

Conference • The History of Jewish Diasporas in China • International Symposium May 5 – 9, 2002

Scholars, teachers, research fellows, descendants of Jewish communities in China, and other interested parties are invited to attend the May 5-9, 2002 International Symposium on "The History of Jewish Diasporas in China" sponsored by The Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University. The Symposium, which will explore the latest discoveries, achievements, and developments in the study of the history of Jewish Diaspora in China, will be organized by and take place at two locales: Nanjing and Kaifeng.

Participants who intend to submit papers should concentrate their subject on one of the following areas:

- Study of the Kaifeng Jewry
- Study of the history of Jewish Communities in Harbin, Shanghai, Tienjin, and Hong Kong in Modern China
- Relations between the Chinese and Jewish people.
- Future perspectives of Jewish Diaspora in 21st Century China

The first three full days of the conference, in Nanjing, are allotted to scholarly papers and discussions. The fourth and fifth days will consist of field trips to original sites of the Kaifeng Jewish community.

Those interested in attending should contact Prof. Xu Xin by post, fax or email. Those who intend to submit papers are invited to send an abstract of not more than 400 words to the Symposium Secretariat at the address below by October 31, 2001. The program committee will then send each applicant a conference program and visa invitation no later than December 31, 2001.

Optional activities before and after the conference, including trips to visit Jewish related sites in Shanghai, Tienjin, and other cities, arranged as part of the program.

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Points East

中國-猶太學院

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THREE JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR LOVE FOR CHINA EVA SIAO (YE HUA), RUTH WEISS (WEI LUSHI) & KLARA BLUM (ZHU BAILAN)

by Matthias Messmer
translated from the German and edited by Rena Krasno

(Note: the author of this article has received a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation and is working on a project entitled: "Where East Meets West: Jews in the Middle Kingdom in the 20th Century"). He is spending this year doing research in New York (Leo Baeck Institute, Columbia University) and in California (Stanford University, Hoover Archives, Sino-Judaic Institute).

The renowned photographer and 'foreign expert', Eva Siao, passed away in Beijing at the end of November last year, shortly after celebrating her 90th birthday with friends and family. Some months prior to that, I met an ill and weakened Eva Siao at her apartment in China's capital. During our conversation, she spoke of her love for the country that had become not only her home but the center of her professional work. This situation also applied to several other Westerners who had settled in China in the middle of the first part of the 20th century.

The death of Eva Siao (Ye Hua – 'wild flower' in Chinese) marks the end of an extraordinary era in China, where a small number of foreign individuals used all their strength and perseverance to build bridges between persons of different race and origin, and to break down prejudices and misunderstandings between peoples. Neither ideological struggles and opposing views between states and social systems, nor two world wars, nor innumerable regional conflicts could discourage them. They remained steadfast.

The three women discussed in this article belong to the above exceptional group. Their biographies have similarities – all were of Jewish origin – and all loved China in spite of almost unsurmountable difficulties and obstacles throughout decades.

(continued on page 4)

RETURN TO CHINA

by Dr. Zvia Bowman

reprinted from Bulletin Igud Yotzei Sin Nov-Dec 2001

Of all the thriving Jewish communities of the past 100 years, few can be as unfamiliar to Western eyes as that of Harbin, in Manchuria. Zvia Bowman uncovers its history and, in doing so, retraces her own family's adventurous steps.

In the summer of 1999, I was on a plane from Beijing to Harbin, in North-Eastern China, looking down on an endless vista of conifers, rivers, villages and towns, all basking in the warm sunshine of a June afternoon. Just a week ago, I flew for long hours over Siberia, and the landscape under the wings was even more majestic and deserted. I was retracing the journey undertaken by my grandparents at the turn of the 20th century. They escaped the pogroms of 1905 in their native Odessa and braved a long, perilous journey on the Trans-Siberian railway to the relative safety of Harbin, at that time a fast-expanding frontier town being built by a vast army of Chinese laborers, supervised by Russian engineers, constructing the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER). While employment on the CER was not open to Jews, the Russian Finance Minister, Sergei Witte, disgusted with the quality of Russian settlers, encouraged Jews, along with other minorities, to settle in

Manchuria to speed up its development. On February 16, 1903, the Jewish Minority Community was established, numbering 500 souls. Its first rabbi was Shevel Levin, who had served in Omsk and Chita in Siberia. After the Russian defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, many demobilized Jewish soldiers settled in Harbin and were soon joined by their families, as well as by thousands of refugees fleeing pogroms in Odessa, Kishinev, and other towns and villages.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and subsequent Russian civil war brought a flood of refugees, both Russian and Jewish, to the relative safety of Harbin, Tianjin and Shanghai. By January 1919, the community numbered more than 10,000 Jews. At its peak, in the 1920s, there were as many as 14,000. In 1922, Russians comprised 120,000 of Harbin's

(continued on page 6)

The Year of the Horse

by Alfred Luk

Some sixty years ago in Shanghai, Tientsin, Tsingtau and Harbin, where the majority of European Jews living in Old China resided, those who had the grace and courtesy to reach out to their Chinese neighbors would say: Gung He Fa Tchoi and joined in the celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year.

Sixty year after, this 2002 year of horse, many of the former Russians who lived in Old China, predominantly led by Russian Jews, now reside in San Francisco, whose large Chinese community reminded them of Old China Treaty Ports. They would visit their old Chinese friends to relive this holiday atmosphere.

Cross-cultural and cross-religious activities are not new to these folks, [they were] only revived in another environment.

The new year usually is celebrated in four successions: First the Jewish New year, followed by Gregorian New Year, then the Chinese New Year, finally the Russian New Year. In the tightly knit multi-cultural and multi-religious societies in Harbin and Shanghai, this was quite common in early 20th centuries up to late forties.

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SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	271
China	15
Israel	13
England	8
Hong Kong	8
Australia	7
Canada	5
Japan	3
Germany	2
Switzerland	2
Taiwan	1
Indonesia	1
Italy	1
South Africa	1

TOTAL: 338

FROM THE EDITOR

Recently, Seattle's Wing Luke Asian Museum hosted a reception to mark the opening of an exhibit on Ho Feng Shan, the Chinese diplomat who, by issuing visas for life, saved many Jews at the start of World War II by offering them sanctuary in Shanghai. I was privileged to be in attendance and representing the Sino-Judaic Institute, which was one of the sponsors of the exhibit.

I was struck, first of all, by the diversity of the hyphenated American crowd: Jews, Chinese, Japanese, and others all gathered together as Americans to honor someone from a distant time who was a true citizen of the world, a genuine hero and a real mensch.

I was also impressed how each of the speakers—the Chinese-American director of the Wing Luke Museum, the Jewish-American director of the local Holocaust Education Center, and Manli Ho, Dr. Ho's daughter—were able to link the Jewish experience of the Holocaust with the issue of discrimination and prejudice in general and to use Dr. Ho's example as a call for our engagement with the world today. In all, it was a very moving, very inspiring evening.

We sometimes lament that people remember only the horrors of history and that the news is always bad. A man like Hitler will be forever infamous, but how many people have even heard about Chiune Sugihara or Ho Feng Shan? Why is it that good people like these are all but forgotten and the shining light of their humanitarianism obscured by the evil deeds of men like Hitler and his ilk?

I am long past the point in life when I was certain I knew how to change the world for the better, but it seems to me that a simple step in that direction would be to celebrate the good rather than to focus on all that was and is wrong with this sorry world. By accentuating the positive in our world, we can inspire both ourselves and others to a higher motivation and nobler deeds.

A good new year to you all!

Anson Laytner

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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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: Shelton Ehrlich, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, 755 Northampton, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

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Points East

very hot and humid in the summer...It wasn't easy to become acclimatized to the weather including flooding and typhoons. In order to resist and protect yourself from the many diseases, good nutrition was vital. Malnutrition and diarrhea was a common disorder. A number of refugees succumbed to tuberculosis. Lack of heat in the winter and often the absence of running water exacerbated good the poor living conditions. To have a flush toilet was considered a luxury. We often slept in our clothes and underwear and had to wash them in cold water. Chinese hot water shops dispensed boiling water. For a penny you would get three little wood sticks. Each was good for one quart of boiling water to make tea. It would have to last for the whole day.

We got used to seeing bodies frozen to death in the streets. In the early morning a municipal truck would collect the cadavers to be disposed of in the city dump. You wouldn't dare touch them, since it would mean you were responsible to pay for their funeral. Passers by would carefully walk around them.

Many stateless refugees or displaced persons as they were called, well educated, having their possessions confiscated by the Nazis, arrived totally penniless. Due to the lack of speaking a foreign language, they depended on welfare, eking out a meager existence by doing manual labor. The Russian Jews who arrived after the revolution in 1917 were much better off. They were fairly well established. To help their fellow Jews, the opened soup kitchens under their auspices of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Society. It enabled those who were indigent to have at least one hot meal daily.

I was thirteen years old when my mother died. I had to support myself and was forced to drop out of school. I worked in a restaurant at first as a dishwasher. Gradually I advanced to a potato peeler and finally a cook. The salary was barely enough to keep myself clothed. I worked ten hours a day, seven days a week. Perspiring, I stood

behind a hot stove with an open fire, inhaling the smoke that emanated from the burning coals. A small wonder I didn't come down with tuberculosis. The re-deeming feature during these perilous times was, that I never went to bed hungry. On the job, I picked up the Chinese language from the Chinese cook who worked beside me and taught me many things along with cooking.

"HAN SU (Hans), you vely nicee, vely clever boy" in pidgin English. Later, when the war was over, my knowledge of Chinese came in very handy. I landed a job with the United States Air Transport Command where I worked as an interpreter.

"But what about the potato water?"

While I worked in a European restaurant as a cook, I regularly made mashed potatoes. Kurt Langer, a refugee and previously successful attorney in Germany would come to the back door of the restaurant to ask for the left over water. I still remember his stubbly unshaven face. Shabbily dressed in a dilapidated suit which hung down from his underfed body, a wide mouthed thermos in his hand, his voice quivering, he would beckon me.

"Herr Cohn, haben Sie etwas warmes Kartoffelwasser fuer mich?"—Mr.Cohn do you have some warm potato water for me?

He would devour the hot liquid, which also had a little nutritional value, to warm his chilled body. Sometimes when the boss wasn't looking, I sneaked in a few potatoes. It made his day. He was a faithful customer, who came to see me often.

Sixty years have passed since I accommodated Kurt Langer. I don't know what became of him, whether he ever survived the war years in Shanghai. I can still see him looking for me into the kitchen window asking for potato water. Until now, I don't have the heart to dump this precious liquid into my kitchen sink. You will find it carefully stored in my refrigerator. I use it whenever I cook my favorite soups.

Singapore Jewish Addresses

submitted by Prof. Al Yee
excerpted from: *The Jewish Yearbook 2002*, ed. by Stephen W. Massil.
London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002, p. 184

The Jewish community of Singapore dates from about the year 1840. The street in which Jewish divine service was first held in a house is now known as Synagogue Street. The first building to be erected as a synagogue was the Maghain Aboth, opened in 1878. This was rebuilt and enlarged in 1925. A second synagogue, Chesed El, was built in 1905. The Jewish community consists mainly of Sephardim (of Baghdad) origin but with some Ashkenazim. The affairs of the community are managed by the Jewish Welfare Board, which is elected annually.

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From *The Jewish World: Yearbook for Jewish Communities and Organizations 2001*, ed. by Zvi Porat-Noy. Israeli-Jewish World, 2001., p. 149:

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The Phalcon Phenomenon

by Dr. Jonathan Goldstein

As China and Israel are set to observe the 10th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, American, Chinese and Israeli officials are mulling over the next step in their three-way impasse over the Phalcon.

Israel's sale to China of the sophisticated radar plane was aborted nearly two years ago because of American pressure, which derived from US fears that the aircraft would be used against Taiwan. China paid Israel Aircraft Industries [IAI] \$75 million for one Phalcon, which now sits on the tarmac somewhere in Israel, and holds options on three more.

Historical precedent may offer a way out of this complicated squabble, which now centers on the issue of indemnification.

In 1901, after the US, Japan and other powers invaded China to suppress the Boxer Rebellion, those same powers saddled a weak imperial Chinese government with a crippling \$333 million indemnity as repayment for their expenses and losses. After a good deal of domestic soul-searching, the US remitted a portion of its indemnity in a unique and creative way: it funded scholarships for Chinese students to attend American colleges.

While some have charged that this was a mere substitution of cultural imperialism for economic hegemony, the fact remains that by 1914 over 900 Chinese had been educated in the US with funds from this endowment. Many of these students trained in highly technical, state-of-the-art fields. Upon their return they helped build the new China. The money had been spent in the US, and, it can be argued, a win/win scenario was achieved for all concerned.

Some 70 years later, funding for education once again provided a "way out" of a potential East Asian indemnification crisis. In 1971, as the US withdrew from the Japanese island of Okinawa, the Americans calculated that they had spent many millions of dollars for roads and other non-

transportable assets in the course of a 26-year military occupation.

A financial compromise was reached in the form of the US-Japan Friendship Commission, the Japanese-funded, tiniest bureaucracy within the US federal government. The endowment of this agency is approximately the same size as the amount calculated for indemnification for abandoned US assets. The Friendship Commission's sole function is to disperse thousands of dollars annually in the US for education about Japan. Another win/win scenario.

These precedents may be applicable to the present Phalcon impasse. First and foremost, IAI should return the \$75 million China has already paid, plus interest. As far as China's demand for as much as \$1 billion in additional compensation and damages, at least some of those funds could be set aside in a fashion similar to the remitted Boxer indemnity, to educate Chinese students in Israel at world-class institutions such as the Weizmann Institute of Science and the Haifa Technion.

A second endowment in Israel could fund education about China, a mechanism similar to the US-Japan Friendship Commission. A two-way educational process would thus be achieved. China would reap enormous goodwill in Israel, gain the services of its returning students in multiple technical fields, and still have the use of its original funds to shop elsewhere for avionics.

And what about IAI - the source for this funding? IAI is clearly set up to sell airplanes and not as a charity to assist higher education. IAI has received extensive publicity for its products as a result of the Phalcon controversy; prior to this episode, it had sold a grand total of one Phalcon, to Chile. IAI would still have the opportunity to profit from the sale of the present and future Phalcons, albeit not to enemies of China. And if it chose to join the line of suitors asking the Israeli parliament for financial relief, it would have a powerful argument in that at least part of the indemnification being paid to China would be spent in Israel, to the benefit of Israeli universities and a sagging economy.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly from an American point of view, with a satisfactory resolution of the issue of indemnification, American fears of the use of Phalcon technology against Taiwan would be assuaged.

POTATO WATER

by Hans Cohn

Editor's Note: Cantor Hans Cohn was born in Berlin in 1926 and, as a child, fled the Holocaust to Shanghai in 1939. His mother died soon after their arrival in China. After a remarkable life, tackling numerous obstacles, Cohn arrived in the United States and served as Cantor at Temple Beth Jacob (Burlingame, Ca) for 35 years. He was much loved and respected by the entire congregation. Cantor Cohn survived a very severe bout with cancer and, in spite of some handicaps, persists in a very active life: teaching Judaism, celebrating Jewish holidays on cruise ships with Jewish passengers, and writing.

To this day when I boil potatoes, I take an empty container to carefully save the water. The innocuous custom of mine seems to make little sense in our modern day. To reminisce, many of my experiences, when I was a young man in Shanghai were filled with memories which left an indelible impression on my life.

"Potato Water?" — you ask, let me explain.

During the Second World War, our pitiful existence meant poverty, hunger and the threat of tropical illness. Countless people died of cholera, small pox and typhoid fever. Mosquitoes bred malaria and lice caused typhus. My mother died of amoebic dysentery. Antibiotics did not exist at that time. Our decrepit domicile, a one room apartment was shared with numerous cockroaches, wandering around as if they belonged there, owning the place.

"What ever you do, be sure to boil the water to make sure it is safe to drink, even when brushing your teeth," the doctors admonished us. The Shanghai climate is subtropical, cold and damp in the winter,

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I would like to respond to Ms. Marcia D. Miller's accusations concerning the behavior of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Shanghai. As the first to write about the rescue of this higher institution of Talmudic Studies in my book, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews; the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-45* (1976), I'd like to set the record straight. Her first accusation, that "these men fled, leaving every female member of their families to suffer and burn," manifests an unfamiliarity with the historical events involving their escape from Poland to Shanghai, during 1939-1941. At the very outset of the war in Europe initiated by the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, approximately 12,000 Polish refugees fled to then neutral Lithuania. At that time the primary fear was that it was the intellectuals and especially men of military age, who were in danger, not the women or their families (which included men, i.e., their fathers, as well). Therefore, most of these refugees included, not merely the 3,000 yeshiva students, but also intellectuals, artists, writers, actors, leaders of the Zionist and other secular Jewish ideologies, etc. The most brilliant of the Mirrer scholars who had recently been married, returned home in Poland — only later to perish. I know of a number of other men, such as Dr. Jacob Griffel, the great rescue activist, who sent his family back to Warsaw to his father-in-law, on the tragically wrong assumption that his wife and children would be safe.

Moreover, many Polish Jews or their parents recalled the First World War when the German soldiers were the decent ones, and the Russian soldiers were the barbarians. One must also remember that even during Kristalnacht, only men between 18-60 were arrested, not women, children. Moreover, when the Mirrer yeshiva decided to leave for Japan, at least six students arranged for "legal" marriages with Lithuanian girls (who were otherwise not permitted by the Soviets to leave their recently occupied Lithuania) in order to take them along to freedom. Most of these "bogus" marriages were soon transformed into permanent "real" marriages.

While some resented the yeshiva for its better standard of living than some of the German refugees, there was no comparable negative attitude toward the group of very successful German refugees. For example in my book I juxtapose two illus-

trations depicting on the one hand the poor refugees selling their clothes, while the well-off refugees dined at leisure in the restaurants and coffee houses. The fact is that the yeshiva did "share" with others by providing weekly Shabbat meals for about 45-50 needy refugees.

Most important is the fact that it was the same Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz, head of the Mirrer Yeshiva (the most effective rescue activist in America during the Holocaust) who risked arrest several times to send money illegally to support the sole higher yeshiva saved intact from the Nazi wrath, who was the same individual to convince the State Department to permit money to be sent legally by all Jewish organizations into Shanghai (and Nazi-occupied territories). Then, and only then, did the Joint (and the entire American Jewish Establishment) resume communications with Shanghai. Since Pearl Harbor they had refused to participate in any "illegal" relief or rescue activity, regardless of the cost to European (or Shanghai) Jewry. Thus, it is only from January 1944 on, the Joint sent large sums for the refugees in Shanghai, thereby greatly improving conditions for all the refugees — thanks to the head of the "Mirrer Yeshiva."

As for Ms. Miller's second accusation involving the insensitivity of two such students to the plight of her aunt, I can neither deny nor agree, though I am personally skeptical. If the two young men were truly so insensitive, they absolutely contravened Torah Law and deserve to be severely reprimanded. In no way, however, can she thereby justify a general condemnation of the entire yeshiva of 250 scholars.

Sincerely, David Kranzler

Open Letter to Dr. Friend

(see article p. 7)

When my two children were born with what our pediatrician described as Mongolian Spots, neither my wife nor I knew what to think. This was quite rare among Caucasian babies, and since we knew my wife's ancestors were Czech and Hungarian, and that my ancestors were, to the best of my knowledge, all Russian, I began to do some research.

We had ruled out African or Native American ancestry as a possibility, but when I looked back at some old pictures of my

father's side of the family, it became obvious to me that both he and his eldest brother had some facial features around their noses and eyes that were typical of Asians, specifically Chinese.

There was not too much information available on this side of my family because, although my father is still alive, that side of my family had, for the most part, passed on before I ever had a hint that there may have been Chinese in what I thought was a 100% European Jewish background. My ancestors, as far back as my great-grandparents, emigrated to the United States between the late 1800s and the early 1900s...

A couple of weeks ago, I met a Chinese friend's classmate who had recently enrolled in a graduate program at an American university. When I mentioned in conversation that I was Jewish, she told me about the Jews of Kaifeng. Upon returning home, I immediately set out to research this connection. In doing my research, I came across your website, and an entire new world of information was opened up to me.

I look forward to learning more about the Jews of Kaifeng, and about the existence of Jews in China; and I would very much like to encourage other Jews who think they might have Chinese ancestry, or Chinese people who believe they might be of Jewish lineage, to further explore their roots.

Warren S. Levine is a freelance journalist who lives in Bellingham, Washington, and may be contacted at mrwallen@qwest.net.

CLARIFICATIONS

1. In the November 2001 issue of Points East we erroneously printed a personal letter from Ralph Hirsch. In its original form that letter was not addressed "To the editor", nor was it intended for publication. We also deleted several sentences from its original text without showing that a deletion had been made. The editor of Points East regrets these errors.

2. We misprinted Dr. Messmer's email address in the last issue. It should read: Matthias.Messmer@unig.ch (not Messmen).

Three Jewish Women

(continued from page 1)

Eva Siao— The Fearless One.

Eva Siao was born on Nov. 8, 1911 in Breslau, at the time when the Chinese Empire crumbled. Her father was the German Jewish neurologist, Richard Sandberg, who died one year after his daughter's birth. Her mother, Franziska Rosenthal, worked as a portrait photographer after the death of her husband, a fact that doubtlessly influenced Eva's later life. Her preference was stage and theater photography. In Stockholm, where she had followed her brother – the conductor of the Royal Opera – in 1932, Eva entered a milieu of artists, intellectuals, Zionists, socialists and anarchists. It is here that her admiration for the Soviet Union slowly took root and developed. When she returned for a visit to Germany, she was confronted with growing National Socialism and decided to turn her back on her homeland once and for all. She applied to enter the Soviet Union, but her visa applications were rejected several times. However, she did manage to enter the country in 1934 on a tourist visa, going to Moscow via Leningrad. During a short stay in Gagra at the Black Sea, she had a fateful meeting with the Chinese poet and writer Emi Siao (Siao San), a childhood friend of Mao Zedong and an active communist. From that moment on, Eva's love belonged to him, the revolutionary and political activist. After many journeys back and forth between the Soviet Union and Sweden, after obtaining Soviet citizenship and marrying Emi Siao, after a turbulent time in Moscow, Eva finally traveled to Yan'an. At the time, Yan'an was the center of Chinese communism and her husband had already settled there a year before. This personal Odyssey of the couple lasted almost 10 years, before Eva finally settled in Beijing in 1949.

In the following years Eva worked mainly as a photographer for the Chinese News Agency, Xinhua, as well as for the GDR Television, and was free to travel until the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. During this period, she also participated several times, in the World Peace Assembly in Praha. Through her husband's contacts, Eva met all the Chinese leaders, among whom she highly admired Prime Minister Zhou En Lai. Through her photographs and films, Eva worked hard to win sympathy in the West for China and its

people. The accusation that she saw her second homeland through rose colored glasses is – according to her personal opinion – undeserved: this willful and sharp-tongued 'Foreign Expert' spoke out about political developments in China. In reality, she was too emotional to be characterized as political analyst. She saw herself, "what else?", as a German, although like most of the 'Foreign Experts' she had become a Chinese citizen.

Eva Siao's photographs are a direct declaration of love to China, because they are 'unposed', intense and direct. They are not an official portrait of communist China, such as it was represented officially to the outer world, but were her personal perception of every day life as she strolled on the streets, in the squares, in the markets, in the imperial palace, and in schools. Her book: *China – my Dream, my Life* (Bergisch Gladbach 1990) expresses her affection and respect for the Middle Kingdom in the following words:

"In spite of all my criticism I love this country, as one loves a human being with all his imperfections. When terrible events occur on this Earth, I observe them with horror and classify them within world history. But when something dreadful happens in China, then I suffer". (p. 568).

Eva Siao's attachment to China can indeed be considered as representative of those of the 'oldtimer' 'Foreign Experts' living there. The majority spent miserable years in prison during the Cultural Revolution but nevertheless developed no negative feelings against the country where this witch hunt took place. Not one of them regrets having chosen the Middle Kingdom as their life's mission and final station.

Ruth Weiss – The Critical One

Ruth Weiss (Chinese name: Wei Lushi) was born in Vienna. Like Eva Siao, this 90-year old woman has been a member of the Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese people since the 1980's. In 1961 she was officially declared a 'Foreign Expert'. Today, she is very ill and barely speaks, living in a studio apartment in the enormous Friendship Hotel in Beijing. Two years ago, her biography was rather roughly put together in book form. It is quite different from that of Eva Siao.

Ruth Weiss's parents were anti-Soviet and anti-Communist. It is only at school that

she was made to feel that she was Jewish. She became a Czech citizen, specialized in both German and English studies in Vienna, and obtained a doctorate in philosophy. In her youth she contemplated immigrating to Palestine. In her book: *Ruth Weiss: At the Edge of History. My Life in China* (Osnabrueck 1999, p. 36), she writes: "It was probably my Jewish origin that gave me a cosmopolitan outlook".

Ruth Weiss's first contact with China were Chinese artworks, exhibited in the Schoenbrunn Castle, while the direct cause of her voyage to China was a love affair with a Chinese man, an affair that led to nothing. Contrary to Eva Siao, Ruth Weiss traveled to Shanghai by ship in 1933. There she met a group of leftists led by the socialist activist and educator, Rewy Alley and writer Agnes Smedley. Both longed to free China from the 'yoke of foreign colonialism', and 'the dictatorship of Chiang Kai-shek', and to help create a classless and just society.

At the beginning of her stay in China, Ruth Weiss was unable to work as a journalist (due to the intervention of the Japanese General Consulate) and was employed as a teacher in a Jewish School, until the headmaster found out that the Jewish religion meant nothing to her. In 1937, she went to Sichuan Province upon the invitation of the Chengdu (capital city) YWCA to teach German. Two years later, she was granted Chinese citizenship by the official Guomintang regime. After a short interlude in the U.S. – she had in the meantime married a Chinese who decided to remain in the U.S. – she returned in 1949 to her 'homeland of choice', China. There she was employed by various publications to "polish up" their texts, and finally as a journalist for English language Chinese newspapers, as well as for the 'Saechsische Zeitung' in Dresden.

In her autobiography Ruth Weiss does not hesitate to express her opinions and criticism of various people and historic events. However, she turns almost a blind eye to political events in China. She writes: "At that time, I still believed that the Party always told the truth, that therefore any accusation they made was 100% justified! It took me a long time to realize that this was not so - a long long time". She made dozens of trips throughout China, describes impressions and evaluations that are still valid today. This is how she speaks of the Chinese people: "The Chinese people are

Points East

Points East

A Visit with Sidney Shapiro

by Jim Michaelson

My wife Judy and I arrived in Beijing towards the very end of June, after a short one hour or so hop in an airplane up from Shanghai. As soon as we got to our hotel, we telephoned Sidney to confirm a short visit with him the next day. He agreed to a 2:00 meeting at his home and gave us directions. He lives near the Bei Hai Park.



Jim Michaelson, Sidney Shapiro,
Judy Michaelson

Everyone we spoke to that afternoon and evening had heard of Sidney or as he is known better in China, Sha Boli, though few had actually met him.

The next day, our driver also claimed to know him and where he lived, and then promptly got lost in the labyrinth of little lanes and old villas in the heart of Beijing. Our taxi, a Chinese- assembled large Volkswagen, called "Santana" there, could hardly fit the width of the streets. These streets were barely more than alleys that twisted in and out on each other. There were few street signs. Finally, we were there, and a young man led us into the courtyard of our home. There was Sidney in the open doorway waving us in.

We all said hello and made introductions. My step-daughter, Tingxia, had trained in the previous day from Shenyang to join us. Sidney, who had already greeted me with a warm, friendly smile and a firm handshake, then surprised me with a "Hello landsmann!" I had never been called a "landsmann" before, even though I am also Jewish. Perhaps that's the result of living in such a cultural desert like Los Angeles for the last 25 years. In any case, I was delighted to be recognized as a member of

Sidney's and the general Jewish community.

We talked about his writings and books, where we could purchase Chinese language editions (the Friendship Bookstore in Beijing), and he showed us a picture of his late wife. His daughter was away at an important hospital where she is a physician. He asked how my wife, who's Chinese, and I met (Starbucks on Main Street, Alhambra, California). Then Sidney spoke with my wife and step-daughter in Mandarin for a few minutes.

Sidney then autographed my copy of "Jews In Old China". He signed it "From An Old Jew In New China". I shall treasure that, and the experience of being in the presence of one so accomplished, for the rest of my life. As we walked out to the main street, we passed a station full of working "shan luen che", the rickshaw/pedicab I had seen only in movies before. Perhaps the next time I come out here, I will be able to ride in one, but with Beijing modernizing so quickly, it's hard to know what will be left in a few more years.

SINO-JUDAICA VOL. 3

We are pleased to announce the appearance of *Sino-Judaica: Occasional Papers* of the Sino-Judaic Institute, vol. 3 (2000) 232 Lexington Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025

Lin Meicun . . . *A Study of the Evidence of Jews Entering into China* (translated from Wenwu 1991.6, pp. 74-80)

Erik Zürcher . . . *Eight Centuries in the Chinese Diaspora: The Jews of Kaifeng*

Mathew A. Eckstein . . . *Identity Discourse and the Chinese Jewish Descendants*

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SJI Collection at the Hoover Institution Archives

by Rena Krasno

We are making constant efforts to increase our collection at the Hoover Institution Archives. This can only be achieved by persistent contacts with all those who may have in their possession material on Jews in China, as well as other Asian countries. We correspond with former Jewish and non-Jewish Old China Hands (Russian, German, American, French) whose collections may include material of interest to our members. Our search focuses on documentation, memoirs, books and films. It often takes detective work to follow clues!

We were recently proud to add to our collection some rare film footage of Shanghai in 1927, taken by a former Jewish Shanghaiander. Such footage is of great interest to writers, researchers, documentary filmmakers and many of our members. The Hoover Institution now has a copy of every film obtained by the Sino-Judaic Institute.

Among our contacts in Germany are Prof. Dr. Matzat, Chairman of the Studienwerk Deutsches Leben in Ostaiien e.V. (StuDeO) and Ms. Renate Jaehrling, the archivist of this organization. Ms. Jaehrling, upon our request, has very kindly sent us a diskette of the catalogue of StuDeO. It includes a list of 1,320 books and 1,060 manuscripts/documents. A hard (paper) copy of the diskette covers some 160 pages. We have now deposited this diskette in the SJI collection at the Hoover Institution.

The StuDeO archives consist of books, manuscripts, photos, pictures, maps, objects and bequests. All this material is catalogued and is open to the public.

Archivist Renate Jaehrling can be reached at: Karwendelstr. 4, 82223 Eichenua, Germany; Telephone 08141-80320; Fax 08141-37098

A study of the StuDeO material on German life in China sometimes yields new insights into the plight of Jews in Shanghai, Tsingtao, Beijing and Tientsin.

Port of Last Resort

The Diaspora Communities in Shanghai (Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2001)

Marcia Reynderts Ristaino

380 pages; 28 illustrations; \$69; ISBN0-8047-3840-8

reviewed by Rena Krasno

Author Marcia Reynders Ristaino, Senior Chinese Acquisitions Specialist at the Library of Congress, set herself a daunting task: the history of the Jewish and Orthodox Russian communities in Shanghai. These two diaspora communities attempted to survive and prosper in a city ruled by privileged – and often competing – Western powers. At the same time, Japanese aggression was spreading rapidly. Both groups included at first mostly impoverished refugees, without passports, who sought a haven in Shanghai for very different reasons. Ristaino meets the challenge of describing their interaction, their fight for survival in the maelstrom of Shanghai's political intrigues, their efforts to maintain their religious and cultural traditions and survive economically.

The Jewish and Orthodox Russian communities had problems with each other and within themselves, problems that only a painstaking historian can understand and identify today. This book is obviously the result of prolonged research. In the Russian Orthodox community there were numerous factions, some so deeply entrenched in their points of view, that political murders resulted. In the Jewish community, two very different groups – one Slav, the other Middle Eastern, led their rather separate lives – until a flow of European refugees fleeing Hitler changed the situation within months.

Ristaino tells us why, when and how the various Orthodox Russians and Russian Jews started trickling into Shanghai. She describes the traditional anti-Semitism and prejudices in Russia and how it was transplanted on the banks of the Yangtze River. And yet, there is the sharing of a mutual culture, the love of Russian landscapes, literature, music, theater. It is a fascinating story, told in academic detail, with dates, statistics, notes and references. It reflects all the many facets of Shanghai, the com-

plicated political and social structure, the divisiveness, yet sometimes admirable cooperation as in the respected Shanghai Volunteer Corps.

The Port of Last Resort is not only a book about two Russian Communities, but also a book about Shanghai, about the conquerors and the victims. It is a revealing and clearly presented history of a city till colonialism breathed its last gasp.

The China Clipper

by Susan Jacoby

excerpted from *Bulletin Igud Yotzei Sin* November-December 1999

An article in The Jerusalem Post entitled "The Cutting Edge" brought back memories of my late father, Ezekiel Zion Jacob. He was what I always thought of as an all-purpose rabbi, who was also the leading mohel of the Shanghai Sephardi Community, and, by all accounts, he was a skilled one who performed his task competently. In general, he never took payment for his work, except from our wealthy community leaders – and thereby hangs a tale.

In such instances, the brit milah was usually graced by the presence of a non-Jewish German doctor who, incidentally, had a long relationship with Father. Dr. Birt, who attended to many of our well-to-do leaders, would privately tell Father that his presence there was medically superfluous. For, as Father would often tell us, Birt admitted to him that "You do a much better job circumcising than I can." In fact, there were quite a few times when the good doctor, who himself had a reputation of being a fine surgeon, would call Father in to perform circumcisions on gentiles at his hospital. And he never failed to hand over his surgery fees to Father!

More about Dr. Birt: After World War I broke out in 1914, the British authorities interned a group of German doctors in Shanghai, including Dr. Birt. Father then was an Ottoman Turk subject (Iraq was created later), but as most of the Shanghai Sephardim were British, this restriction never affected the other Jews. Father was somehow acquainted with Dr. Birt, and

took upon himself the duty of supplying the interned Germans with fresh vegetables and fruit every week. In fact, one of the Germans was Dr. Blumenstock, a Jew. My Jewish Communal Association birth certificate states that Dr. Blumenstock had delivered me on May 14, 1918 at the British Victoria Nursing Home, even before the end of the war. Apparently he was allowed out by the British. . .

After the end of World War I Dr. Birt married an English widow and became the step-father of her twin daughters. Coincidentally, I recently read a book about the treaty ports in China and the life of foreigners there. The author described the visit in Shanghai in the early 1930s of Noel Coward, the noted English dramatist, and how he enjoyed being feted by a "Madame Birt and her twin daughters." The lady, of course, was Dr. Birt's wife and she was prominent in the city's fashionable society despite having a German husband. My only regret was that I never knew what happened to Dr. Birt and his family when World War II erupted in 1939. But I remember how Father always referred to him as "a good German" even after thousands of German and Austrian Jews arrived in Shanghai where they found a haven from Nazi persecution.

To end this "circumcision story" I would like to relate how Father would regularly sail to Kobe in Japan to perform circumcisions for the children of a small congregation of Sephardi businessmen who lacked this facility locally. It led to a lot of hilarity when some wag in our Shanghai community dubbed him the "China Clipper." This was a reference to the transpacific seaplane service from California to Japan, China and the Philippines. Such aircraft were named "clippers" after the 19th century sailing ships which brought cargoes of tea from China to Europe and America.

These seaplanes caused something of a revolution at that time in speeding mail between the western coast of the US and the Far East. They had the added advantage of not needing the building of airports for they landed at any nearby stretch of water. It was quite a sensation in Shanghai to see the China Clipper landing on the Whangpoo River.

patient. They are used to cower, but one day their molten lava will burst to the fore".

Her thoughts about the hierarchical system deserve attention: "Suddenly, understanding came to me with the speed of lightning. Here is what is missing in China, that people are able to speak to each other as equals, regardless of age. Confucius had postulated that one must obey one's ruler, one's husband or one's elder son. Always from down up, from up down, never as equal to equal... This hierarchy has remained fixed until the 3rd millennium, and unless it disappears, there is no hope for China."

In spite of her criticism of certain conditions in China today, Eva Weiss concludes: "In spite of all the rigors in the world, I myself have found my second homeland in China, and in all those years have suffered no hardship. All in all, China's situation today is much better than that of former socialist countries. Never before have Chinese masses had a more acceptable standard of living than today."

Klara Blum – the Sensitive One

Among the three women, Klara Blum (Zhu Bailan in Chinese, 1904-1971) had to endure the most difficult fate. She belongs to a group of writers living in exile who were unrecognized for a long time due mainly to political reasons. A further handicap was that she had lived for a long time in Russia and in China. Klara Blum was born in Czernowitz (today in the Ukraine) under the Habsburg monarchy. She grew up in Vienna, where she engaged in journalistic and literary work until 1934. Czernowitz at the time was the center of Jewish-German cultural tradition. Among other celebrities, Karl Emil Franzos, Paul Celan and Rose Auslaender lived there. It is only the Holocaust that ended this blooming Jewish-German symbiosis that had developed in this frontier region.

Klara Blum's childhood was not simple. Her parents quarreled often and after their divorce Klara lived together with her mother in Vienna. From 1923, she studied literature and psychology, participated passionately in the Zionist movement and often wrote articles for the *Ostjuedische Zeitung* in Czernowitz. Apart from journalistic and lyric publications, Blum also tried her hand at theatre, short stories and

novels (see *Zhidong Yang: Klara Blum – Zhu Bailan (1904-1971)*, Frankfurt/Berlin 1996, p. 19). For a short time, Blum was a member of the Social Democratic Party of Austria, then resigned and did not join any party until the end of her life, although her contemporaries often characterized her as a communist.

In the year that Hitler grabbed power, Blum was distinguished for her poem "Ballad of the Obedient". Her prize: a two month study trip to the Soviet Union. It was a great honor to be a guest in the Soviet Union, an honor only granted to prominent anti-fascist writers or functionaries of the German and Austrian Communist parties. In 1935, Blum obtained Soviet citizenship and three years later she became a member of the Soviet Writers Association. In 1937 – just like in the case of Eva Siao – there was a fateful meeting with a Chinese. In the case of Blum, it was with the theater director and journalist Zhu Xiangcheng, son of a rich Shanghai family, born in 1903. In a poem published in 1939 in Moscow, Blum hints at her love for Zhu and the meeting of two ancient peoples who had both differences as well as similarities:

"My people is scattered throughout the world,
Harassed, insulted and hunted from land to land.
Your people, while quietly laboring in their rice fields
Bleed under the blows of predators."

The happiness of the couple that came from such different cultures and environments, lasted only 3 months: in April 1938, Zhu suddenly disappeared. Klara Blum heard nothing further from him. She desperately tried to get an exit visa for China since she suspected that her lover had been called back by the Communist Party. Her efforts were in vain. She had to wait for 10 years when she finally managed, by detours through Bucarest and Paris, and the support of the Jewish Hilfscomitee to get a visa for China via Shanghai, only to discover that Zhu was not to be found. Investigation and efforts by Blum and her friends addressed to official Chinese quarters, resulted in the reply that in view of relations with the Soviet Union, the name of the 'missing man' should not be mentioned. Finally, in 1990 – twenty years after Klara Blum's death – the suspicion of many of her friends was confirmed: shortly before his trip into China, officials of the Soviet Ministry of Interior arrested Zhu and con-

demned him to 8 years of prison. According to Soviet information, he died in 1943 in a labor camp in Siberia.

When the Communists gained power in China, Klara Blum wrote an autobiographic novel: *The Shepherd and the Weaver*, which she described as a memorial to her life. After much political discussion, it finally was published in the GDR. The book was written with an "endless love for China" (quotation of the publisher Karl Dietz). The background of the work is an ancient Chinese legend, and Chinese themes are its center. The story takes place in Shanghai (1929) and in Beijing (1949). Blum documents a part of Chinese current events, many of her descriptions relate to real history and she presents people true to life.

For Blum, "China was the most beautiful country on earth, its capital Beijing the most beautiful city on earth, its population the most lovable and its language the most sonorous". In short, the homeland of her lover was a paradise for her. In her novel, Blum tries to convey to her readers what is specifically Chinese – something westerners often fail to comprehend – attempting to explain the somewhat mysterious Chinese smiles or what may appear to westerners as superstitious customs. She includes another theme present in her 1962 book *Those Who Overcame their Fate (Schicksal ueberwinder)*, which is that of evil foreigners. In fact, a number of the former 'Foreign Experts' in China, stated that they had remained in the People's Republic after 1949, because of the centuries old plundering of China by Western powers. They wanted their work to compensate at least partially for the harm done to the Middle Kingdom by their colonial forefathers.

In 1952, Klara Blum became a Professor of German Language and Literature at Fudan University in Shanghai – and later in Nanjing. She applied for Chinese citizenship, which she obtained two years later. From then on, she called herself Zhu Bailan (White Orchid). After a quarrel with a professor from the GDR, she left Nanjing and in 1957 took a teaching position at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou (Canton). During the Cultural Revolution, she like many other foreigners, was suspected of espionage. "Her dream to have a home, and the feeling to belong to a land and a people was destroyed... She no longer knew where she belonged. In spite of all

her efforts, she was and remained a foreigner, an outsider. She became deeply depressed because she had still not been taken in and accepted by the Chinese. She was not allowed to belong to them" (Zhidong Yang, p. 61f.). Klara Blum died in May 1971 without ever having denied being part of the Jewish people.

As we mentioned in our introduction, the three women had in common – besides their Jewish origins – their all-encompassing love for China. Each one of them saw from her own perspective what was specifically Chinese. Their pictures of the Middle Kingdom were expressed in different forms and ways. Each one of these women had her own approach to her 'chosen' homeland, which often was a result of personal background and experience. Their perceptions differ from those of, for example, refugees in Shanghai and are unlike those of missionaries or diplomats who lived in the Far East for other reasons. Perhaps, all these depictions, put together, give us the possibility to complete the mosaic of China and thereby enable us to understand its soul a little better.

Return to China

(continued from page 1)

485,000 inhabitants, with 300,000 Chinese and sizeable Korean and Japanese minorities plus a sprinkling of Western nationals in this bustling, Russian-looking city deep inside China.

Freed from Tsarist oppression, Jews played a prominent role on the Harbin stock exchange and were active in municipal affairs. A few became millionaires through the ownership of timber factories or coal companies, or by exporting soya oil and beans, wheat and furs to Russia, Europe and America. Others established flour mills, factories, jewellery shops, pharmacies, cafes and restaurants. Harbin had two Jewish banks, a Talmud Torah, a Jewish hospital, a *moshav zkenim* for the elderly, while the Jewish free kitchen provided meals and financial assistance to the poor, the sick, and the elderly. It was a warm and caring community which helped many thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing from a Russia ravaged by revolution and civil war. Most Jews settled in the Pristan (Pier) area by the river and worshipped in one of

the two Orthodox synagogues which are still intact. While most Jews spoke Russian, and some Yiddish at home, they did not bother to learn Chinese. Many employed Chinese servants and cooks and did not venture in the Chinese quarters of the city. Many young Jews belonged to organizations like Maccabi and Betar. The Zionists among them wanted to go to Palestine. Some were Socialists, and even Communists, and yearned to go to the Soviet Union.

It was a vibrant community with some very active leaders, among them Rabbi Aaron Kiselev, who served in Harbin from 1913 until his death in 1949, and Dr. Abraham Kaufman, head of the National Jewish Council. When the Japanese occupied Manchuria in 1931-2, their economic domination and harsh treatment of the Jews caused many to seek refuge in Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. In 1945, the Soviet Army occupied much of Manchuria and arrested Dr. Kaufman and other communal leaders, accusing them of having collaborated with the Japanese occupiers and of being anti-Soviet traitors. Many Jews and White Russians were taken back to the Soviet Union and subsequently perished in Stalin's labor camps. Dr. Kaufman was interrogated for three years in the notorious Lubyanka prison in Moscow and sentenced to 10 years hard labor. He survived his ordeal and joined his family in Israel, spending his remaining years as a doctor in Ramat Gan.

I visited the Jewish cemetery and found many graves, including that of Rabbi Kiselev, restored by the Chinese authorities. It is a remote resting-place in an area now without living Jews. Of former Jewish sites of Harbin, the Old Synagogue still stands, as do the former Jewish high school, the Jewish hospital (now a Chinese eye hospital) and the Talmud Torah (now a Korean school).

I was particularly excited to find the site of the house, on 15 Konnaya Street, where my late father, Isaac Shickman, was born in 1909. According to him, it was a small, adobe construction, which was half-covered by deep snow drifts in the winter. Now, a modern house in Western style stands on the site. My father attended a Russian school in Harbin. At the age of 10,

he was sent to a French boarding school in Tianjin, and later attended a British school there. In 1925, my grandparents moved to Tianjin as well, and my grandmother opened a successful ladies' fashion salon.

My father went to work for a Jewish fur company and traveled extensively to Manchuria and Shandong peninsula, buying furs from the local population. In time, he opened his own fur shops in Tianjin and Beijing. He met my mother in 1943, when she was hired by him as an accountant. They decided to get married right after the Japanese surrendered in 1945. Their decision was a brave one, since very few Jews married Chinese women. And despite her Orthodox conversion, it was very hard for both families to accept their marriage.

My parents settled in Beijing and my father became a leading figure in the small Jewish community there. Soviet officials were pressuring the Russian Jews to accept Soviet citizenship and move to the Soviet Union. Like many other Jews and White Russians, my father was filled with admiration for Joseph Stalin and knew nothing about the gulags. He visited the Soviet Union in 1957 with a view to selling his business in China and moving to Moscow. Moscow was not the paradise which he had expected, however, and the anti-Semitic sneers he encountered helped change his mind. China meanwhile was becoming engulfed by an increasing xenophobic mood. In the 1950s most of the Jews left in China went to Israel, the USA and Australia. We, however, did not leave until 1967, when the Cultural Revolution was sweeping China. Mine was the last Jewish family to leave China. We went to Israel and settled in Netanya. My mother taught Chinese at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for 20 years.

Walking the streets of Beijing and Harbin again all these years later, I was filled with admiration for the courage and fortitude my grandparents and parents displayed during decades of hardship, change, war, and revolution.

Dr. Zvia Bowman was born in Beijing. She teaches Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies and King's College, London University.

tions of Chinese works in Jewish languages appeared only decades later, in Hebrew in Israel.

In the universalist aspect, Marx can be said to be the Jew with greatest impact on modern China, followed by Einstein as a model and symbol of science. Einstein set foot in China in the 1920s in a brief stop in Shanghai. Marx never did so, but, in his own generation, paid due attention to Chinese developments. He wrote a series of penetrating articles in the *New York Tribune* on the mid-19th century Taiping peasant revolution, expressing ringing confidence in China's place in the world's future progress.

The content of this book is manifold but, in my view, needs some filling out – in this or future editions. The entries touching on Jewish politics give the impression that Zionism was always the dominant trend, and within it the Right wing, Revisionist Zionism. In reality, among pre-war Jews in China, there were more tendencies.

Among the book's themes, the important one of Jews in China who actively sided with the country's people in their revolution, war of resistance to Japanese aggression and later with the People's Republic is mixed in with other biographies rather than grouped together under an appropriate heading. These men and women sided with the Chinese people and revolution not specifically as Jews, but as convinced democrats, socialists, Communists or anti-fascists-historic causes which attracted many Jews as they did other opponents of, or sufferers from reactionary world trends before and after Hitlerism.

Mentioned, but not separately grouped, are Hans Shippe (born in Poland as Monek Grzhyb), German Communist, journalist and writer, who died, gun in hand, in a Japanese attack on an 8th Route Army unit he was accompanying behind the enemy lines in North China; the Austrian-Jewish refugee Dr. Jacob Rosenfeld who held general's rank in the Communist-led anti-Japanese New 4th Army; and Dr. Fritz Jensen, also from Austria, who served not only in medicine but as a writer, and died in the Guomindang sabotage of a plane carrying journalists covering the Chinese delegation bound for the historic Bandung Conference of Asian and African countries and national movements in 1955, and is memorialized on an obelisk in the Cemetery of Revolutionary Martyrs in Beijing.

Not mentioned, apart from Jensen, were the former volunteer members of the medical service of the anti-fascist International Brigade which defended the Spanish Republic against fascist treason and invasion in 1936-39. After the Republic's defeat they came to serve the anti-Japanese struggle in China. Of the 20 or so members of this group, originally from Central and Eastern Europe, more than half were Jewish including its leader Dr. Stanislaw Flato (from Poland, later a diplomat for his country in Chinese People's Republic), and its deputy-leader, Dr. Janto Kaneti (a Sephardi Jew from Bulgaria, still living in that country).

Also deserving listing among Jewish helpers to China's revolution were Hans Shippe's widow, Gertrude (Trudi) Rosenberg, a friend and fellow-worker of Soong Ching Ling (Mme. Sun Yatsen) and Manya Reiss (Ayerova) – a founding member of the Communist Party of the United States who died, mourned and respected, while working in the Xinhua News Agency in Beijing. And there were others.

Of the eleven foreign-born members, now Chinese citizens, of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, five are Jews, two from Austria, one from Germany, one from Poland and one from the United States. Another, now deceased, was Dr. Hans Miller from Germany who spent years in frontline medical service in the North China Liberated Areas and a long period in that of the new China.

Since this is surely not the last edition of the present book, just as the story of Chinese-Jewish contacts will not end, there will be more to record in the future.

Israel Epstein is a prominent Chinese writer and scholar of Jewish origin.

Briefly Noted

- *Jewish Portraits, Indian Frames: Women's Narratives from a Diaspora of Hope*, by Jael Silliman, Brandeis University Press, 2001; 208 pages, 35 illustrations, \$24.95 cloth. This book combines ethnography, memoir, and social-cultural history to relate the lives of women from four generations of her family, including the author, to sketch the history of the Baghdadi Jews of Calcutta.
- *History of the Jewish Communities of India*, by Monique Zetlaoui, Imago Publishers, claims to be the first study, some 380 pages long, in French, of the various Jewish communities in India.
- *Guide to Bene Israel Ceremonies*, by Shimeon Kollet, \$15 + \$5 postage. This book is written in Hebrew and is self-published by the author. Limited availability. Make checks payable to author and send to 4/11 Nechushtan Street, 71262 Lod, Israel.
- The "Bombay Jews", a new video, is available from Basic Vision, 13 Castle House, Plot No. 56, Share Punjab House Society, Mahakali Road Andheri East, Mumbai 400 093, India. Email: rajeshlathar@yahoo.co.in
- A brochure, entitled "Forever Nostalgia-The Jews in Shanghai" is now available for free at hotels etc. in Shanghai. Its editors are: International Tourism Promotion Dept., Shanghai Municipal Tourism Administrative Commission, and the Center of Jewish Studies, led by Prof. Pan Guang. Included are interesting photographs of Jewish life in Shanghai as well as 2 maps.

New Issue of the JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES Available

The fourth issue of the JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES is now available. Articles include "Till the Women Finish Singing": Historical Overview of Cochinchina Jewish Women's Malayalam Songs," by Barbara C. Johnson; "Differing Intentions in Vedic and Jewish Sacrifice," by Kathryn McClymond; "India and the Land of Israel: Between Jews and Indians in Ancient Times," by Meir Bar-Ilan; "Jewish Traders in the Indian Ocean - 10th to 13th Centuries: A Review of Published Documents from the Cairo Genizah," by Brian Weinstein; and "The Camp for Polish Refugees at Balachadi, Nawangar," by Kenneth X. Robbins. Also included are five book reviews, one letter to the editor, and one obituary. \$15 to JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES, Department of Religious Studies, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, CANADA S7N 5A5. For manuscripts or books for review, contact katzn@fiu.edu

to use it as a municipal building. After then-U.S. first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline Albright asked to visit the building during a 1998 visit to China, the city cleaned up and painted the building, but little structural repair was done. Ohel Rachel is still owned by the city government, which lets Shanghai's Jewish community of approximately 300 - which is served by a Lubavitch rabbi - use it only a few times a year.

Kaplan and the rest of his congregation hope that the Monuments Fund listing will encourage the city to return the building to his congregation. He said he wouldn't mind if the city used it as a museum - as it has said it wants to - as long as the congregation is able hold services there.

"It's a symbol of Jewish-Chinese relations," Kaplan said. "It's also a symbol of what the Chinese people have done for us in the past, such as for the refugees during the war," he said. "This synagogue represents the past. It represents the future. It needs to be restored."

BOOK NOOK

Preface to *The Jews in China*

compiled and edited by Pan Guang China Intercontinental Press (2001) US 45.00

by Israel Epstein

Jews in China is an extensive, mainly photographic record of the subject edited by Prof. Pan Guang, an outstanding Chinese authority in the field. It covers, in successive sections, the centuries-old Jewish community in Kaifeng of which only a few, assimilated descendants are discernible today; the scores to hundreds of Baghdadi Jewish traders who settled in Hong Kong and Shanghai in the mid-19th century; the many thousands of Jewish migrants from the tsarist Russian empire and the Soviet Union who mounted to tens of thousands in the early 20th century and the tens of thousands of refugees from the Nazi holocaust who flocked to Shanghai as a sole sanctuary in 1930s and early 40s.

The longest lasting community, but the first to fade away, was the one of which a few descendants still live in Kaifeng. Its final absorption was due, among other factors,

And the Rabbi Adds

by Rabbi Shalom Greenberg excerpted from *Shanghai China Update* December 2001

It all started in November 2000, when Matthew Trusch, a member of our community, was first informed about the existence of the World Monument Fund. With Ohel Rachel Synagogue in mind as the last remaining synagogue in Shanghai, Matt requested the necessary documents to nominate a site . . .

To nominate Ohel Rachel was no easy task. Community members quickly got involved in organizing this undertaking as the executive committee of the Jewish Community of Shanghai supported Matt's proactive efforts. Community member Seth Kaplan took the responsibility of being project coordinator. He collected historical accounts of Ohel Rachel and of Jews in Shanghai and throughout China. The WMF required photos of the synagogue from inside, outside, overhead and the area from a distance. Pictures of the synagogue past and present were compiled by community member Adam Glasser who vol-

to the total absence of anti-Semitism in the Chinese tradition. Later, too, there was no differentiation in the average Chinese consciousness between Jews and gentiles from abroad. Resident Jews, most often without extraterritorial jurisdiction or other inimical colonial power over the Chinese, were seen as non-dominant foreigners, neither to be placated by favor-seekers nor to be unseated by patriotic revolutionaries.

However, then Jews lived far from those of the Chinese, mostly in the capsules of the foreign "concessions" in which they were a fairly self-contained capsule within the capsule. With the Chinese they had very little contact except in business. And, notably, music. Chinese musicians and musicologists fondly remember Aaron Avshalomoff, born in Russia, who advocated and himself used Chinese traditional and folk sources in symphonic and operatic creations and urged China's modern composers to concentrate on this - as well as other once-resident Jewish conductors, teachers and performers, as escapees from Hitler, who left their marks on Shanghai's musical life and education.

unteered to be the onsite photographer.

The fund also required a supporting party besides the applicant, so Seth approached Rabbi Arthur Schneier of Park East Synagogue to support this project. Rabbi Schneier, a friend of the community who was instrumental in the restoration of Ohel Rachel synagogue in 1998, kindly agreed.

It is now up to us, the members of the Jewish community, to take the next step.

The community, together with consulate of Israel, the consulate of the USA and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, are working together with the Chinese government to develop the site in the most beneficial way . . .

This synagogue represents the past. It represents the future. It represents Jewish continuity and deserves to be restored to its rightful use.

The hard work of those involved is greatly appreciated.

THANK YOU!

None of the European Jewish communities that arose in China in the past century were permanent. Most of those who came as refugees were, in their own eyes, transients "sitting on their suitcases" as a saying among them went, although some stayed for one or two generations. Between them and the Chinese there was a fair amount of good feeling and many regarded China as a second home - a sentiment reflected in the large proportion who have visited the new China as tourists from western countries in which they settled - and from Israel.

One result of the transience of these communities was how rarely persons born and bred in them engaged in Chinese studies, though Jewish scholars with other antecedents were quite frequently active in this field. In the 1930s Chinese cultural figures showed more interest in Jewish culture than vice-versa. Lu Xun and others participated in the translation (often via Russian and English) of Yiddish writers such as Shalom Aleichem and Peretz. But transla-

A Jewish Spark Rekindled in China

by Michael Freund excerpted from *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, November 23, 2001

Though he is only 23 years old, Shi Lei of Kaifeng, China, is laboring hard to reclaim centuries of Jewish tradition and heritage, much of which has all but faded away in his native land.

A descendant of a once prosperous and thriving Jewish community located on the south bank of China's Yellow River, Shi Lei (pronounced Sher Lay) is now enrolled in the one-year Jewish studies program at Bar-Ilan University outside Tel Aviv, where he is busy studying Hebrew and learning about Jewish history and culture.

Shi Lei is heir to a proud legacy that was handed down from father to son over the generations. His ancestors were Chinese Jews, part of a community that enjoyed nearly a millennium of peaceful relations with their Chinese neighbors...

Nowadays, there is no community in Kaifeng per se, just a few hundred individuals who identify themselves as descendants of the city's Jewish community. "There is no rabbi, no synagogue. There is nothing left, only memory. Only memory", says Shi Lei.

As he grew older, Shi Lei read everything he could find about Jewish history and culture, slowly expanding his knowledge base about his ancestors' way of life. "As my knowledge about this was growing, I gradually, little by little, more and more, I had the strong wish that I want to study Judaism and Jewish history".

In July 2000, Shi Lei met Rabbi Marvin Tokayer of Great Neck, New York, who was leading a study and tour group to China, as he has done on many occasions over the past two decades. Rabbi Tokayer, a former Chief Rabbi of Japan and author of some 28 books on Jews and the Far East, was deeply impressed with Shi Lei and his sincerity about exploring his heritage.

Rabbi Tokayer had always been troubled by the demise of the Kaifeng Jewish community in the 19th century, saying, "No

one went to help them, and we let them disappear. This bothers me to this very day". His meeting with Shi Lei, then, was especially fortuitous. "Suddenly," he says, "I meet a recent college graduate in China, who knows English well and is a direct descendant of the original Jewish families. He is very proud of his ancestry and anxious to learn." After Shi Lei served as a guide for Rabbi Tokayer's tour group in Kaifeng, the participants became enamored with the young Chinese scholar. After consulting with Shi Lei and his family, Rabbi Tokayer contacted Bar-Ilan University and arranged for him to enroll in the one-year program.

Shi Lei was excited at the prospect of learning about Jewish traditions and culture. "After I knew that I am Jewish and that my ancestral land is Israel," he says, "I had a strong wish to go to Israel to study. Rabbi Tokayer contacted Bar-Ilan University and the university promised to give me a full scholarship because I do not have any personal funds". Thanks to a scholarship from the university, along with some funding from the members of Rabbi Tokayer's tour group, Shi Lei is now busy juggling an intense program of study.

When I visited with Shi Lei at the Bar-Ilan campus, the excitement he felt about his lessons was palpable. He proudly showed me his daily schedule of classes, which include lectures in Jewish history, archaeology of the Holy Land, and Hebrew language. His personable nature and ready smile have served him well, as various people stop us in the hallway to greet him and say hello.

As the first descendant of Kaifeng Jewry to come to Israel to study, Shi Lei often encounters a great deal of curiosity and interest in his background. When he tells people of his Jewish ancestry, he says, "the first reaction of some is surprise, surprise, surprise, after which they always ask me many questions about the Jews, about the history of the Jews in China".

After completing the one-year program at Bar-Ilan, Shi Lei plans to return to Kaifeng, where he hopes to find a job in academia researching Jewish history and culture in China. He is grateful to the Chinese government, which allowed him to study in Israel, and says that relations between China and the Jewish state are friendly.

Shi Lei encourages American Jews and Israelis to visit China, and to learn more about the history of Kaifeng's Jewish community. Such visits, he says, are "really very helpful to Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, because they can tell us more about Jewish history and traditions. Most of us know nothing about Judaism or Jewish history". In the past, visitors have sent Jewish books and other materials to Jews in Kaifeng, all of which have helped them to deepen their knowledge of their roots...

But even among those who do preserve the memory of their Jewish heritage, there is no active communal life. "Every Jewish family in Kaifeng," says Shi Lei, "every family is an orphan, an island in a lake, so this family has no connection with that family and they don't know each other". "When the new year in China comes, some other people from the Shi clan, they come to my grandparents home and visit my grandparents so that at that time we can meet each other. So you can see it is only about individuals."

Nevertheless, Shi Lei has gotten to know some of the other Jewish descendants in the city. "As the foreign visitors came to visit us often, it grew necessary to choose some representatives from every family, who would sit together and talk to each other and meet with the visiting groups. So through this, we get to know more and more Jewish descendants in the city".

Despite these positive developments, it would be wrong to speak of a revival of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Too many years have passed, too much has been lost, to try and rebuild a Jewish communal framework in the city...

Interestingly, when I asked Shi Lei the meaning of his name in Chinese, he told me that, roughly translated, it means a "strong stone". I could not help but be moved by the symbolism.

For though Jewish life in Kaifeng, like the synagogue it once supported, is long gone, a single stone, one made of flesh and blood, still stands, proudly clinging to the heritage of his ancestors and grappling to reclaim it.

That stone, of course, is Shi Lei. And, as his name implies, he is a rock of strength and determination.

China's Aging Jews

by Daniel Walfish
 excerpted from the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 5, 2001

On a bitterly cold winter's afternoon in Beijing, your taxi hurtles past the gleaming skyscrapers that dot the city's sprawling highways. It pulls up at the Friendship Hotel in the northwest of the city...

A matronly Chinese nurse—one of three who work here at state expense—quietly opens the door and ushers you into a small, softly lit room. There, lying in bed, is an old woman. Silently reading her copy of the state-run *China Daily*, oblivious to the cold outside, she slowly puts down the newspaper, turns, and gazes at you, calmly taking your measure.

This is Ruth Weiss. Born in Austria in 1908, she decided 50 years ago to “come home to China.” Now, aged 92, she lies ravaged by strokes and old age, her hair white and wispy, her body struggling against the years. But, for all that, she retains the air of determination that's shaped her long life.

Determined. Just like her neighbour in the Friendship Hotel, 86-year-old Israel Epstein. A short man with a commanding, sonorous voice, he sits in the living room of his enormous six-room government apartment, surrounded by portraits of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and images chronicling his lifetime's service to the Chinese Communist Party—a party he still hopes “will build a new socialist China.”

“My basic position is that Marxism isn't dead and socialism isn't dead,” Epstein expounds. “History moves in zig-zags. The main line running through the zig-zags in China is up, not down.”

Weiss and Epstein are two survivors of a dying generation. Along with perhaps no more than a dozen other foreigners still living in Beijing, they spent much of their lives believing in Mao's dream of a communist China. Today that dream has all but faded for most people, but they remain here—ardent patriots who have supported the People's Republic of China down through the decades even when it was largely off-limits to the West. For some, like Epstein, the flame of socialism still burns strongly in the imagination. For others, like Weiss, the mind is filled rather with flickering memories of a more personal story.

Weiss's first contacts with China came in the late 1920s, when she met a Chinese boyfriend at an international students' club in her native Vienna. When he left Austria, she made sure there was a letter waiting for him at every port his ship visited. They continued corresponding for four years before she decided to follow him to China in 1933...and she convinced her parents that she would go to Shanghai for six months and survive as a freelance journalist.

But when she got to Shanghai, the pair began quarrelling... The journalism didn't work out either, but something else happened in Shanghai: Weiss met left-wing Westerners who showed her Dickensian factory conditions, introduced her to Chinese luminaries like author and social critic Lu Xun, and kindled in her a social conscience...

Weiss spent the rest of her youth working as a teacher and clerk in war-torn China. After the war, she left for the United States, where her husband—a Chinese engineer whom she met in Chengdu—had already been living for three years. But she felt she didn't belong in the U.S., or for that matter, in Austria, where her parents had perished in the Holocaust. So, in 1951, she returned to the People's Republic of China with her two small children and began working as a polisher of government publications in German and English. That effectively ended her marriage...

Unlike Weiss, Israel Epstein grew up in China, the child of staunchly socialist Eastern European Jews who had spent time in Siberia and the tsar's prisons for their views. “So I came by my ideas honourably,” Epstein jokes. Epstein attended a British high school in Tianjin, learning Chinese on the street. He graduated in 1930 and, for the next 14 years, as the communists fought the nationalists and both fought the Japanese, he risked his life as a war correspondent, writing for everyone from *The Peking & Tientsin Times* to *The New York Times*.

But Epstein did even more dangerous work. Sometimes writing under a pen name, he helped to publicize the anti-Japanese and communist causes. By 1942 he was in Japanese-controlled Hong Kong, where his political activities made freedom so dangerous that he decided to slip into an internment camp. He remembers the irony: “I was safer as an enemy national interned

with 3,000 other foreign nationals than I would have been walking around in Hong Kong.”

The camp was only a way station. He soon escaped by boat to nearby Macau, and from there was smuggled inland across Japanese enemy lines with the help of sympathetic leftist Chinese guerrillas.

Like other journalists, Epstein was granted repeated interviews with communist leaders like Mao and Zhou Enlai in the 1930s and 1940s, while they were still building their power base in the west of the country. In the new China he became the chief editor of *China Reconstructs*, an English-language propaganda magazine. No foreigner has that kind of responsibility in the state media anymore; nowadays they all work as polishers, and are mostly younger people seeking a brief taste of life in China, or older people looking for an easy life and an escape from their own countries...

Today, Epstein is probably the most respected and beloved foreigner in China, his reputation buttressed by the five books on Chinese history he has written over the years. (Deng Xiaoping attended his 70th birthday party, and Jiang Zemin his 80th.) Like Weiss, he is one of the few foreigners to become a Chinese citizen.

AS CHINA'S HISTORY has unfolded over the past five decades, Weiss and Epstein's generation has been through a roller coaster of experiences, living through times of euphoria, times of hysteria. In 1949, the future seemed impossibly bright: “There was almost no crime, no corruption, and everybody was helping everybody,” recalls another member of their generation, the 85-year-old Sidney Shapiro. He came to Shanghai from New York in 1947 with a law degree and knowledge of Chinese, and wound up spending his life in China, working as a translator. Sitting in his Beijing courtyard home, he remembers finding “ourselves plunged into this dreamworld. We loved it. We hoped it would last for ever. But then reality set in.”

By the 1960s everything had changed. In 1966, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, a decade of violence and destruction originally born out of a power struggle within the party and Mao's desire to advance the revolution. Like many Chinese people, Epstein counts much of the movement a big mistake...

Points East

Points East

Epstein...recalls early enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution. At the beginning, he made speeches and paraded around with other foreigners. “We didn't want to be left out,” he recalls. But he took sides in the chaotic factional battles that soon engulfed workplaces all over China, and was sent to jail, where he had to repeatedly write self-criticisms and see them torn up because he wouldn't confess to being a spy. Now he looks back wryly on the experience. “I was rather surprised to find myself in that predicament,” he quips. “I didn't think I'd done anything to put myself in prison.”

Weiss kept a much lower profile, but she, too, was caught up in the revolutionary fervour. Like Epstein, she cut her own salary, and even went to her son's school to complain when he wasn't promptly sent to work in the countryside. But things soon changed: It became dangerous for Chinese to see foreigners, and aside from work, where she had to salute Mao's picture each day and recite from the *Little Red Book* of his quotations, Weiss wound up shunned and isolated...

Epstein was released from jail after five years and given back his editing job. He retired in 1987. Nowadays, except for the annual government-sponsored holiday at Hainan Island and the convening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—a 1,000-strong advisory body of which he and about 10 other foreigners are members—he spends his time in his apartment, writing his memoirs, receiving visitors, watching CNN and answering phone calls, e-mails and greeting cards from hundreds of friends.

HOW DOES THIS generation feel about the past two decades of modernization and reform? If Epstein has disagreements with the government, he doesn't air them. Mainly, he says, he's thrilled with the progress China has made in his lifetime. He believes that “on the face of it,” the economic reforms would seem to have been correct, but he worries about the widening gaps between rich and poor, and between coast and interior...

Weiss, on the other hand, seems not to remember opinions about the changes in China that she held before her stroke last year. On one recent day, though, she was quite clear. The foreign companies, the free markets, the reformed economy? Her re-

action comes out slowly: “I am wondering . . . how such things can happen . . . and still be socialism. It bothers me. But on the other hand, I can see China's point of view.”

The manuscript of an unpublished set of her memoirs holds clues to her thoughts, too. After the bloodshed around Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, she introduced a note of bitterness towards the leadership and bewilderment about the country's overall direction: “Is socialism and eventually communism really impossible to achieve or [is it] rather that socialism has nowhere in the world really been established so far? Surely, it could not be that untold numbers of revolutionaries have given their lives for a mirage, a chimera, a logical impossibility? I couldn't ever accept that.”

Chinese Synagogue Named Endangered Site

by Amy Sara Clark
 excerpted from *JTA*, 4 November 2001

Shanghai resident Seth Kaplan got tired of celebrating the High Holidays in rented hotel spaces while the city's oldest intact synagogue sat empty, deteriorating just a few miles away. So along with others in his congregation of expatriates, Kaplan, 34, began advocating for the restoration of Ohel Rachel.

Their efforts came to fruition recently when the World Monuments Fund added the synagogue, built in the 1920s, to the 2002 Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

The World Monuments Fund publishes the list in order to bring attention to threatened cultural sites around the world. The fund revises its list every two years. The 2002 list includes one other synagogue - Subotica Synagogue in Yugoslavia, built in 1902. The list includes well-known sites such as the Great Wall of China, as well as more obscure sites such as a Gothic church in Poland - or Ohel Rachel, which the Chinese Communists turned into a warehouse.

According to Henry Ng, the fund's executive vice president, Ohel Rachel was chosen because it symbolizes the long history of the Jews in China. “This is really the only active synagogue that's authentic left in all of China,” he said.

Ohel Rachel is urgently in need of repair. For nearly 50 years, the building has been used by various state and local governmental bodies. Reoccurring leaks and vegetation growth threaten its structural fabric. But perhaps the most important factor in the fund's decision to include Ohel Rachel on the list was the energy and commitment of Shanghai's Jewish community.

The synagogue “has that local, on-the-ground group that's willing to be advocates for the building and to basically ensure its long term future,” Ng said. “Every building needs an advocate in order to survive,” Ng added, “and this is a perfect group.”

While inclusion on the Watch List will likely draw international attention to the site, there are no immediate financial rewards. Kaplan, who was born in New York, said his community plans to undertake a campaign to raise money for the repairs.

Ohel Rachel is one of only two remaining synagogues in Shanghai. The other, Ohel Moshe, has been turned into a museum. When the Ohel Rachel Synagogue was built, Shanghai had a population of approximately 1,700 Jews. It was constructed to accommodate a community of approximately 600 Jews from Baghdad living in Shanghai at the time.

With a seating capacity of 700, the Sephardic synagogue had a walk-in ark that once held 30 Torah scrolls. The synagogue is part of a small compound that at one time included a Jewish school, library, playground and mikvah. Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon, a Baghdadi Jew living in Hong Kong, endowed the synagogue in memory of his wife, Lady Rachel...

After the Communist takeover in 1949, Shanghai's Jewish community dwindled. The new government confiscated Ohel Rachel in 1952, removing its furniture and decorations. During the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, Ohel Rachel's windows, chandeliers and ornaments were smashed. The building was used for a variety of government functions. Most recently, the Shanghai Government Education Commission used it for offices and storage.

In 1993, the city of Shanghai declared Ohel Rachel a historic landmark, which granted it some protection, but continued