen-Belsen. He treated me like a son, and I treated him like a father."

Han credits those experiences learning from his mashgiach as a means of understanding his newfound Jewish clientele.

"When I opened the restaurant," Han says, "it hadn't been too many years



Norman Han. (photo credit: Michael Levin)

since the Holocaust had ended. So I was able to sit with my customers and listen carefully and understand the stories they were telling me about what some of them had endured." ...

In January, during Chinese New Year, Han and his team celebrated the 37th anniversary of the opening of the restaurant. Because he has certificates of kashrut from both the Orthodox and hassidic beit din, pretty much all of Jewish London eats in his restaurant.

"More than 80 rabbis eat here," he says proudly. "Most nights, you see Orthodox and secular Jews eating here until about nine o'clock. Then the place turns mostly hassidic. I'm proud to say that everyone trusts our kashrut. The beit din calls me an 'honorary Jew' – I'm proud of that!"

IN 2020, when COVID struck, Han decided to keep the restaurant open and focus on his takeaway business. Although the British government offered a plan that would pay a large portion of the salaries of suspended workers, Han kept everyone on his staff at full salary, which he paid out of his own pocket.

And then comes the sense of mission beyond serving great kosher Chinese food.

Prior to COVID, Han was diagnosed with cancer, and he initially went the Western medicine route. Radiation therapy did nothing for him, and he was essentially told to go home and await his unfortunate fate.

Han wanted no part of that. Instead, he pieced together a formula for restoring himself to health, based on what he had read in *The Economist*, the *British news magazine*, and conversations with cancer survivors. He put together a concoction that contained turmeric, certain vegetables, and black grapes. After drinking that beverage twice a day, he soon found himself cancer-free...

In the years since, word has spread about Han's approach to treating serious illness. People started going to the restaurant from Great Britain, Europe, Israel, and the US in search of a cure.

"The Americans always ask me for guarantees," he says, laughing. "I always ask them, 'What kind of guarantee did your doctor give you? He only guaranteed to accept his fee!'"

Han says that he has been responsible for "hundreds and hundreds" of recoveries. He sees the restaurant not just as a business endeavor but as an opportunity to spread the message and save lives...

Does Han's recipe really cure serious illness? That's a question that individuals will have to decide for themselves. The medical community will almost certainly tell you it's not true. On the other hand, the medical community doesn't pretend to know everything.

"I just wish doctors would keep an open mind," Han says about his alternative medicine approach. "There's a Chinese proverb: It doesn't matter what the cat looks like, as long as it catches mice."

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