

Matook Rahamim Nissim: An Oral History

Interview by Jane Perry
August 2001

Matook Rahamim Nissim, a Sephardi Jew, was born in 1923 in Shanghai. On his father's side, he was the third generation Nissim to be born in China. From 1943-1945, under the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, the Nissim family, who were British citizens, were interned in Yang Chow camp as 'enemy nationals'.

The Sino-Judaic Institute arranged for some of Nissim's documents, papers and photographs to be deposited in the Hoover Institution archives (at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California). An exhibit of part of the Nissim collection was organized in the Hoover Tower.

Here are some dramatic extracts from the Oral History about the end of World War II:

"...I told you about these (Chinese) ladies that came in to change the honey buckets (night soil) each day. One of these came and passed a message, a written message on paper, toilet paper, or something, whatever it was, that the war was over. ... The

next day a Chinese newspaper was smuggled in by the same group of ladies, these tiny little ladies that came in. So we knew the war was over.

"We went to the (Japanese) camp commandant and he called a meeting...He took his samurai sword and put it on the table and indicated that the war was over, and that he had a radio message that the Americans were going to drop supplies.... This plane was supposed to come over and drop supplies one day of the week. So again, about a dozen of us were selected to go and pick up these large drums that were supposed to be dropped outside the camp compound. Well, we heard planes on that given date. Nothing happened. They turned around and, I suppose, went away. Then we got word they would come back four days later, and they did come back four days later. They did drop those steel drums, like these oil drums that we know of. ...Every drum fell within the compound... They contained medicine and things like that, clothes, food, necessities...."

Nissim eventually immigrated to the U.S. and got a job in San Francisco. He said:

"...The first day that I joined, the personnel manager, Bill Blass, came up to me

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and asked me: "Do you want to go out for a cup of coffee?... You know, I read your resume. I always wanted to go to China and never had the opportunity...(During the war) there was an occasion when I flew to China and it was in the interior, to a place called Yang Chow. I was the navigator of the plane". I said, "You got lost." He looked at me and said, "How did you know?" "You came back four days later and you dropped the barrels of clothing, medicine and food." He couldn't believe that. He said, "Come on, let's get into the car." He had a little MG, the English little car. He said, "Let's go to the house." So we forgot all about the office and the coffee. We went to his place, and he showed me aerial photographs of the drop from the plane. I looked at the photograph and I said, "Bill, that's our laundry hanging out there." Between the structures of the houses, we had put pegs in the wall and the clothesline so our clothes would dry. I recognized our clothes. I said, "My God."

When you think of it, what a small world this is. Here we are in a camp and this is many years later, and I meet the navigator that could reach the camp. It was quite an experience. I think life is full of things like that".



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中國-猶太學院

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MARTIN BUBER AND TAOISM

by Irene Eber

excerpted from *Monumenta Serica, Journal of Oriental Studies*, Vol 42, 1994

PART I. At various times during his life Martin Buber had a considerable interest in Taoist thought.¹ In 1910 and 1911 this led to the publication of two small volumes of translations, the first, selections from the *Chuang-tzu*, and the second, the following year, consisted of a number of stories from P'u Sung-ling's *Liao-chai-chih-i* (Liao-chai Tales). In later years he occasionally commented in lectures or essays on Taoist ideas, specifically those of the *Tao-te-ching* (*TTC*), and in 1942 he translated into Hebrew a number of the *TTC*'s chapters...

Background

Buber's initial concern with matters Chinese occurred against the background of a wider German interest in China which began in 1897 with Germany's occupation of Chiao-chou Bay and the port of Tsingtao...In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Berlin University's Seminar for Oriental Languages grew in importance and its offerings included, in addition to language instruction, practical knowledge on Asia...

Buber's encounter with China took place against this larger background and it coincided with his preoccupation with Hasidic materials and his interest in questions of myths and culture. He may also have come across materials on China when he was a reader for the publisher Rütten und Loening in 1905 and later...At about this time Buber became acquainted with Wang Ching-t'ao who in 1907 was a lecturer, or Chinese language instructor, at the Seminar for Oriental Languages...

Buber and Wang collaborated on the translation of a number of stories from [P'u Sung-ling's] *Liao-chai chih-i* collection, Buber translating from the English version by Herbert A. Giles, and Wang translating several from the Chinese original. Most of the *Chuang-tzu* portions were also prepared from Giles' English version...

Enthusiastic reviews in the German language press greeted the appearance of both volumes. Buber was praised for making these works available to German readers and for thus furnishing evidence of the universality of ideas...Considering the paucity of translated works from Chinese in the early decades of the twentieth century, the widespread response is not surprising. Except for the *TTC*, German speaking readers had few translations from Chinese available to them and even fewer critical works...Buber's collection of P'u Sung-ling's stories was the first selection of Chinese fiction in German and thus deserved the well-earned praise it received.

ALLY IN THE MAKING

by Herb Keinon

excerpted from *The Jerusalem Post*,
3 Feb 2005

On the face of it, especially when looking at the world through jaundiced Jewish eyes, the recent warming of Israeli-Chinese ties doesn't make a whole lot of sense...State Counselor Tang Jiaxuan, whose unrevealing title doesn't do justice to the fact he is one of the six most powerful men in China, arrived in December at the head of the highest level delegation to visit Israel since the Phalcon fiasco. Both sides characterized that visit as excellent. "He came with one purpose in mind," a senior Israeli official said, "to further economic cooperation."

Indeed, at a friendly meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, during which neither the Harpy drone nor the Phalcon came up once, the two leaders agreed to try to double Israeli-Chinese trade to some \$5 billion by 2008. "Our relations are good," says Yigal Caspi, head of the northeast Asia department at the Foreign Ministry. "Tang's visit is an indication of this, as well as of the Chinese desire to continue to have good ties with Israel, to cooperate in scientific and technological ties with us."

And since Tang's visit, the Chinese delegations haven't stopped arriving: a delegation from the Communist Party central committee, an election observer team to monitor the PA elections, China's ambassador to Syria, the deputy staff general of the Peoples Armed Police (the Chinese version of border patrol) and a foreign ministry delegation. And coming up is a delegation of 20 members of the People's Armed Police to undergo an anti-terror training course.

Lu Jing, the political affairs counselor at the Chinese embassy in Tel Aviv, says that more delegations from China arrived in the month of January alone than arrived in any given year since 2000. While Lu, who also serves as the embassy's spokesman, indicated that the increase in the number of delegations coming to Israel is a signal of better days, not everyone agrees. One Israeli diplomat says that the relations have not fundamentally changed of late, and all that has really changed is that Yasser Arafat has died.

Arafat was the plug in the dyke that kept away official Chinese delegations. Or, more accurately, Israel's policy of snubbing officials who met Arafat was a major disincentive over the past two years for Chinese visitors. The Chinese are not the Europeans, who were largely able to bypass the ban by visiting Arafat on one trip, and then returning a few months later and visiting Israel. When the Chinese arrive they come with bulky delega-

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FROM THE EDITOR

In all the years I have served as editor of *Points East*, I have never yielded my column to another's words. With this issue, I break precedent.

Writing in the 15 November issue of *The Jerusalem Report*, Shlomo Maital, academic director of the Technion Institute of Management, offered as succinct a comparison of Chinese and Jews as I have ever read—although, in typically Israeli fashion, he confuses his terminology by assuming that Israel and the Jewish people are one and the same, rather than the first being a subset of the second. (Please pardon my *galut* mentality.) Here is what he wrote:

What do Israel and China have in common, then? For a start—history, religion, character and entrepreneurship. Both Israel and China are ancient civilizations, spanning four millennia, which reinvented themselves in 1948/49, freed themselves by arms from imperial powers and shaped their new national identity in a newborn country. According to Jerusalem-based Jewish studies expert Dr. Gustavo Perednik, Confucianism and Judaism are based more on deed than on dogma, and on behavior rather than on belief. Both Jews and Chinese have a long history of persecution and suffering. The Jews and the Chinese, said Chinese statesman Wu Ting Fang a century ago, "are despised not on account of their vices, but on account of their virtues—their industry, economy, perseverance, thrift." Both Jews and Chinese were scattered over the four corners of the earth, and many heeded the call to return to rebuild their new nation...Both Israelis and Chinese make extensive use of what the Chinese call guanxi and the Israelis call protektzia, or connections. And both are very pragmatic. Perhaps most important, Israel and China share a drive for enterprise. Both seek to prosper through entrepreneurship and innovation.

This issue, like the summer season now bursting forth here in Seattle, is abloom with articles of so many colors it boggles the mind. Enjoy!

Anson Laytner

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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white. "I felt like, what am I doing here?" he says. But no more: Today, Chinese and Chinese Americans are important customers, as are other Asians and Asian Americans, and some restaurants are once again catering to newly arrived workers. How "authentic" they are, though, depends on how you define "authentic." "It is and isn't a return to the way things were at the beginning," says Lee. She points out that with globalization, food is changing quickly even in Asia; what constitutes Chinese food is evolving.

The epic kitsch of the exhibit is balanced by touching recollections, on video and in notebooks, of what it was like to work and grow up in Chinese restaurants, both in America and abroad. I loved the many humble, vivid accounts and encourage others to take these in, as one may, sitting atop rice-sack-cushioned stools. While resting there, one might also appreciate the beauty and intelligence of the exhibit and the absence of cliché. There is no red; there are no lanterns or fortune cookies. Here, in the heart of Chinatown, in a kitsch-filled room, one finds, happily, kitsch-free thought.

Gish Jen is the author, most recently, of The Love Wife.

A Filipino-American Effort to Harbor Jews Is Honored

by Joseph Berger
excerpted from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/14/national/14rescue.html>

CINCINNATI, Feb. 12 - It was a time when Jews were frantic to get out of Germany, risking voyages to places they were not sure would accept them and finding doors closed almost everywhere.

In Manila, though, a vigorous expatriate cigar manufacturer from Cincinnati had been playing poker and bridge with the likes of Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower; Paul V. McNutt, the American high commissioner; and Manuel L. Quezon, the first Philippines president. When the manufacturer, Alex Frieder, saw refugees straggling to the port pleading for entry, he cajoled his poker cronies to let the Philippines become a haven for thousands more.

Through his efforts and those of three of his brothers, about 1,200 German and Austrian Jews eventually found sanctuary in the Philippines in the late 1930's, then an American protectorate...

Over the weekend, 98 of Mr. Frieder's relatives came together here with a half dozen refugees and a grandson of Mr. Quezon to celebrate this little-known tale of one of the war's unlikely rescues.

"They were the right persons in the right place at the right time," said Mr. Frieder's daughter, Alice Weston, 78, who was a young girl in Manila in 1938 and 1939 when her father and her uncle Philip Frieder masterminded the rescue. "My father wasn't an exceptional person. He was an ordinary businessman and he saw this horrible situation and he thought of a way to help a little bit."

Filipinos from the Cincinnati community serenaded the relatives with love songs in Tagalog as well as "Hava Nagila." Mrs. Weston, among others, sang along with the Tagalog lyrics she remembered from childhood. There were Filipino dishes like chicken adobo. Refugees led a Sabbath eve prayer service, and Manuel L. Quezon III, a 34-year-old journalist in the Philippines, introduced the blessing over the challah.

"We're a very hospitable people and we had experienced exile and imprisonment during the Spanish colonization and the early American occupation, so someone of my grandfather's generation would have been conscious of the plight of refugees," Mr. Quezon said. "We're a sucker for anyone who's suffering."

The reunion, organized by the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion here, was held on the 60th anniversary of the Japanese destruction of Manila's synagogue, Temple Emil.

The story of the Manila rescue begins in 1918 with the decision of the Frieder family to move much of its two-for-a-nickel cigar business from Manhattan to the Philippines, where production would be cheaper. Alex, Philip, Herbert and Morris took turns living in Manila for two years each, Mrs. Weston said, in a community that had fewer than 200 Jews.

Frank Ephraim, who as a child was one of the Jewish refugees in Manila and who wrote a history of the rescue, "Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror" (University of Illinois Press, 2003), said that in 1937 Philip Frieder saw European Jews arriving in Manila's port from Shanghai while it was under siege by the Japanese. Shanghai remained an open port and eventually harbored 17,000 German Jews.

The Frieder brothers were reluctant to burden the Philippines with poor refugees, so they focused on importing people in occupations the country needed, like doctors. Mr. McNutt, the high commissioner, was able to finesse State Department bureaucrats to turn a blind eye to quotas and admit 1,000 Jews a year.

Mr. Quezon's approval was also needed. Dr. Racelle Weiman, the Holocaust center's director, said there was a letter written by Alex Frieder to Morris Frieder that said skeptics in Mr. Quezon's administration spoke of Jews as "Communists and schemers" bent on "controlling the world."

"He assured us that big or little, he raised hell with every one of those persons," Alex Frieder wrote of Mr. Quezon in August 1939. "He made them ashamed of themselves for being a victim of propaganda intended to further victimize an already persecuted people."

Mr. Frieder combed lists of imperiled Jews for needed skills and advertised in German newspapers. The brothers and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee arranged visas, jobs and housing and raised thousands of dollars for sustenance.

Ralph J. Preiss, 74, of Manhattan, was 8 when he left Germany and recalled his family studying Spanish on the ship because they had read an outdated encyclopedia describing their intended haven as a colony of Spain. "We didn't know what the Philippines was or where it was," Mr. Preiss said...

Most refugees hoped the Philippines would be a way station to America, yet were delighted at the kindly reception from Filipinos...

"One of the first things I did when I came to China was visit Harbin," said Olmert, adding that he found his grandfather's grave in what is billed as the largest and best-preserved Jewish cemetery in the Far East and had it cleaned up. This past June, he returned to the 677-grave cemetery just outside of Harbin with his brother, Ehud, who was leading a 200-member trade delegation through China.

Amram Olmert sees his posting, which has just ended, as representing more than simply bilateral diplomacy. "I was offered a posting in Washington, DC, but I turned it down," he said. "I'm closing my family story; I have come back to the place where my parents began their life. They brought the skills they learned [in China] to Israel. Now I'm bringing Israeli technology and know-how back to China."

His department has been busy lately, with several dozen ongoing projects across the country, including technology exchanges and the establishment of training centers and model farms. He recently made his 20th trip to the northwestern province of Xinjiang, where many Israeli agricultural projects are based.

While some of the Olmert family moved on to Israel and Russia, they exemplified Li's belief that for many, Harbin was more than just a point of transit. "Had the Japanese not invaded, many Jews would have stayed much longer. They had established homes here."

The Olmerts also proved to be the exception to the rule that Chinese and foreign residents rarely mixed. Li explained that it was rare for foreigners to be able to speak Chinese: "Most only know how to say 'Hello' and 'From the same hometown' in Chinese." But both of Amram Olmert's parents spoke Chinese, and growing up in Israel, he and his siblings experienced Chinese the way many young Jews experience Yiddish today.

"When my parents didn't want us to know what they were saying, they would speak Mandarin," said Olmert. "When my father was dying," Olmert recalled, "he spoke Chinese for a whole day. I think he was at the point where he was returning to the happier times in his life."

A Short History of the Chinese Restaurant

by Gish Jen
excerpted from <http://slate.com/id/2117567/> 27 April, 2005

"Have You Eaten Yet?," the wonderful Chinese restaurants exhibit now on view at New York's **Museum of Chinese in the Americas**, takes a Babel of ephemera and makes it speak. One's visit begins with an absence: the never-photographed first Chinese eateries in America, known as "chow chows"; these sprang up in California in the mid-19th century to serve Cantonese laborers—true holes in the wall, they were marked, as per a Chinese tradition, with yellow cloth triangles...The Chinese restaurant had been born.

Would anyone have bet the bank on Chinese food back then? According to *Chinese Restaurant News*, there are now more Chinese restaurants in America than there are McDonald's franchises—nearly three times as many in fact. In the 19th century, though, the Chinese were scorned as rat-eaters; nothing could have been more revolting than eating what they ate. An 1877 magazine cartoon titled "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner" shows various immigrants contentedly enjoying their respective national dishes—a Frenchman, for example, tucks into his frogs—while an officious African-American manservant conveys a turkey to Uncle Sam. All is harmony, right down to a Native Indian who, unable to abide a chair, squats peaceably beside his fellow guests. Only one personage draws horror from the other diners—the Chinaman, about to eat a rodent.

Yet despite this prejudice, and despite the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which categorically barred further Chinese immigration, Chinese restaurateurs strove to make a place for themselves. With trepidation: Chinese food was often embedded in the familiar. For example, one early menu lists "Grilled Dinner Steak Hollandaise" and "Roast California Chicken with Currant Jelly," with "Fine Cut Chicken Chop Suey" presented as just another option...

Observes show curator Cynthia Ai-Fen Lee, "It's as if the owners are trying to say, 'It's OK. Don't be scared.'" And indeed, the phrase "Try it" recurs hypnotically throughout the exhibit. Still, despite the best efforts of the restaurateurs, something

disreputable remained, not only about Chinese food, but about people who ate it. In 1903 the *New York Times* described the Chinatown clientele: "It is the men and women who like to eat after everybody else is abed that pour shekels into the coffers of the man who knows how to make chop suey."

Shekels. What an interesting currency to have gratuitously cited. And yet how unwittingly prescient the writer turned out to be, by mid-century: One of my favorite parts of this exhibit is the wonderful collection of kosher Chinese menus from New York restaurants, sporting names like "Glatt Wok" and "Shang-chai," and serving dishes like Matzoh Foo Young. Lee speculates that East European Jews, themselves marginalized, flocked to Chinese restaurants as a way of forging a new, modern, identity—as a way of becoming American. Not that things "Chinese" were generally recognized as American; it took outsiders to see the obvious. Visiting Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, for example, was amused and amazed by a restaurant he visited in the early 1940s. "It was called a Chinese restaurant," he wrote, "but ... nothing made me feel the slightest at home."

After the Second World War, mainstream Americans, too, began to see the Americanness—eureka!—of some "Chinese." And Chinese Americans celebrated this: On a menu from the 1950s, a man smilingly paints characters on his "Chinese Easter Eggs." By this point, though, Chinese restaurants were about more than East Meets West. They were sites where not only Chineseness but ethnicity in general was made and made fun of...Concoctions like Mani-shaiget Cocktails—half Manischewitz wine and half Christian Brothers brandy—were served....

Happily, change was on its way. The 1965 liberalization of immigration laws brought new arrivals and new food, from Sichuan and Hunan and Shanghai. Multiculturalism and Nixon's visit to China in 1972, meanwhile, inspired an "authenticity revolution"—a transformation further fueled by a changing clientele. Charles Lai, the director of the museum, recalls wandering into a Chinatown restaurant as a boy in the '60s and realizing that everyone else in the place was

TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

Friends of mine are traveling to Mongolia this summer and will be in Ulan Bator on Shabbat. Does anyone know whether or not there is:

- A Jewish community in Ulan Bator
- A synagogue?

Thanks,

Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan

<http://www.TempleEmanuElofSWest.org>

Dear Rabbi Laytner,
With great interest we have read the latest issue of your esteemed publication *Points East* (vol. 20, no. 1, March 2005). We would like to add a few titles to the bibliographical notes on "Jews in Shanghai", compiled by Audrey Friedman Marcus (p. 11):
Jonathan Goldstein (ed.), *The Jews of China*, 2 vols. (Armonk, NY - London 1999 and 2000).

Roman Malek (ed.), *From Kaifeng ... to Shanghai. Jews in China*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 45 (Sankt Augustin - Nettetal 2000).
Donald Daniel Leslie, *Jews and Judaism in Traditional China. A Comprehensive Bibliography*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 44 (Sankt Augustin - Nettetal 1998).

David Ludwig Bloch: *Holzschritte - Woodcuts. Shanghai 1940-1949*, ed. by Barbara Hoster, Roman Malek and Katharina Wenzel Teuber (Sankt Augustin - Nettetal 1997).

All these books contain valuable information about the Jews in Shanghai, so you might want to relate the bibliographical information to your readers in the next issue of *Points East*.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,
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IN THE FIELD

- Rickshaw Reunion Planned**
Prof. Pan Guang informs us that there will be a reunion of former Shanghai Jews April 24 – 30, 2006, in Shanghai. Please see: <http://www.rickshaw.org> for details. (It is also a very fine website, by the way.) He adds that he will begin publishing a Jewish Studies Bulletin in Chinese, noting "It may be difficult for you to read article, but easy for you to read the news."

- Jins Now Jews**
Michael Freund, director of Shavei Israel (formerly Amishav), writes that Shlomo and Dina Jin, from Kaifeng, successfully passed the *Beit Din* (rabbinical court) in Jerusalem, and were formally accepted back into the fold of the Jewish people. It was a very emotional scene, and many tears of happiness and relief were shed, when the rabbis informed the Jins of the good news. In the coming weeks, the Jins will immerse in a *mikveh* (ritual bath), and will then undergo a Jewish wedding ceremony. "This is truly an historic day," he writes. "It is the first time that a family from Kaifeng has undergone conversion in Israel and returned to the faith of their ancestors. Mazal Tov to the Jins, who

struggled for so many years with great faith and determination - and may their "homecoming" be smooth and pave the way for others."



- Great New Website on Jews in China**
Yair Schaffer, of Haifa, Israel, emailed on behalf of the Igud Yotzei Sin, that their wonderful new website is now up and running. To take a tour, go to: <http://www.jewsofchina.org>.
- New Book on Chinese-Jewish Relationship Planned**
Shoshannah Zirkon, currently a Chinese language student at Fudan University in Shanghai and a graduate from University of Colorado, attended last October's conference "International Symposium on Judaism," coordinated by Professor Xu Xin at Nanjing University. At the confer-

ence she met Professor Avrum Ehrlich, whose work in the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University was featured in the last issue of P.E.

Following the conference, he invited her to work together with him to assemble a book tentatively titled, "Jews and Judaism in Modern China: A Meeting of Civilizations." It will be a collection of articles for the informed reader. The American publisher, KTAV, has already agreed to support this project, she writes.

- **Rabbi backs India's 'lost Jews'**

In a historic decision on 30 March 2005, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar decided to formally recognize the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India as "descendants of Israel." The Chief Rabbinate has also agreed to send a *beit din* (rabbinical court) from the Chief Rabbinate to the region to convert them.

The Bnei Menashe claim descent from the tribe of Manasseh, one of the ten tribes exiled from the Land of Israel by the Assyrian empire over 2,700 years ago. They reside primarily in the two Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur, along the border with Burma and Bangladesh. In recent years, over 800 members of the community have made *aliyah* thanks largely to the efforts of Shavei Israel (www.shavei.org), a Jerusalem-based group that reaches out and assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, a *dayan* (rabbinical court judge) and spokesman for Rabbi Amar, said that the decision had come after careful consideration and study of the issue. "The Chief Rabbi sent a delegation of two *dayanim* to India last year to conduct a thorough investigation of the community and its origins. After a thorough review of their findings, it was decided that the Bnei Menashe are in fact descendants of Israel and should be drawn closer to the Jewish people." Rabbi Birnbaum added that once various conditions laid down by the Chief Rabbi are fulfilled, such as the construction of *mikvaot* (ritual baths) in India, and the dispatch of

additional teachers, then the Chief Rabbinate would send a *beit din* of its own to the area to convert members of the community to Judaism, thereby allowing them to make *aliyah* to Israel.

- **Report from Kaifeng's Institute for Jewish Studies**

At the invitation of the Institute for Jewish Studies of Henan University, a series of lectures was organized by London Jewish Cultural Centre between November 2004 and January 2005. Dr. Jerry Gotel, the Director for Overseas Project of LJCC, came to Kaifeng to deliver the lectures. The events were very well attended. The audience included graduate students who are studying at the Institute for Jewish Studies, teachers from the College of History and Culture, and the undergraduate students who major in world history. Some graduate students and PHD students who are studying with Prof. Xu Xin in Nanjing University also came to Kaifeng to join this great event. As the honorary professor and the supervisor for graduate students of the Institute for Jewish Studies, Mr. Gotel has come to Kaifeng to teach the students every year since the Institute was established in 2002. During the process of development, the Institute for Jewish Studies at Henan University has received much help from LJCC both in academic guidance and financial support.

- **Remembered Rhythms**

The Daniels, intrepid promoters of things Indian and Jewish, sent an announcement about a new CD entitled "Treasures. Songs of Praise in the Iraqi-Jewish Tradition", which includes a 36 page booklet containing the texts, translations and program notes written by Sara Manasseh. Visit www.riversofbabylon.com for more information.

- **When in New York...**

Visit the Museum of Biblical Art, or MOBIA, 1865 Broadway at 61st Street, where you can see one of the 13 Torah scrolls once preserved in the synagogue in Kaifeng and now in the collection of the American Biblical Society.

JOURNAL OF INDO-JUDAIC STUDIES

The Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies is devoted to analyzing the interactions and affinities between Indic and Judaic civilizations, from ancient through contemporary times.

Interests include Indian Jewish communities, cultural and commercial links between India and ancient Israel, images of India in Jewish literature and of Jews in Indian literature, medieval Jewish views of India and vice-versa, interreligious dialogue between Jews and Hindus/ Buddhists, modern to contemporary relations between India and Israel, etc.

Issue number 7-8 has just been released. It includes:

- "The Influence of Indo-Judaic Studies in Israel, or, The Salience of Spirituality," by Shalva Weil;
- "Jewish Experience in India, or, Making of an Indian Novel - A Reading of Esther David's "The Walled City", by D. Venkateswarlu;
- "India's Jewish Geography as Described by Nineteenth-Century Traveler David D'Beth Hillel," by Alanna E. Cooper;
- "Existential and Metaphysical Perspectives on Opposition and relations: A Comparative Study of Martin Buber and Basanta Kumar Mallik," by Madhuri Santanam Sondhi; and
- "The Identity of a Mystic: The Case of Sa'id Sarmad, a Jewish-Yogi-Sufi Courtier of the Mughals," by Nathan Katz.

It also includes book reviews by David R. Blumenthal, Ruth F. Cernea, and Dinesh Kumar, as well as obituaries on J. B. Segal and M. L. Sondhi.

To subscribe, please send a check for US\$15 to: Professor Braj M. Sinha, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 9 Campus Dr., Saskatoon, Sask., CANADA S7N 5A5.

Other queries may be sent to Prof. Nathan Katz at katzn@fiu.edu.

A Safe Harbor in Harbin

by Jon Campbell
excerpted from the *International Jerusalem Post*, 8 October 2004

Amram Olmert likes to entertain the Chinese he encountered as science and agri-

Beijing with a particular joke.

"I tell them I'm a true capitalist," said the brother of Israel's Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Ehud Olmert during the home stretch of his four-year posting in Beijing... "I say, 'I've got plots of land all over the country: One in Tianjin, one in Harbin and one in Shanghai.'"

The plots of land to which he refers are the final resting places of the members of his family who were just several of the hundreds of thousands who left Russia in the first three decades of the 20th century, originally settling in...Harbin, China.

By the time Olmert's grandfather came with his family to Harbin in 1917, the city had already become "Little Moscow": The Russian populations was about to reach 200,000.

"It was, in a way, the most convenient place to go," he explained. From Harbin, his family spread across China, and later, to Europe, Russia and Israel...

Coverage of the subject of Jews in China is generally focused upon two cities: Kaifeng and Shanghai...But somehow, Harbin has generally stayed below the radar. Prof. Li Shuxiao, the deputy director of the Harbin Jewish Research Center, is working to change that. Part of the problem, he said, is a lack of manpower, but more significant is a lack of interest.

"Intellectuals are interested in the topic, but common people generally aren't, even though they know the stories. We don't have any students in this department, and I don't know how to attract them. I think the topic alone should do the trick."

A new crop of Chinese scholars is working to educate the public about Judaism and...Li is doing his part in Harbin, where the Jewish Research Center, along with the Association of Former Jewish Residents of China in Israel and the Israel-China Friendship Society, hosted a conference in late August that not only fea-

tured Chinese academics, but also saw speakers from the US, Israel, Australia, France, Russia and the UK...

"So few people have heard of Harbin," said Li, frustrated at the lack of awareness of his hometown's history. "But it was China's first modern international city, the first place that China met the rest of the world."

Li has spent his academic career researching Harbin's history, which culminated in a year-by-year account of the city from 1763 to 1949, published in 2000. Over the course of researching the history of Harbin, Li narrowed his focus from the international community to the Russian community to the Jewish community.

"You can't research Harbin's foreign population without looking into the Jewish populations," he said. It wasn't their numbers that led Li to focus his work on his city's Jews: It was their prominence in all aspects of Harbin life. "Even though they were a minority of the community, they comprised the bulk of its influential members."

The Harbin Jewish Research Center opened in 2000, and has an impressive exhibition of over 400 photographs detailing the history of Harbin Jewry, currently housed in a vacant room in the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, located across a courtyard from the center's cramped quarters. *The Jews of Harbin*, a coffee-table book comprised of many of the photographs in the exhibit, was released in October 2003 to little fanfare. With no official overseas distribution channel, few copies have been scooped up: Li estimates that 1,000 were sold in China, and 400 sent overseas. He hopes for a second edition and the addition of newly acquired photographs from several trips to Israel before the books sees major overseas distribution.

This past winter, when I spoke with Li, he was optimistic about the possibility of relocating the exhibition to one of the city's former synagogues that he hoped would be converted into a permanent museum. Funding for the project, he said, would need to come from a combination of donations and government coffers, and both local and provincial governments were in favor of the move. Their excitement, however, was tempered by financial concerns,

and it seemed unlikely that the province and city would figure out who would foot the bill: The center is in a provincial institution; the synagogue is a city building.

In June, however, the city government stepped in, pledging nearly \$2.5 million for the restoration of three buildings with links to the former Jewish populations: The Old Synagogue, the New Synagogue and the Jewish school. The New Synagogue, built in 1921, will be converted into a Jewish history and culture museum.

Renovations mean that, at the very least, the three building best representative of the architectural legacy of the Harbin Jewish community will be highlighted...A keen observer happening past the No. 2 Korean School or the neighboring train factory guest house will likely gawk at the fact that they are not your average Chinese buildings. Looking a while longer, one might notice that the buildings' windows, whose tops curve to a point, display a not-completely-Russian design, and feature Star of David latticework. But without a guide or a book of postcards (which are available through the center), one might never discover that the guest house was, in fact, the Jewish community's first synagogue, completed in 1909. Even if you asked passersby about the building, they'll say it's "The Old Church." And next door, where the city's sizable Korean community currently sends its children to study, is the school to which the city's once-sizable Jewish community sent its children to study.

Like many Jews in Harbin who were forced to move on with the arrival of the Japanese, and, later, the Chinese communists, the Olmert family's path to Israel was cleared in China. Unsatisfied with Hashomer Hatza'ir, the only Zionist movement active in Harbin at the time, Mordechai Olmert, Ehud and Amram's father, founded a local Betar chapter in 1928.

After graduating from the local Polytechnic University, Mordechai decided that he wanted to move to Israel. His father was against the trip and refused to fund it, so he spent two years teaching Russian in order to raise the money. Realizing that his electrical education would help little in a land that required agricultural expertise, he stopped in Holland to study agriculture. Just over 65 years later, his son, Amram, was sent to Beijing as science and agriculture minister.

Benjamin Fishoff, a survivor who was featured in the film, was very thankful to Sugihara for his great act. He stated that there were today 37 family members in his family, including the wives and husbands of his children and grandchildren. All were the result of one single Sugihara visa granted to him.

Susan Bluman and Samuel Graudenz also gratefully praised Sugihara for his transit visas that saved thousands of their co-religionists. Rabbi Samuel Graudenz described Sugihara as a God-sent figure to rescue them from almost certain death.

The importance and magnitude of Sugihara's visa will always be appreciated by the entire Mir Yeshiva. Some 300 of them escaped to Kobe as result of Sugihara's heroic action. One Rabbi of the Mir Yeshiva, depicted in the film, broke down in tears as he recounted the deep gratitude of his mother to Mr. Sugihara.

The film explained at length as to how the whole process of issuing visas started with a Dutch citizen, whose dear wife had a sister in United States. He attempted to obtain a visa to Curaçao – a Dutch colony in South America – from the Dutch representative in Kaunas. Then, Mr. Nathan Gutwirth, a Dutch Jew, ensured the possibility of securing a visa to Curaçao and similar visas were also granted to twenty non-Dutch citizens (mostly Jewish). The momentum initiated by Gutwirth spread like wildfire among Kaunas's Jewish residents. The next link was the transit visa required to obtain final approval for exiting Lithuania. Sugihara was approached by a huge crowd surrounding the Japanese consulate in Kaunas. After consulting with five of the representatives of the crowd, the Japanese Consul made the extraordinary decision to immediately start issuing transit visas through Japan.

During a few weeks, Sugihara accomplished the unthinkable deed of issuing Japanese transit visas at an amazing rate, in spite of Japanese Foreign Ministry's repeated denial of his request. Sometimes, he worked 16 hours a day, writing permits by hand in Jewish passports, affixed with Japanese Consulate seal. He was acting on his own behalf, not seeking any reward even at expense of his diplomatic career.

Perhaps, the sole disappointing part of the film was the very brief mention of the

names of important persons who played vital roles in the whole Curaçao visa process. Similarly, there was no display of the Rabbi's name when he thanked Mrs. Sugihara for her husband's great deed.

The film lent a lot of weight to Rabbi Marvin Tokayer's entertaining and logical theory of the Japanese refusal to persecute the Jews who arrived in Kobe as a result of Sugihara's transit visas. It was a fact that the Japanese benefited from the enormous loan of 200 millions dollars granted by Jacob Schiff before 1904, which helped Japan tremendously in financing the war against the Russians in Port Arthur, China. But Japan's refusal to persecute Jews in Kobe, as well as later in Shanghai, was not officially linked to the huge loan secured by Takahashi from Jacob Schiff, nor was it clearly the direct result of a meeting between Japanese officials and the Jewish representatives in Kobe.

Japan did not officially acknowledge the plan to settle Jewish refugees in Manchuria but instead transferred most of the European Jewish refugees to Shanghai. By not persecuting them and allowing them to resettle in Shanghai was already a gesture honoring Sugihara's visas and probably his wish to rescue Jewish residents trapped in Lithuania.

Regardless of Sugihara's real intention in issuing the transit visas, one has to be satisfied in realizing the fact that thousands of Lithuanian and Polish Jews made it safely to Japan because of his heroic act. Initially he reluctantly admitted his righteous act and later refused to be rewarded financially. He chose to be treated in a low-key manner, possibly because for him, it was only righteous and natural to lend a helping hand to desperate persons whose very survival was at stake. This was in great contrast to other nations – including the United States – who turned away, when they were in optimum positions to open their doors to European Jewish refugees on the brink of annihilation.

The film quotes the Jewish proverb "The triumph of evil is for the able person not to do anything". That was exactly what the Western Nations did to millions of European Jews during WWII. In contrast, Sugihara attempted his very best to avoid submission to evil by saving the thousands of lives who would otherwise meet a catastrophic end and perished in the claws of the evil hands.

Historic Visit of Jewish Delegation to Tripunithura Kalikkotta Palace

Tripunithura, 23 February 2005. B'nai B'rith International is a Jewish organization based in Washington, DC, doing great work on human rights issues in addition to their Semitic interests. A delegation representing this organization recently visited India. One of their most important destinations in India was in Kerala, particularly Cochin.

After careful thought and consideration of the historical facts, B'nai B'rith decided to recognize and honor the ancestors of the Cochin Royal Family with a "Humanitarian Award". The Jewish delegation presented this award to the Valiya Thampuran, Shri Ravi Varma Kochaniyan Thampuran during a commemorative function held at Kalikkotta Palace on February 23, 2005.

A 7-member team, headed by Kenneth Robbins, was in touch with the royal family for the past three years. The function at Kalikkotta hosted by the Cochin Royal Family Historical Society commenced at 4 P.M. The delegation, accompanied by the members of the Jewish community in Cochin and vicinity, was accorded a warm and colorful welcome. The visitors spent some time with the dignitaries and members of the Cochin Family present for the occasion and at least symbolically revived their ties with the people of Cochin.

According to Robbins, the rajas of Cochin befriended, protected and favored the Jews allowing them to even openly practice their religion. Though the Inquisition of 1636 wanted to persecute the Jews, the Portuguese Viceroy, who feared that the Raja's displeasure would affect the prince of pepper, prevented it.

Kenneth Robbins, in his request to the royal family, expressed the desire of the Jews to honor the present Valiya Thampuran "to recall the tolerance, acceptance, religious freedom and traditional trust enjoyed by us during the enlightened times of the Rajas of Cochin and also to bring these rare qualities, essentially needed for a ruler, to the notice of posterity."

"The generosity shown by the maharajas of the Cochin royal family is yet to get society's recognition," R.T.R. Varma, son of Kunjippilla Kutty Thampiuran, the Valiyamma Thampuran, said.

In Memoriam: Chen Yifei, 59. Artist, Filmmaker, Entrepreneur. 1946-2005

by Rena Krasno

SHANGHAI. To the shock of many friends and admirers throughout the world, CHEN YIFEI, Chinese artist, filmmaker, fashion designer and entrepreneur, passed away unexpectedly on April 10th, 2005. He had been engaged in the filming of "The Barber" and, according to actress Wan Yajie, had often worked for days without a break, leading to total exhaustion.

Chen Yifei, probably China's most renowned contemporary painter, was indeed a loyal son of Shanghai. He said on various occasions: "Shanghai has always been China's window to the world, we have an expression 'hai wai pai' (overseas style), which describes Shanghai perfectly. We were always formed by influences from the outside world."

Chen Yifei is much admired for his images of old Shanghai, which were deeply engraved in his mind and imagination, and for his paintings of elegant, somewhat mysterious "femmes fatales". Chen Yifei's interests extended to many topics. One of his most striking works is entitled: "Looking at History from my Space". It is a self-portrait gazing at a canvas depicting past historical events from the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1995, Chen Yifei became the first Chinese artist to sign a contract with a major Western gallery, the New York Marlborough. Since then, he has had a number of major exhibitions, including the introspective "The Homecoming of Chen Yifei" at the Shanghai Museum (July 1996). In February of the following year, this exhibit traveled to the prestigious China National Museum of Fine Arts in Beijing.

Since childhood, Chen Yifei had always been interested in movies, and he ventured into this field with his usual enthusiasm and dedication. His first film "Reverie in Old Shanghai" reflected his private view of Shanghai. It was followed by "Evening Liaison", a romantic mystery of Shanghai in the 1930s, and "The Lover", starring Hong Kong matinee idol, Tony Leung. Chen Yifei's interest then turned to the story of Jewish refugees who had escaped from Hitler's Europe to China in the late 1930s. He was assisted in this project by his friend, Professor Pan Guang, a much-respected expert on Jews in China.

After hearing the tragic news that Chen Yifei had passed away, I emailed Professor Pan Guang in Shanghai asking him how the TV film "Sanctuary Shanghai" – in which I was a participant – had come about. Professor Pan Guang replied:

"I met Chen Yifei for the first time in 1994. He informed me that he was interested in making a film about Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II, and invited me to be his advisor for this project. I remember so well the many hours I spent with Chen Yifei telling him the story of Jews in China, a subject that began to fascinate him more and more. In 1996 and 1997, I helped to arrange for his team interviews with former refugees in USA, Europe and Israel. We then discussed the possibility to invite some refugees back to Shanghai, take them to visit their former homes and film the reactions both of the refugees and of the Chinese people. I also suggested that we invite two Jewish Old China Hands from Shanghai. That is the reason why we invited you."

The touching documentary "Sanctuary Shanghai" was filmed in April 1998. It was very well received by Chinese TV viewers.

In fact, Chen Yifei got so involved in the history of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, that he completed a second film, "Escape to Shanghai", about a refugee violinist. It is a documentary about Heinz Gruenberg, a young Jewish boy who fled to China with his family from the Nazis in the late 1930s. His father bought him a toy violin, which the boy came to love and he eventually became a much-respected musician. The film centers on Gruenberg's return to Shanghai after more than half a century and his poignant memories. It is an amazing tale of a city that was able in spite of difficult wartime conditions to absorb penniless foreign refugees...

On November 17, 1997, "Escape to Shanghai" premiered at the Asian Museum, San Francisco. This event was sponsored by the San Francisco Shanghai Sister City Committee and the Sino-Judaic Institute.

In 1999, Chen Yifei launched a clothing line name "Leyefe". A year later, he set up two home ware outlets in Shanghai called "Leyefe Home". A man of many talents and interests, Chen Yifei sponsored a youth magazine, organized an arts foundation, and donated generously to Project Hope to help the underprivileged.

All those who met Chen Yifei will not forget his great personal charm, enthusiasm, love of life, optimism and kindness.

Veteran Journalist/Writer Israel Epstein Dies

compiled from the *People's Daily Online*, 31 May, and *The New York Times* article by Douglas Martin, 2 June 2005

Veteran journalist and writer Israel Epstein, hailed by *People's Daily* as "a true old friend of the Chinese people," died in Beijing at age 90 on the morning of May 26.

On April 17, Chinese President Hu Jintao paid a special visit to Israel Epstein, Epi for short, who interviewed Chairman Mao Zedong in the 1930s when working for US news organizations, to extend greetings on the eve of his 90th birthday.

President Hu praised Epstein for the "outstanding contributions" he made to China's progress and his "sincere affection for China and the Chinese people" in the past several decades during which he witnessed all the phases of China's revolution, construction and reform under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Born to a Jewish family on April 20, 1915, Epstein came to China with his parents at the age of two. He began to work for China's revolution in 1933 and became a Chinese citizen in 1957. The noted journalist and writer once served as editor-in-chief of *China Reconstructs* (*China Today*) magazine. From 1983 on, he has been elected member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the top advisory body in China.

He and perhaps a dozen other aging foreign-born residents of Beijing were sometimes seen as the last true believers in a revolution that has sometimes seemed blurred by time's passage and China's embrace of free markets and consumerism.

Mr. Epstein hung Mao's portrait on his bedroom wall; knew the American journalist Edgar Snow well enough to help edit his books; was a protégé of the widow of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of China's first republic; and was able to say the five years he spent in prison on false charges during the Cultural Revolution had helped improve him by shrinking his ego... "My basic ideas have not changed," he told *The Observer*. "I see no reason to change them."

Israel Epstein was born on April 20, 1915, in Warsaw, then under Russian control. His father was imprisoned by the czarist authorities for leading a labor uprising, and his mother was once exiled to Siberia. "The earliest influence on me came from my socialist parents," Mr. Epstein said in an interview with *China Daily* in 2003.

After the outbreak of World War I, his father was sent by his company to Japan to develop business in the Pacific region. As the German Army approached Warsaw, his mother, with him in her arms, fled the city and traveled east to be reunited with her husband. After experiencing anti-Jewish sentiment in several places, they settled in Tianjin in north China. He was then 2.

Mr. Epstein began his career as a journalist at 15, working for the Tianjin-based *Peking and Tientsin Times*, an English-language newspaper. He covered China's struggle against Japanese invaders for *United Press* and other Western news organizations.

In 1941, a short item in *The New York Times* reported that he had been killed, but it later turned out that he had faked his death to divert the Japanese who were hunting him. He anonymously submerged into a Japanese internment camp for a while.

Mr. Epstein became acquainted with Mr. Snow after his editor assigned him to review one of Mr. Snow's books, and Mr. Snow showed him his classic "Red Star Over China" before it was published. Mr. Snow reciprocated by reading Mr. Epstein's unpublished works.

In Hong Kong, Mr. Epstein worked with Soong Ching Ling, Sun Yat-sen's widow, whom he had met in left-wing political activities in the 1930's. She arranged for him to visit North Shaanxi Province and Shanxi-Suiyuan Anti-Japanese Base Areas, and interview Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other CPC leaders, along with a delegation of Chinese and foreign reporters. Mr. Epstein said his conversations in a cave with Mao had changed his life.

In 1944, Mr. Epstein visited Britain, then spent the next five years in the United States, where he published "The Unfinished Revolution in China" to good reviews... In 1951, Ms. Soong invited him to return to China to edit *China Reconstructs*, later renamed *China Today*. He was editor in chief until his retirement at 70, and then editor emeritus.

His five years in prison during the Cultural Revolution, on charges of plotting against Zhou, ended in 1973 with a personal apology from Zhou and a restoration of his exalted position. His prominence in China was suggested by the annual talks Mao had with him. Deng attended Mr. Epstein's retirement reception in 1985.

His other major books include "From Opium War to Liberation," "The People's War," and "Tibet Transformed." and "Woman in World History: Soong Ching Ling" in 1993. Mr. Epstein first wife, Elsie Fairfax-Cholmeley, died in 1984. He is survived by his wife, Wan Bi, two children and two stepchildren.

He will be buried at the Babaoshan Cemetery for Revolutionaries.

Film review 'Sugihara: The Conspiracy of Kindness'

by Alfred Luk

The film entitled: 'Sugihara: The Conspiracy of Kindness' was aired by PBS on May 5, 2005, during the global observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day. It was a brilliantly directed and executed film. This film featured Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese Consul in Kaunas, whose courageous act of issuing visas saved the lives of some 2,000 fleeing Jews. Unlike other documentary films on the same subject, it did not simply provide generally well-known information but also disclosed details and historical background related both to Chiune Sugihara and his political environment at the time.

The film-maker included in her documentary associated background footage, remarks by key survivors rescued by Sugihara's visas, quotations by authors who had studied the same subject, interviews by Sugihara's family members, and photographs related to the epic events depicting Sugihara frantically issuing visas to desperate Jews crowding around his residence. Thus, from its very beginning, the film successfully demonstrated the urgency of an impending catastrophe and the imperativeness of the Japanese visas.

The director and the producer also included artistically produced pictures to recreate the scenes of meeting between Chiune Sugihara and Solly Ganor. Solly Ganor, a central figure in the story, vividly described his personal encounter with Sugihara, which probably sparked Sugihara's decision to rescue the Jews in Kaunas, Lithuania. At the time, Ganor was a little boy and by chance met Sugihara at a local bakery. Ganor, found himself was short of change to buy a piece of his favorite pastry, when Sugihara, who was a total stranger, offered to pay for Ganor. Ganor was so impressed with his good will, and he spontaneously invited the Japanese diplomat and his family to share a Hanukkah dinner at his parents' home. This was a unique opportunity for Sugihara to learn about the persecution of Polish Jews in Warsaw. A few Polish Jews who had narrowly escaped from Warsaw also attended the same Hanuk-

kah celebration. One of them, Rosenblatt, told Sugihara about the horrifying atrocities committed by the Nazis in Warsaw. In the course of the film, numerous chronological events in Sugihara's life were highlighted and discussed. They offered glimpses of Sugihara's character, achievements, missions and accomplishments. These were key issues to help find pieces that fit into the large puzzle as to why Sugihara was stationed in Kaunas and how he resolved to carry out the noble act of issuing transit visas to Jews.

Sugihara's refusal to follow his father's will to become a medical doctor was mentioned in the film. He did not openly confront his father as the result of his *Bushido* (the spirit of Samurai) training. Instead, he defied his father's plan for his future by simply signing his name in a University entrance examination without actually taking it.

In the weeks of 1940 during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the danger of the Nazi army invading Lithuania was impending. The film showed an exhausted Sugihara pleading with the Japanese Foreign Office for permission to grant transit visas to desperate Jews. Only after the third denial of his request, did Sugihara defy the order and issue precious visas to the terrified recipients. These two events portrayed in the film amply demonstrated that Sugihara would stand up against authority, to carry out what he deemed was the most appropriate course. He might have felt that to save the lives in innocent people was far more noble and righteous than to be a loyal diplomat fulfilling Japan's WWII wartime goal.

Another scene in the film describing Sugihara's resignation of his post in Harbin, demonstrated his disapproval of the Japanese mistreatment of Chinese in Manchuria. This event was further evidence of Sugihara's moral character, a precursor of a greater courage and nobility demonstrated later in Kaunas.

Sugihara's post in Kaunas, Lithuania was puzzling because there was no community of Japanese citizens, nor any noticeable Japanese commercial activities in Lithuania. The film however handled this interesting issue by clarifying for the viewers the strategic position of Lithuania in

1940. In fact, the observation of encroaching armies of Nazi Germany and Soviet Union around Lithuania could provide vital information to the Japanese. A clash and large-scale war between Nazi Germany and Soviet Union would mean that the Red Army would be unable to divert much of the main body of their armed forces to confront the Japanese Army in Manchuria. Thus, Sugihara's assignment in Kaunas becomes understandable. His son Hiroki's account of his father's disappearance for two to three hours whenever the family made an excursion to the border of Lithuania near the positions of the Nazi Germany and Soviet Union armies, further reinforced the theory of Sugihara's main mission as a Japanese diplomat. The director cautiously interpreted Sugihara's diplomatic work in Lithuania and invited Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, an author whose book also dealt with Sugihara and his heroic act, to appear in the film. She reminded the viewers that the difference between gathering information and gathering evidence is a very thin, obscure line and sometimes marginal. Gathering information for one's country she stressed, was the duty of any responsible diplomat.

The producer and director made clear the impact of Sugihara's righteous act of issuing visas by drawing attention to the approximately 250,000 Jews in once thriving pre-WWII Lithuania, a number which plummeted to a mere 30,000 at the end of WWII. Today hardly more than 1,000 Jews reside in Lithuania. It is extremely painful to realize that 220,000 Lithuania Jews perished at the hands of Nazi occupying force in Lithuania. Had the other diplomats of major Western nations acted in a similar manner, undoubtedly there would be many more precious Jewish lives could have been rescued from the murderous jaws of the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators.

Of the 2,139 recipients of transit visas signed by Sugihara, roughly a few more than 2,000 made it safely to Kobe from Lithuania. Today, we have no exact count of how many survivors and their descendants benefited from Sugihara's transit visas. The film pointed out that one transit visa allowed a family to escape, which makes it impossible to make an exact calculation of how many people were actually saved.

BOOK NOOK

Two Reviews of *The Jews of Harbin: A Tale from the Heart*Review by *Teddy Piastunovich*

The Jews of Harbin: A Tale from the Heart
Author: Teddy Kaufman
Original in Hebrew.
English version forthcoming.

Price: Donation of US \$10, plus postage.
Order from: Association of Former Residents of China in Israel, 13 Gruzenberg St., P.O. Box 29786, Tel Aviv 61297, Israel.

(Editorial Note: The author, Teddy Kaufman, is President of Igud Yotzei Sin (Association of Former Residents of China in Israel.)

Kaufman opens the his book with the following paragraph:

"Harbin was founded in 1898 on the site of a small Chinese village. On that date, the first Jews arrived there, and the last Jews departed in 1963. Hence, the story of the Jewish community in Harbin spans a period of only 65 years. One of the characteristics of the Harbin Jewish community was the remarkably smooth integration of its members from diverse backgrounds and their rapid adaptation to an environment previously totally unknown to them. The Jews of Harbin originated from various areas and followed different traditions. Some were well educated, even learned, while others were illiterate lacking in the most basic religious knowledge. But, unlike the Jewish communities in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere in the Diaspora, who achieved integration over hundreds of years, the Harbin community came into existence almost overnight."

This book, whose author grew up in Harbin, is both a trip down memory lane and the historic documentary of an eyewitness. It is the story of Harbin and the Jews who lived there, the successes and tragedies that befell prominent local Jews, such as the Skidelsky and Caspè families, and the selfless devotion of the Jewish Community's brave leader, Dr. A. Kaufman (who was the author's father.) Above all, Kaufman describes the little known Jewish life in Harbin as it unfolded before his eyes. This is a book that should be read by all those conducting research on Jews in Harbin. In ex-Harbiners, it will

evoke memories of days gone by and to all readers this book will surely present a new perspective on the actions of Japanese occupying forces during turbulent times.

The Jews in Harbin reveals the courage of Jews isolated in a distant corner of Asia during the difficult days of post revolutionary Russia and World War II, their fortitude and honorable actions in a period of rising anti-Semitism.

Additional Review by *Rena Krasno*

The story of Jews in Harbin is indeed close to the heart of Teddy Kaufman, President of the Association of Former Jewish Residents of China in Israel. His father, Abraham Kaufman, a dedicated medical doctor and leader of Jewish communities in China, is still today a hero in the minds of Jewish "Old China Hands". Dr. Kaufman served as a beloved model not only to his son, Teddy, but to all Jews who had met him personally or read about him.

Teddy Kaufman's book is a detailed history of Jews in Harbin, and the changes in their fate as various rulers took over the city. It is a combination of detailed historic research and personal involvement, a source of much information for all those interested in Jewish history in China.

Harbin was founded in 1898 and Jews arrived early to settle there. By 1963, most Jews had gone but in the short period of 65 years they left an indelible mark on the city, where they played a role in the economy, professional life and culture. The Jews in Harbin came from different countries and different backgrounds. Some were religious, some not, some passionate Zionists, some indifferent to the movement.

Many Russian Jews escaping anti-Semitism and cruel pogroms had arrived with the construction of the East China Railway in 1896. At the time, it was Russia's greatest project, which ended in 1903 after 3,819 km of rail had been laid. In Harbin, Jews were not restricted in their lives and work as they had been in Russia. They could engage freely in their professions and live without terror. In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War broke out. Among the 1,000,000 Russian soldiers were 30,000 Jews. One of them, a great Zionist, Josef

Trumpeldor, was the first Jewish officer in the Russian army. He was severely wounded in the battle of Port Arthur, taken prisoner by the Japanese, and reached Harbin when he was released. Trumpeldor took this opportunity to lecture to Jewish youth in the city, where his pro-Zionist influence became very strong.

The 1920s and 1930s were good times for Harbin Jews. They founded a Jewish Bank, a Jewish High School, Zionist organizations, newspapers, a fine library, benevolent societies, an old people's home, medical clinics, a burial society and cemetery. Their Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Kissilov was revered for his total dedication to the Jewish community.

When Japanese troops entered Manchuria in 1931, the entire picture changed. Many Japanese cooperated with White Russian Fascists who were fiercely anti-Semitic. Their paper "Nash Put" (Our Way) was a mirror reflecting Nazi hatred for Jews. In 1933, Simon Kaspe, the young son of a prominent Harbin Jewish businessman, was kidnapped for ransom and tortured to death by White Russians supported by some Japanese. The perpetrators were arrested and eventually released.

After the end of World War II, the Red Army occupied Harbin from August 17, 1945 - April 1946. Dr. Abraham Kaufman, the author's fearless father, who had suffered under Japanese occupation, was now persecuted by the Soviets. On August 12, 1945, Dr. Kaufman was arrested. He was taken away with other prisoners in an open truck, surrounded by NKVD people. He would finally be reunited with his family only in 1961 (in Israel), having survived dreadful conditions in a Russian concentration camp.

The final pages of the book are of a more personal nature. The author speaks with love and admiration about his parents, tells the story of some other Harbin Jews, and describes the joy when the creation of the State of Israel is announced.

In the Epilogue, Kaufman says: "When I left Harbin in 1949, its population was 800,000. Since then, I visited Harbin twice (in 1992 and 1994) and found that Harbin had become a modern city whose population in 1994 had reached 8,400,000...We are proud to be descendants of Harbin Jews."

Martin Buber and Taoism

(continued from page 1)

Although Buber published no further books on Chinese subjects, his interest in Taoist ideas did not cease in 1911. In 1924 he subjected the *TTC* to a fairly systematic study when asked to give a series of privately arranged lectures to a lay group. These lectures, not recorded by Buber himself but probably by one of the participants, were neither revised nor published, and exist today only as a typewritten manuscript entitled, "Talks with Martin Buber in Ascona, August 1924, about Lao-tzu's *Tao Te Ching*."

In 1924 Buber was living in Heppenheim, coming regularly to the University of Frankfurt where he lectured on the history of religions. Although the majority of the courses which he offered between 1924 and 1933 were clearly on Jewish topics, some course titles suggest that he included also other subjects and that he probably discussed Taoist concepts also. In 1924, Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930) joined the faculty, beginning a distinguished albeit short-lived career in Chinese studies. Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) whose friendship with Buber was of some years' standing, also visited the university and was there, for example, at the end of 1926, to read from his works. Wilhelm's close friendship with Hesse dated from 1897.¹ In addition, a rare personal relationship existed between Wilhelm and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) who was brought into this charmed circle for a time due to Wilhelm and Jung's mutual interest in Chinese thought, especially Taoism and the *I-ching*...

Wilhelm had gone to Tsingtao in 1899 as a missionary for the Weimar Mission, two years after Germany occupied the Shantung peninsula. His missionary career was soon diverted; however, into other channels. He acquired remarkable expertise in Chinese and Chinese classical literature, and from 1910 on, he published a series of outstanding translations...In 1924, when he joined the philosophical faculty of the University of Frankfurt, he also founded the China-Institut which became a focal point for a variety of China-oriented cultural activities. The institute attracted visiting sinological luminaries from other European universities, as well as major Chinese literary and

religious figures, among them the ever-popular Hu Shih (1891-1962).

But Wilhelm's hopes for the Institute transcended the mere staging of cultural activities: the institute was to be a beacon for the culture of the future when, he believed, East and West would at last meet. . . Did Buber, Wilhelm, Hesse, and Jung engage in discussions and did they share thoughts on Chinese philosophy? Unfortunately concrete evidence for Buber's involvement in the institute's activities and in an ongoing dialogue is meager. Apparently Wilhelm kept Buber informed on matters of interest to him, and Buber (together with Jung) participated as discussants in the institute's 1928 fall lectures delivered by Wilhelm.

Buber, however, had still other contacts. Between 1927 and 1931 Buber corresponded with Willy Tonn (d. 1957) about the latter's Chinese interests² and work. Tonn pursued Chinese studies in Berlin in the late twenties and early thirties, but seems not to have earned a doctorate. He was at the time translating a brief, esoteric Taoist text and the 1512 stele inscription of the K'aifeng Jews.³

Tonn, who in the 1950s assisted Buber with the *Chuang-tzu* revisions, had fled to Shanghai in 1938, shortly after *Kristallnacht*, where he devoted himself to educating his fellow refugees about China. His many publications in the refugee press of the 1940s include translations from Chinese prose and poetry as well as creital articles on a variety of Chinese subjects. During that decade he also established an Asia Seminar where he lectured to the German-speaking refugees on Chinese history and culture. After Tonn came to Tel Aviv in 1948 or 1949, contact between the two men resumed. But Tonn in Tel Aviv, like Buber in Jerusalem, found little interest then in China, her history and civilization.

Buber continued a slight but steady interest in the *TTC* in the 1940s while teaching at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Among his notes from those years there are several translated chapters from the *TTC*, notations on Chinese classical grammar, and several translated passages from the *Lun-yü* (Analects), suggesting that he included materials on Chinese thought in his lectures. In 1942 he published the translation of eight *TTC* chapters...Finally,

in the 1950s, he revised the *Chuang-tzu*, enlisting Tonn's help on points of transliteration and translation. Still, for both men this must have been lonely work. Jerusalem's Hebrew University had then neither a department of East Asian Studies nor did its library contain even the most basic works on China and Chinese philosophy.

These, briefly, are the years and circumstances of Buber's interest in Taoist ideas. Clearly the *TTC* occupied him more than the *Chuang-tzu* and, except for work on the *Chuang-tzu* revisions, he returned time and again to concepts expressed in that brief, enigmatic work. The two questions this raises, are, which Taoist concepts did he consider significant, and how did he understand and use them. In what follows, some answers will be attempted.

¹ This essay is based in part on my introduction in Martin Buber, Alex Page, trans., *Chinese Tales, Zhuangzi: Sayings and Parables and Chinese Ghost and Love Stories* (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, 1991), p. ix-xxiii.

² After 1924, Buber, Hesse, and Wilhelm were apparently in close contact.

³ On Chinese Jews Tonn published "Eine Jüdische Inschrift der Synagoge in K'aifeng fu aus dem Jahre 1512," *Gemeinde-blatt der Gemeinde zu Berlin*, 20 [?] (1930), pp. 360-364. Buber expressed an interest in both the translation and in the work on the Chinese Jews in two letters to Tonn, dated March 7, 1927 and January 31, 1931, respectively. I wish to thank the Leo Beck Institute, New York, for making these letters available to me.

~ PART II - TO BE CONTINUED ~

Ally in the Making

(continued from page 1)

tions, and they are not going to make that long trip twice...

Why would a country like China, which is now feeling its oats and is widely considered the world's most serious challenger to US global hegemony, make overtures to a country like Israel? Especially at a time when, as a result of its economic success, China has in the last decade gone from an oil exporter to an oil importer and recently inked a \$75 billion multi-year energy-contract with Iran. And at a time when both the Phalcon and Harpy episodes show that the one thing the Chinese truly covet from Israel - hi-tech military hardware and software - will still not be coming their way.

In addition, Israel and China don't exactly share a democratic tradition, nor core religious values - the mortar that cements Israel's ties with the US. So why the Chinese interest? This type of question, Lu intimates, is only asked by those who sell themselves short. "We admire the Jewish people so much," says Lu... "Israel is such a strong country, surrounded by hostile countries for more than 50 years. It has achieved so much. This is a strong reason for the country to be admired by the rest of the world." As Chinese officials are frequently prone to do when speaking about Israel, Lu soon slips easily into a discourse about how the Jews and the Chinese have a fond history and similar values. "The Jewish people and the Chinese people are similar," he says. "We enjoy the same family values, saving money, hard work, importance of education." This is all said very matter-of-factly, with no trace of malice harking back to any kind of anti-Semitic stereotypes. Lu talks about the Jewish genius, and mentions Einstein, Marx and even Lenin, who he insists was half Jewish. The Chinese diplomat's message is clear: The Jews are smart, they have given the world some very smart people; so even without the arms deals, it's worth working closely with the Jewish state.

This attitude, says Reuven Merhav, a former Foreign Ministry director-general who pioneered Israeli-Chinese relations in the late Eighties, is reflective of the Chinese attitude. "They have a real appreciation of Jews," says Merhav, who as Israel's consul-general in Hong Kong in the mid-Eighties established an Israeli academic and scientific liaison office in Beijing that became Israel's embassy there. "They appreciate the Jewish intellect." In addition, he says, the paving of ties with China was made easier because the Chinese are not burdened by any anti-Semitic baggage. "When we came to talk with them, the table was clean, there was no [historic] anti-Semitism," he notes. "But, let's face it, the Chinese don't want to be Israel's friend just because some of our co-religionists happen to be - or were in the past - super smart. This certainly helps, but is not reason enough. Good relations with Israel serve a number of key Chinese strategic interests," Merhav says.

The Chinese, Merhav maintains, bring three perspectives to the table when in-

teracting with the nations of world: how it fits in with their view of themselves as a superpower; how it fits in with their self-perceived role - by virtue of their being one of the five permanent UN Security Council members - as a member of the world's board of directors, with all the concomitant responsibilities; and what is the nature of the bilateral relations.

When Israel and China formally established ties in 1992, what interested them - at least from a bilateral point of view - was Israel's ability to provide China with state-of-art weaponry. Indeed, even before the formal relationship, Israel was supplying China with hundreds of millions of dollars of arms a year. A study in the *Nineties* by the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency estimated Israel's total arms exports to China between 1984 and 1994 at \$5.7 billion, or an annual average of about \$526 million. If that was the situation before formal ties were established, the expectation was that this aspect of the relationship would grow enormously when the countries established formal ties. But then the US - worried about sophisticated technology in the hands of a country it perceives as potential military foe - intervened and squashed the \$1.2 billion sale of the Phalcon.

The Phalcon fiasco, says Merhav, was more than anything a personal insult to then Chinese president Jiang Zemin, who in April 2000 paid a state visit to Israel, was pictured lollygagging in the Dead Sea, and was given assurances that the sale would go through. But then it didn't. Ties nose-dived until 2002, when Israel agreed to pay China \$300 million for pulling out of the deal, and Shimon Peres, who was then foreign minister, went to China to deliver the good news. Ties improved, but the damage remained. Now, while the Chinese are well aware of Israel's strong ties with Washington, they see the relationship running both ways, says China expert Yitzhak Shichor of Haifa University. Although they recognize the influence Washington has on Jerusalem, he says, they also believe Israel has a grand capacity to influence US policy. "The Chinese believe that if Israel would have wanted to, they could have influenced the US to give in on both the Phalcon and the drones," he maintains. "They think Israel has an enormous amount of influ-

ence in the US, and didn't use it in these cases."

While readily pointing to the shared values and similarities between Jews and Chinese, Lu says in recounting the Phalcon incident that one value the Chinese could introduce to Israel is "keeping faith, integrity." "This is very important in our social life, and also in dealing with bilateral relations," he says. "No matter how much I hate someone, I must show him my respect. And I must keep my word. Failing to do so is a breach of something very important in our tradition."...

The scuttling of the Phalcon deal took place in July 2000, just a few months before the outbreak of the Palestinian violence in September of that year. And when the violence hit, China - which had begun tilting away from its reflexive anti-Israel public stance to a more nuanced public diplomacy regarding Israel - reverted to its old patterns of fierce public criticism. And it did so with a vengeance, culminating in what Israeli diplomats said were some articles in the Chinese press during Operation Defensive Shield that bordered on the anti-Semitic. And yet, when basic interests are at stake, time has a way of healing, especially if accompanied by the balm of a \$300-million breach of contract payment. "We have realized that what happened with the plane is not only the fault of the Israeli government," Lu says. Referring to the US, he adds, "There were some external factors involved as well. We have to look forward, not backward. This relationship is mutually beneficial for both countries."

This reference to the US as an "external factor" popped up in a press conference Tang gave in Jerusalem in December, but in this case it was in reference to the Harpy drone issue, not the Phalcon. "We cooperate with Israel in many fields, and all this cooperation serves the fundamental interests of both sides, and none of them violate the interest of any third parties," Tang says when asked about the controversy surrounding the drones. "Our cooperation has always been normal and healthy and not targeted against any third country, and that is why any interference, intervention or disturbance from any other country in the world is groundless and unreasonable in this matter."

As "groundless and unreasonable" as it may have been, the "third party" interference was there, and it worked - at least partly. In 1994, Israel sold China Harpy drones, a killer drone that hovers over enemy anti-missile batteries and radar systems and then destroys them by diving into them. The Chinese recently returned one of the drones to Israel for an upgrade, and the US reportedly called on Israel to confiscate it, so as not to upset the military balance between China and Taiwan. After weeks of back and forth on the matter, Israel - according to Lu - decided not to upgrade the drone. But rather than confiscate it, Jerusalem just sent it back to Beijing. One senior Foreign Ministry official at the time dramatically - indeed, over-dramatically - framed the dilemma in terms of Israel being forced to choose between China and the US. Surely, such a choice is a no-brainer. As Shichor says, "If you ask which is more important, the US or China, there is no argument. If we have a problem in the region, China will not come to our aid, and the US will."

And China itself has begrudgingly come to understand this consideration. Lu says that Beijing's more understanding response to the Harpy issue than to the Phalcon is due to its attempt to "put ourselves in your boots. We were more tolerant this time around," Lu says. "We never scolded the Israeli side. We just wanted to let the issue get resolved quietly, and not let it damage the bilateral ties. I can't say we are satisfied, but while last time we publicly expressed our outrage, this time we kept everything in. We learned a lesson, and didn't want to turn it into a big issue. This is only one aspect of our relationship."

WHILE REJECTING the premise that relations with China need to come at the expense of Israel's relations with the US, Lu admits that because of US concerns, relations with Israel have their limits, that there is a glass ceiling. But, as Merhav asks, what relationship doesn't have limits? At the end of the day, says Jonathan Rynhold, a lecturer at Bar-Ilan University's political science department, who teaches a course in China's foreign policy, the US will not let Israel develop independent, sky-is-the-limit relations with China. But both he and Shichor question the wisdom

of this policy. An Israeli-Chinese military relationship, Rynhold argues, has a valuable intelligence component that could actually benefit the US. "Israel had connections with the military that they didn't have," he says...

Nevertheless, Lu says China's interest in Israel does not only revolve around arms. China is extremely interested in Israeli technology, and advances in medicine and communication. "We are a developing nation, with a large number of people beneath the poverty line," he says. "We have a large part of our population living in the countryside. We can learn from Israeli hi-tech in agriculture, and in building settlements in deserts and in remote areas." It is precisely helping China in its mammoth modernization effort where Israel can be of most help, says Rynhold. "At the end of the day, the Arabs can only provide them with one basic resource," he says, referring to oil and the growing Chinese dependence on its importation. "But Israel can help with technology. China lags very far behind in developing patents, they are not good at that sort of thing. Israel is, so it makes for a good match." But what Israel has to offer China does not end with a computer chip. "The Chinese have undertaken a strategic assessment, and understand our weight and importance in the region," Merhav says. "They understand that nothing in the Middle East will move without us."

Many countries give lip service to a yearning for peace and stability in the Middle East, including Russia and China. But whereas there are those in Jerusalem who believe that Moscow is more interested in the diplomatic process gives them international standing, China is genuinely interested in stability. Oil fuels the Chinese economic engine, and some 50% of its energy needs now come from the Middle East. Stability here is turning into a vital Chinese strategic interest. "The Chinese realize that in order to influence what goes on here, they have to have a relationship with Israel," Shichor says. "In the past, they only had influence on the Palestinians and the Arabs; they want some on Israel as well." Which explains why...China seems determined - as was evident during Tang's visit in December - to come back for more.

If Israel had any moral scruples, say some foreign policy moral purists, it would place its eggs in democratic Taiwan's basket, and not in that of mainland China, which isn't exactly the world's beacon of freedom and human rights. "Get serious," reply diplomatic officials in Jerusalem, who point out that Israel's policy toward Taiwan follows the lead of the US and most of the free world. What this means is that Israel has a business interest office in Taipei, not an embassy, and that it is very mindful of Beijing's reaction when deciding what type of business to do with Taiwan. For instance, while the US does sell arms to Taiwan, Israel does not, in order not to upset the Chinese. Israel and Taiwan flirted over the possible sale of 40 Kfir fighter planes in the early 1990s, but the idea went nowhere, and was finally nixed in 1992, the year formal ties were established with Beijing.

Defense Ministry Director-General Amos Yaron was quoted in 2002 in the *Defense News* as saying, "China is a very important country for us and we do not want to initiate anything that can put us in a situation where our relationship [with Beijing] will suffer. There is no chance of changing our policy regarding Taiwan." Which doesn't mean there is no trade. There is, and it is robust, to the tune of about \$1 billion a year - but it is civilian. Israeli-Chinese trade, by comparison, was \$2.4 billion in 2004, with the goal of doubling that by 2008. Taiwan also plays another dimension in Israeli-Chinese relations, the reason Israeli officials use to rationalize China's consistently poor voting record on Israel at the UN. "The Chinese are petrified about losing votes in the UN on issues regarding Taiwan," one official said. "So as a result, they vote with the Arab bloc to ensure that the Arab bloc will vote for them. They don't want to take any chances." The official said this is an issue that does come up from time to time with the Chinese, but not something Israel is willing to go the mat over. "I am from the pragmatic school," the official said, adding that for Israel "the bread is buttered" in Beijing, not at General Assembly votes in the UN. Nor, he may very well have added, in Taipei.