

中國-猶太學院

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- 2) To assist the descendants of the ancient Jewish community of the city of Kaifeng, Henan province, in their efforts to preserve and maintain the artifacts and documents they have inherited from their forebears, as well as in their efforts to reconstruct the history of their community.
- 3) To support the establishment and maintenance of a Judaica section in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum.
- 4) To promote and assist the study and research of the history of early Jewish travel in China and in the rise and fall of the various Jewish communities that were established in China over the past millennia.
- 5) To publish general information and scholarly materials dealing with all aspects of the Chinese-Jewish experience.
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N E W S
L E T T E R

Points East
中國-猶太學院

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STANISLAS D' ESCAYRAC DE LAUTURE: AN EMISSARY OF THE ALLIANCE UNIVERSAL ISRAELITE IN CHINA

by Frederic Viey

Following a meeting of the Parisian Committee of the "Alliance Universelle Israelite" at which the Rabbi Mahir Charleville made a statement on the situation of the Jews of China, the members of the board decided to address a French diplomat on a mission in China to obtain information on the Jewish Community of Kaifeng, described by the Jesuit missionaries at the beginning of the XVIII-th century. The "Bulletin of the Alliance Universelle Israelite" of 1861 published the letter sent by the Alliance Universelle Israelite to Sir Count Stanislas d' Escayrac de Lauture, charged by the French Government with a scientific mission in China:

*"The Israelites of China,
Paris, on May 6, 1861*

Sir,

The scientific mission which you perform in China with a competence which fixes on you the attention of the learned world, and the love of the science at the level of all the tests which it imposes, offers to your curiosity and in Europe a crowd of problems, of which nobody is to disdain at this time of patient research and fertile comparisons. The religious questions especially have powerful charm, to which would know how to resist no philosophic spirit, and they are connected by an immediate interest with the evolution of various cults. Please find, Sir, that our curiosity comes to join you through the space, and to demand a more complete satisfaction, on a point which you only touched in a remarkable communication made for the public by the Universal Instructor. In this correspondence, relative to the religious faiths of the Chinese, we read the following sentence:

"The Israelites established to Kai-fon, from before Christ, offer great honour to the memory of Confucius".

Here we are, Sir, by which title we cite this passage to write to you. The Alliance Universelle Israelite is a free, lawful association, in the name of the progress, under the aegis of the freedom of conscience, and spread already to all the points of Europe. Among the other objectives, it suggested establishing a base of general statistics of the Israelites spread on the surface of the globe. One can, without any systematic concern, admire the vitality of this race, to which we belong, and to follow with a singular interest its dispersal in the whole world. The science of the past finds there a problem which is the most deserving of

(continued on page 3)

"NOT JUST ANOTHER COUNTRY:" THE OLMERT FAMILY SOJOURN THROUGH CHINA AS A CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF TRAVEL IN JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION

by Jonathan Goldstein

"China is the country which hosted our parents. They studied in China. They spoke Chinese, and the Chinese culture is part of my heritage and memory as a young kid in the State of Israel. So China is not just another country for me." Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Briefing, 8 January 2007, p. 1.

Between 8 and 10 January 2007, the University of Cape Town's Kaplan Center for Jewish Studies and Research convened an international conference to examine the role of "travel" and "journeys" in the formation of Jewish identity. This article adds an East Asian dimension to that discussion. In particular, it examines the sojourn through China of the family of one of Israel's best known contemporary personalities, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. How did the Olmert family's political identity coalesce in an Asian political context? This article utilizes the four-part analytical framework suggested by conference organizers Tony Kushner, Sarah Pearce, and Milton Shain for examining Jewish journeys in many parts of the world. It focuses first on "leavings," or what motivated Jews to abandon their ancestral homelands; second, "passages," or how the vicissitudes of travel to new and relatively unknown destinations shaped Jewish consciousness, thought and behaviour; third, "identity," the new cultural and intellectual characteristics which Jews adopted at their new destinations; and fourth, the "return," or how Jews, in their new homelands, remembered and utilized their ties to their ancestral homelands.[1]

[1] "Leavings"

In 1919, Ehud Olmert's grandfather Iosif Iosifovitch was a middle class merchant the city of Samara, a trading port on Russia's Volga River which came to be known as Kuybyshev in the Soviet period. In that year, Iosif made the momentous decision to move himself, his wife, young son and daughter away from the chaos gripping their ancestral homeland. For many Jews 1919 was a time of political uncertainty, social upheaval, famine, and virulent anti-Semitic pogroms which were byproducts of civil war between Red and White Russian factions. With little chance of escaping to the West and with strong devotion toward things Russian, Iosif turned eastward, traveling across the Trans Siberian Railroad to the city of Harbin, a Russian railway hub located several hundred miles within Man-

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Taiwan	1
TOTAL:	277

FROM THE EDITOR

We wrap up volume 22 of *Points East* with something which I believe has never been translated into English and may not have even appeared in print since its original publication in the mid 1800s. I refer to the correspondence between the Alliance Universelle Israelite and Count Stanislas d' Escayrac de Lauture.

Also in this issue are some fascinating tales of individuals whose lives exemplify the intersection of things Chinese and Jewish: Israel Epstein, Dr. Zhong Zhiqing, the Olmert family, and Sara Imas.

Lastly, some notes on more peripheral Jewish communities, those of Karachi, Taiwan and Burma.

Mention of the latter cannot but bring a prayer to the lips for the people of that country as they struggle for their rights with the military junta that has for too long ruled there.

My best wishes to all of you for a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year!

Anson Laytner

IN THE FIELD

- **Prof. Xu Xin Hospitalized; Recovering**
Our dear friend and colleague, Prof. Xu Xin of Nanjing University, has been hospitalized with a brain aneurism. His condition is stable and improving. His son reports that he's fully conscious and articulate. We wish Xu Xin a "refuah shelaymah" and his family our best wishes.
- **Indian Jewish Newsletter**
The Indian Jewish Congregation of the USA publishes a wonderful electronic newsletter, with memoires, news, recipes and more. To receive their newsletter, please send them a request to: comments@jewsofindia.org
- **Art Exhibit on Kaifeng Jews**
The Tolman Collection opened a painting exhibit on the Kaifeng Jews in Shanghai on 1 September. This suite of 34 paintings, by the artist Yin Xin (b. 1959, Kashgar), chronicles the history of the ancient Jewish community. For more information, go to www.tolmantokyo.com.

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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SJI members interested in receiving a copy of the annual financial report should send a self-addressed envelope to: Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, Illinois College, 1101 W College Ave., Jacksonville IL 62650.

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One Chinese Jew's Tale of Adversity and Triumph

by Wang Shanshan and Li Jian
excerpted from China Daily,
07/27/2005

Leiwi Imas chose to stay in China when most other Jewish refugees left after World War II. By doing so, he began a legacy that continues to this day, in a remarkable tale of one Jewish family's connection to China's business hub that spans seven decades.

The businessman, customs officer and ex-president of the Jewish Club in Shanghai died peacefully in a downtown villa in 1962. His daughter, Sara Imas, grew up among her Chinese peers without a Chinese passport, speaking only Mandarin with a local accent...

"Don't ask me how it all began," Sara Imas quoted her father as saying every time she asked him where they were from. Neither Sara nor Leiwi's Chinese wife know much about the first four decades of his life in Germany. But a long scar on his thigh told the story of the end of Leiwi's time in Europe. He got it crossing a border fence between Germany and Poland in 1939, at the age of 43. He arrived in Shanghai the same year... He sold his gold watch and opened a small bakery on the city's Fuxing Road. Despite finding a job with the local customs office in the early 1940s, the bakery continued to do business.

By the 1940s his situation had improved markedly, as he owned a dozen businesses, including two bakeries, three wine shops, a carpet shop and a truck-rental firm, according to his daughter. He also built a family in Shanghai, by marrying in the late 1940s his *ayi*, a house cleaner named Xia Guiying, who hailed from a village in the north of East China's Jiangsu Province. He adopted Xia's son and together they had a daughter, Sara...

Leiwi Imas more than survived, he prospered. Since the mid-1940s, he and his family had lived on the third floor of the

three-storey house belonging to the Jewish Club, which has been well preserved at No 642 Fuxing Lu together with its extravagantly large garden. As president of the little-documented club, he had the privilege of living in the house. "There was a lobby on the first floor where Jews met regularly, and offices of the club on the second floor," his daughter said.

Until his death in 1962, Imas lived comfortably in the house. Though his businesses became State-owned in the 1950s, he received in his last years a monthly subsidy from the local government as well as from the Israeli Government. His daughter Sara grew up happily and felt no different from her Chinese schoolmates and friends...

As her father's heiress, she continued to live in the downtown villa and received the same monthly subsidy from the Israeli Government, which was then deemed a fortune. She met with frustration only in the late 1960s, when she was told that, being a foreigner, she couldn't "reform oneself in the vast rural areas" by choosing to become a farmer in poverty-stricken areas, as many of her peers did passionately at the call of then-Chairman Mao Zedong.

She was compensated in 1971 with a job at a local copper factory...The picture became less rosy as the "cultural revolution" developed. In 1973 a group of teenage Red Guards drove Sara Imas and her family out of the villa. Sara was wrongly accused of being an Israeli spy and was put into prison for three years until the "cultural revolution" came to an end in 1976.

Upon release from prison, Sara Imas went back to her job at the factory and was married in 1974 to one of her colleagues. The couple had a son the following year and remained happily married until the 1980s. Many in China at the time were looking to set up home abroad after the country opened its doors to the outside world, and Sara's husband was no exception. He emigrated to New Zealand and

married a local woman. Sara Imas married twice more, but neither husband lasted more than two years. It was after the break up of her third marriage that she applied to immigrate to Israel.

In 1991, at the age of 41, she was received by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as the first Jewish immigrant from China to Israel after the two countries established diplomatic relations. Because she had fluent Mandarin, Imas soon found jobs in Chinese restaurants and shops. With a small sum she managed to save, she opened a spring roll shop in her second year in Israel, selling the same Shanghai food she had eaten most of her life but had never made...

"It was really difficult at first, but I quickly invented something looking somewhat like a spring roll they sold like hot cakes, as few Israelis had seen a real spring roll at the time." With the money earned from her new business, Imas brought her three children to Israel and sent them to local schools. "But I didn't want to be a Chinese immigrant selling spring rolls all my life. I wanted to be a member of mainstream society wherever I was," she said...

Imas' efforts paid off when an Israeli court advertised for a Chinese-Hebrew translator. She was chosen from a field of 100 Chinese immigrants...In 2002, Imas grabbed hold of another opportunity and became the chief representative of Israel-based Lustig Brothers Diamond Co Ltd to the Greater China area. She was back in Shanghai with an office in the landmark Jinmao Tower.

The following year she bought an apartment in the city and married Chen Kai, a mild-mannered official with the Municipal Education Commission. She now spends three afternoons a week volunteering at Pudong Gongli Hospital, chatting with elderly patients...

tute I hope to convey what life was like for the different Jewish community in Shanghai...to convey a bit of the daily life of the historic Shanghailander Jews and their contributions to this wonderful commercial city.

My greatest thanks to Rena Krasno for inviting me to search the archive and for being a valued advisor on the project, and to Ron Bulatoff at the Hoover Institute, who went beyond the call of duty to help orient me and offer tactical advice in my work with the archival materials."

Dvir Bar-Gal is now the Director of the 'Kaddish in Shanghai' project, which is in its final stages. The documentary is to be about 1 hour long.

Keeping the Faith in Taiwan

by Larry Luxner
excerpted from the JTA 09/30/2007

TAIPEI, Taiwan — As Typhoon Sepat bore down on Taiwan with flashing thunderstorms, eight rain-soaked men gathered in a little storefront shul in downtown Taipei to welcome the Sabbath.

Despite the wind howling outside, and the fact that he didn't quite have a minyan, 89-year-old Rabbi Ephraim Einhorn held services on this August Friday just as he has nearly every Friday and Saturday since 1975.

When the hourlong Shabbat eve service was over, Einhorn recited kiddush, invited his fellow worshipers to enjoy freshly baked challah dipped in honey and asked who they were and from where they came.

It's a ritual Don Shapiro has witnessed more times than he can remember.

"Usually he wants your name, where you were born and what your occupation is," says Shapiro, a native of Rochester, N.Y., who has lived and worked in Taiwan for 38 years. "Everybody has to give a small bio, and if you forget something, he'll remind you."...

In recent years, as Jews increasingly flock to Communist China to take advantage of booming business opportunities there — Chabad-Lubavitch alone now runs seven synagogues in Hong Kong, Shanghai,

Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen — the Jewish presence in democratic, staunchly pro-Western Taiwan is disappearing.

Today, no more than 150 Jews live among the 23 million inhabitants of Taiwan. That compares to between 5,000 and 10,000 Jews in mainland China, not including another 5,000 in Hong Kong, the former British colony that reverted to Chinese control in 1997...

"When I first came here, we had 80 to 100 people coming every Shabbat," says Einhorn, who was born in Vienna and once headed the information department at the World Jewish Congress. "Most of them were of Syrian descent, so we used the Farhi [Sephardi] siddurim. Now we use Ashkenazi prayer books. I never know how many people will show up from one week to the next."

Before Einhorn, the only Jewish services in Taiwan were at the U.S. military chapel. Then the U.S. military left, and until a few years ago services were held at the five-star Hotel Landis. These days, Einhorn uses a tiny street-level office in the hotel's annex as a synagogue. Smaller than an average American living room, it's crammed with a holy ark, bookshelves, a dozen black chairs and a dining-room table piled high with siddurim and newspaper clippings.

On Rosh Hashanah and Passover eve, services and communal dinners are held at the American Club, not far from Taipei's famed Grand Hotel. About 50 to 60 people usually show up.

The rest of the time, Einhorn is strictly a one-man show and the undisputed authority on Jews in Taiwan. "I am the rabbi, the shamash and the treasurer. And I pay all the bills," Einhorn says. "Somebody's got to do it."

The businessman-turned-rabbi...first came to Taiwan as head of a Kuwaiti business delegation in 1975.

"Einhorn is the glue that holds the Jewish community together," says William Ting, 38, a Taiwan-born corporate lawyer who grew up in Pasadena, Calif., and converted to Judaism a year ago under Einhorn's supervision. "I met him at the European

Chamber of Commerce four years ago, but I never discovered the rabbi side of him until a year later."

Aside from Einhorn's Shabbat services, Jewish life in Taiwan is virtually nonexistent. However, the island has a Holocaust museum at a church in Tainan, about 90 minutes south of Taipei via train, and there's a Jewish exhibit that Einhorn organized at the Buddhist-run Museum of World Religions in suburban Taipei.

The only kosher food in this land of pork dumplings and fried oxtails is at Jason's Supermarket in the trendy food court of Taipei 101, the world's tallest building, and at the Landis Hotel, whose chefs are familiar with the laws of kashrut. Despite the dwindling numbers, Ting says he sees a bright future for Jewish life in Taiwan if the current government drops its insistence on independence and seeks closer economic cooperation with China...

Like Taiwan's other business partners, Israel adheres to the one-China policy. The Jewish state established diplomatic ties with Beijing in 1994, the same year it opened an Israel Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei. Bilateral trade between Israel and Taiwan reached \$1.3 billion in 2006, compared with \$1.8 billion between Israel and China, according to the office's director, Raphael Gamzou.

"Taiwan is one of our main trading partners in Asia," Gamzou told JTA. "The Taiwanese have a great deal of sympathy and admiration for Israel. They admire Israeli courage and resilience, and the innovative capabilities of Israeli high-tech companies."

The few local Jews here hope that increasing trade with Israel, combined with successful negotiations to open direct air service between Taiwan and mainland China, could save Taiwan's Jewish community from outright extinction.

"Direct air links would do wonders for the Jewish community," Ting says. "You could fly from Taipei's downtown city airport to Shanghai in 40 minutes. This will attract a lot of skilled Jewish professionals who are sick and tired of the pollution and smog in other big Asian cities."

TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

As a result of a postal slip-up, the July issue of *Points East* only reached me only today in my village on Vancouver Island. As usual I read your little publication before anything else in my mailbox and in fact I can't recall ever having been disappointed with its offerings. But Vol. 22, No. 1 issue left me breathless, and that for several reasons. Let me start from the beginning.

I am a long retired sociologist whose principal academic work concerned adoptive kinship and family. My work is well known in North America, Europe, Australia, and Israel. Though not part of my expertise, inter-country adoption, especially of girl children adopted from Korea and China, has been a matter of some interest. As a Jew, I had been aware that Asian children were also being adopted by Jewish couples. It was therefore with great pleasure that I found Dr. Yee's interesting piece in the current issue

With warm SHANA TOVA greetings,

H. David Kirk, Ph.D.
d.bar-shimon@shaw.ca
Professor (emer.) Sociology
University of Waterloo

To the Editor,

The lead article in (the recent) issue of *Points East* only tells part of the story of the start of the Hebrew Language program at Beijing University. In August 1985 in Hotien (Xinjiang Province), China I met Justin Rudelson who had recently graduated Dartmouth. The following is a paragraph from my soon to be published book *The Marco Polo Odyssey*:

"While studying Uighur at Beijing University he (Justin Rudelson) convinced Professor Chen Jia Hou of the Eastern Language Department to start a program of Hebrew and Judaic Studies. A four-year Hebrew Language program was to start in 1985. Justin recruited Ilana Bougardier from Israel as their first Hebrew instructor..."

Best regards,
Harry Rutstein

Executive Director
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To the Editor,

I am editing a book on Jews of India/Jews in India. One chapter will be on Jewish refugees in India. If anyone has information on this subject, please e-mail me or write to 5055 Seminary RD #108, Alexandria, VA 22311.

Does anyone know if the art historian Hermann Goetz was or was not Jewish?

Thank you.

Kenneth Robbins MD
rajanawab@comcast.net

To the Editor,

I am reading Diana Preston's book on the Boxer Rebellion, and there is nary a reference to the Jewish communities in China at the time. A search on the web suggests that the Jews of China had quite a different experience in China at the time of the Boxers, from the 8 allied powers. Does anyone know more?

Here is one reference: [http://www.alternatehistory.com/discussion.1901:Seven western powers plus Japan suppressed Boxer rebellion in China. Peking sacked, Russian troops ransacked a number of Jewish homes along with the Chinese ones. Dowager Empress Cixi fled all the way to Xian, where a Jewish delegation met with her; normally she would refuse audience to foreigners, by that time the dowager Empress was too shell-shocked by anything from outside China that she acquiesced. A number of Jewish lawyers accompanied the Chinese delegation to the negotiations. Boxer Protocol signed by Dowager Empress Cixi of China, a little less harsh than historical. For this office the Empress granted free passage to all Jews and some land around Xian.](http://www.alternatehistory.com/discussion.1901:Seven%20western%20powers%20plus%20Japan%20suppressed%20Boxer%20rebellion%20in%20China.%20Peking%20sacked,%20Russian%20troops%20ransacked%20a%20number%20of%20Jewish%20homes%20along%20with%20the%20Chinese%20ones.%20Dowager%20Empress%20Cixi%20fled%20all%20the%20way%20to%20Xian,%20where%20a%20Jewish%20delegation%20met%20with%20her;%20normally%20she%20would%20refuse%20audience%20to%20foreigners,%20by%20that%20time%20the%20dowager%20Empress%20was%20too%20shell-shocked%20by%20anything%20from%20outside%20China%20that%20she%20acquiesced.%20A%20number%20of%20Jewish%20lawyers%20accompanied%20the%20Chinese%20delegation%20to%20the%20negotiations.%20Boxer%20Protocol%20signed%20by%20Dowager%20Empress%20Cixi%20of%20China,%20a%20little%20less%20harsh%20than%20historical.%20For%20this%20office%20the%20Empress%20granted%20free%20passage%20to%20all%20Jews%20and%20some%20land%20around%20Xian.)

I also discovered there was at least one Jew in the U.S. expeditionary force - Sam

Dreben I think... but it would be useful to find out if there is reliable information, which might also shed some light on whether there was a Jewish community of any kind in Beijing at the time...

Mark Cohen
chinaipr@yahoo.com

Stanislas d'Escayrac de Lauture
(continued from page 1)

fixing the Alliance's attention, and, it is necessary to admit it to the shame of our century, the element of the religious history of (our various) peoples has hardly begun to be reunited. We take the freedom to draw your attention to the fact which you indicate, precious in so much consideration. We already knew, by the other relations, that there were Jews in China; but nothing positive was collected on this subject. Now, what is exactly this city about which you speak? Did they keep the native language? What are their practices, their special traditions? At which time, by which circumstances, they did arrive to China? Do they know the existence of their coreligionists of West? Would they have books which we would not have? How did they reconcile Moses and Confucius? Did you, Sir, you have the good fortune to see and to maintain one of these Hebrews? Can you, Sir, thanks to your high position, shed some light...collect documents appropriate to enlighten these different questions, and to indicate to us the means to resolve them? Nobody has yet been placed in more favourable conditions with a vaster knowledge and more heated fascination. Please, let me hope, Sir, that your attention, provoked by us, will not refuse itself in the research which we wish, and that you will indeed want to pass on us directly the results so that they will not be lost for the general science, while answering one of the special objects of our association. Our respectful gratitude would anticipate that of all members of this classic Jewish race, which tries morally to connect its scattered sections by the spirit.

Sincerely Yours.
(There follow signatures). "

In autumn, 1861, "Les Archives Israelites" published in turn the answer that this French diplomat sent to the Alliance

Universelle Israélite:

"The Jews of China

One will read with pleasure the following letter, sent to this Society by a fearless traveller, a missionary and a martyr for science. "In the name of the Society, the Alliance Universal Israelite", you honoured me by sending some questions for which the need to prepare my answer, because of numerous activities, did not allow me to answer earlier. I would have wanted to bring some new and useful facts for the inquiry which you pursue. Without the treason of which I was one of the victims, I would have crossed China and looked there for the still visible tracks of a Jewish immigration. My planned route would have led me to Kai-fon. Events decided it otherwise. I was able to collect on a point of a so high interest no new light and I am reduced to summarize in some words little that the men dedicated to the study of China were able up here to learn about our coreligionists of Kai-Fon. Father Being Ricci, a Jesuit, the first and the greatest missionary of his order in China, was also the first one who mentioned Chinese Israelites. Father Alexis visited them later. Father Gozani copied Hebraic registrations of their synagogue; they were lost, but copied out later by Father Gaubil. The edifying letters published in the 18th century by the Jesuits inform us what these eminent men had been able to learn. Since this time, the missionaries were less successful and spread less light. The Protestant missionaries talked more themselves than risked.

It is under the dynasty of the Khans, that is 2,000 years ago, at least, that Ishmaelites appeared in China, in the name of seventy families or groups carrying the same name. Their number appears to have been reduced, maybe because a good many of them embraced, over the centuries, Islam. A missionary attributes to them the custom of a blue hat which distinguishes them from Moslems who wear a white hat. As for me, I saw, the blue hat worn almost exclusively by the Moslems. At first the Israelites dwelt in several cities, among them Peking. One does not meet them any more today except in Kai-Fou, administrative centre of the department of the same name (Kai-Fon-Fou), as well as the province and Kho-Nan's department; an immense and very populated city, hardly reduced after a flood arisen in 1642, and situated in the South and in about two leagues of the Yellow river, by 38 ° 52 '

05 " of north latitude, and 1 ° 55 ' 30 " of western longitude counted by Peking. From Shanghai or Tien-Tsin, one could get there in a month. Ishmaelites would always have had there more ease than Christians, whose religion often appeared to the Chinese as a threat and a plot. It is so surprising that no attempt was made again to connect with this abandoned group and it has been almost lost to the rest of the Hebraic race.

It seems to me that it would be in many ways a desirable view if current circumstances were to take advantage for this purpose. I believe that the Chinese Israelites would hardly have to learn about their brothers in Europe. These last ones perhaps would also find some interest in the study of very ancient, unpunctuated texts, which would supply maybe variants deserving of attention. The Chinese Israelites are attached to their religion only by a tradition of which they have lost direction; isolated for so many centuries, they took all the ideas of China, except its unrefined polytheism. They honoured Confucius, but I do not believe that this practice can be regarded as (including monks?). It is only a public honouring offered to an illustrious man, appointed by God to guide his race. This honouring, condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, which had admitted him for a long time, is required by the State of the men of letters and the magistrates, and we know that Israelites of Kai-Fou often filled high offices in the Empire. I regret, Sir, not to be able to give you more invaluable clarification on a subject which deserves it so, and I ask you to approve the expression of my profound consideration. Count d' Escayrac de Lauture. Paris, on July 15, 1861

P.S. It seems to me that it would be difficult to connect with the Israelites of China, which would make the missionaries suspicious, other than by personal and direct action. If the occasion to make it came about, I would be happy to give to an Israelite who is going to China, the few notions which I possess about this country and the small experience which I was able to acquire of its manners".

The Marquess Marie Joseph Henri Léonce d'Escayrac de Lauture, the father of Stanislas, was a part of the Commission of canals and roads under the Second Empire. He is the author of various treatises on this subject. In May, 1861, a propos the proposition made to his son

by the A.I.U. concerning the Jews of China, he sent to Mr. Jules Carville, President of the Alliance Universelle Israélite, the following letter:

"Mister President, I hurry to answer literally that you honoured with writing to my son, intending to return to France, about the Israelites established in China well before the coming of the Christ. I may beforehand assert to you, Mister President, that he will hurry, upon his return, to provide you with all the documents which he can. I ignore if they are numerous however their exactness leaves no doubt in my spirit because my son does not only display an incredible activity in his investigations but he looks for the truth by all the means possible. Sincerely Yours. "

The Count Stanislas d' Escayrac de Lauture left very important literature about his journeys, among which was one that led him to China with the French Expeditionary Force. He is the author of "Reminiscences (Reports) on China" published in five parts by the "Bookshop of the Picturesque Shop", whose owner was the representative of the Yonne: Edouard Charton. He recorded there his observations on the Empire of the Middle Kingdom by addressing: in the introduction of his personal recollections and the majorities (?), then the history, the religion, and government and customs.

Pierre-Henri Stanislas d' Escayrac de Lauture was born on March 19, 1826, in an old aristocratic family. He learnt English, Spanish, Portuguese, worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and travelled to Africa, among other places, where he learnt Arabic. After the Revolution of 1848, he resigned, and it was his good fortune that allowed him to continue his journeys: Europe, Africa and the Middle East. He published between 1851 and 1858: "Note on Kordofan", "Desert and Sudan", "Report on Ragle or Hallucination of the Desert" that he sent to the Academy of the Sciences, "Of Turkey and Moslem States "and" Journey in the Big Desert and in Sudan ". In 1859, he served as geographer on the French-English expedition sent to China to impose on the Chinese the respect for the merchants and European missionaries.

Charged with a diplomatic mission by the Imperial Government, he followed the allied armies and participated in the March on Peking. Emboldened by his good connections with the natives, he got used to

From the beginning, Sonja's parents had no intention of remaining in Shanghai. Only three days after their arrival they went to the Soviet Consulate to apply for a visa to Birobidjan, where Stalin had created a Jewish, mainly agricultural, settlement. In preparation, her father started learning Russian but Germany's attack on the U.S.S.R. put an immediate halt to further plans. The Japanese Proclamation of February 1943 forced all Stateless Jews who had arrived in Shanghai after 1937 to move to a so-called Hongkew Designated Area which they could not leave without a special pass, in other words, a ghetto. Sonja's family had lived in this area prior to the Proclamation, but now they too were strictly restricted to it and could no longer travel freely outside its designated limits.

Sonja describes conditions in the Designated Area, her father trying his hand at any job available, even employment by a Chinese for distributing eggs to customers on his bicycle. As a result, he spoke fluently the Shanghai Chinese dialect. Not only did her father carry two baskets of eggs on his bicycle, but later he took Sonja to and from kindergarten, then elementary school.

Sonja sees her personal experiences through a child's eyes. When Sonja was born, her inexperienced mother faced numerous difficulties taking care of an infant. In 1945 another baby was born in the family: Sonja's brother. The children had hardly any toys and entertained themselves with all kinds of games, one accompanied by singing a Japanese song.

Upon their return to Germany, the Krips family settled in the Russian Sector of Berlin. Sonja remembers that when they arrived, they were warmly welcomed, treated with cookies and surrounded by journalists. Sonja's brother, the youngest returnee, was very popular with photographers. Sonja had difficulty adjusting to a German school, since all instruction in the Shanghai Kadoorie School had been given in English.

Sonja Muehlberger has managed to include in her charming miniature book much information that casts light on general conditions in the Designated Area of Shanghai. To this valuable information is added her view from a child's very special perspective.

To Wear the Dust of War: From Bialystok to Shanghai to the Promised Land, an Oral History

(Palgrave Studies in Oral History) (Paperback)

by Samuel Iwry (Author), Leslie J.H. Keller (Editor)

Samuel Iwry, a pre-eminent scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a Near Eastern Studies professor emeritus at Johns Hopkins, was born in Bialystok, Poland, in 1910 and died several years ago at the age of 93. Iwry earned a diploma from the Vilno Teachers Seminary in 1931 and a master's diploma in 1937 from the Higher Institute for Judaic Studies in Warsaw. Two years later, the Nazis invaded, and Iwry fled to Moscow, then Tokyo and finally to Shanghai. He was arrested and tortured by the Japanese. Iwry then met his future wife, Nina Rochman, a hospital administrator, who persuaded authorities to release Iwry to a hospital, where he regained his health. After the war, they immigrated to America. This book tells his life-story.

Kaddish in Shanghai: A Film in the Works

by Rena Krasno

It was a great pleasure for me to meet Chad Grochowksi, producer of the feature length documentary film 'Kaddish in Shanghai'. Fortunately, within the short time of Chad's visit to California from Shanghai – where he now lives, I was able to accompany him to the Hoover Institution Archives. Thus, in addition to the ample historical data he had already collected while in China, I hoped he would be able to absorb the special ambiance of Old Shanghai from our Sino-Judaic Institute's collection.

Some years ago, when I visited Shanghai, Tess Johnston, well known for her numerous books mainly on colonial architecture in China, showed me a Jewish tombstone lying neglected in a field. I was stunned to see the carved Hebrew letters. Later, during that same trip, I met Dvir Bar-Gal, a journalist who had worked for Channel 2 in Israel. He interviewed me at length in the former Shanghai Jewish Club (at present the Shanghai Conservatory). We later talked about former foreign cemeteries that had been bulldozed during the

Cultural Revolution and tombstones scattered in the Shanghai countryside. At the time, I told Dvir that if he came across tombstones, I might be able to put him in touch with descendants of those who had been buried under them, since I had many contacts with former Jewish Shanghaianders.

The tombstone project became Dvir's passion, his personal mission to unearth and collect as many lost tombstones as possible. He hoped to create a headstone memorial commemorating the former Jewish Community of Shanghai, now dispersed throughout the world. The 'Shanghai Star' newspaper later wrote that in his quest to recover Jewish tombstones in Shanghai, "Dvir wore many hats: archeologist, detective, historian..." Dvir eventually found over 85 Jewish tombstones in the Shanghai countryside, some used as steps, built into walls, stepping stones in muddy walkways. One of Dvir's fascinating encounters occurred in a distant village, with 63 year-old Mr. Bao, who had helped destroy Jewish Cemeteries during the Cultural Revolution. When they first met, Bao was unwilling to cooperate. But as the years went by and Dvir persisted, the two men's relationship changed to one of trust and friendship. Bao later led Dvir to many discoveries of lost grave stones.

At the Hoover Institution, Ron Bulatoff efficiently prepared a display of some material from the SJI files and my personal collection, which Chad examined with great interest. The following day, on the eve of his departure to Shanghai, Chad returned again to the Hoover for more research.

Chad had the following comments: "I found the collection at the Hoover immensely fascinating. The materials will be very useful for us in telling the story of the experiences of the different Jewish communities in old Shanghai and for setting a context for the resurgence of the Jewish community there today.

The headstones Dvir has collected, and more importantly the lives of the people these stones were so lovingly carved for, provide a window into the three different Jewish communities that lived in Shanghai during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

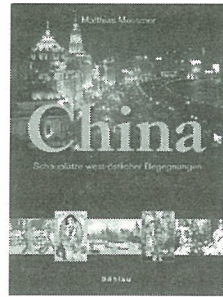
By using the some of the photographs and film footage from the Sino-Judaic Insti-

BOOK NOOK

China- Schauplaetze west- oestlicher Begegnungen

(China>Showplace of West-East Encounters)
by Matthias Messmer
(Boehlau Verlag Ges.m.b.H and Co. KG, Koeln. Weimar. 2007. 479 pages. Illustrations.)

Matthias Messmer studied Political Science, Law and Economics at the University of St. Gallen and received his Ph.D. in Social Sciences at the University of Konstanz. Later, he spent several years doing research in both China and the USA. His extensive publication covers topics on China, (inter-)culture and travel. He is currently affiliated with the University of Fribourg/ Switzerland, but lives and works in Shanghai.



This book concentrates on an extraordinary interface in the contacts between East and West during the Twentieth Century. Up until the present day conventional pictures of China have been filled up over the course of centuries with specific - often fictional - stereotypes and passed on by Westerners of various origins. Contrary to the arrogant Western imperialism, the viewpoints of selected Jewish personalities in this book acquired a richer and more sophisticated dimension.

Some of these visitors, themselves refugees, experienced the country and its people and developed the greatest interest in the foreign culture. Others, such as journalists, artists, revolutionaries and scholars, who came to China, explored an untouched world through their non-conformist thinking and distinctive lifestyle. The Jewish perceptions reveal the lost corner in the mapping of China. The significance of this book lies in its interdisciplinary nature and the uniqueness of concentrating on an extraordinary form of intercultural exchange.

"China - Schauplaetze west-oestlicher Begegnungen" is divided into three parts: Part one covers the observations and at-

mosphere of places where those westerners shaped their images of China (Peking, the 'Treaty Ports', Manchuria, Hankow, Yan'an etc.); part two deals with the individual biographies and their corresponding 'Lebenswelten' (living environments) in China; and part three elaborates the Western silhouettes of China, Chinese culture and mentality, and the Chinese people according to topics that over and over struck the Westerners fascinatingly.

Comments:

"Excitingly written ... The book enabled completely new views of intercultural relations and the life in China." (Heiko Haumann, Prof. of History, University Basel)

"This book makes a valuable contribution to the knowledge of China." (Rainer Hoffmann, Prof. of Chinese Studies, University of Freiburg)

"In this book, an impressive amount of unexplored material is published and analyzed, interpreted in a convincing way." (Peter Weber-Schäfer, Prof. of Political Science, University of Bochum)

"The China section of every serious library should make a point to acquire it. Dr. Messmer's persistence, grasp of history, ability to describe its developments, uncover little-known details, reproduce apt quotations by experts in a well-organized manner, will doubtless arouse interest not only among China specialists, but that of a more general readership." (Rena Krasno, Sino-Judaic Institute)

Geboren in Shanghai, Als Kind von Emigranten

(Born in Shanghai, A Child of Emigrants: *Life and Survival in the Hongkew Ghetto 1939-1947*)

by Sonja Muehlberger

Hentrich & Hentrich, Teetz, Berlin. Publisher: Dr. Hermann Simon, Director of the *Centrum Judaicum*, Berlin. The book is available only in German.

reviewed by Rena Krasno

I had the pleasure of meeting Sonja

Muehlberger during a seminar in Salzburg (Austria) on Jews in Shanghai. Our paths crossed again when we both participated in a documentary by Chen Yi-Fei, a celebrated Chinese artist and film-maker who, alas, passed away a few years ago at the height of his achievements. Then we met in Berlin where Sonja is very well-known for her dedicated work on German refugees in Shanghai, and finally, in California.

Thus, when I received as a gift from her a book she had written (part of series entitled '*Juedische Miniaturen, Spektrum Juedisches Lebens*' – *Jewish Miniatures, Spectrum of Jewish Life*) which includes titles such as: Alfred Dreyfus, Walter Rathenau, Jewish Synagogues, and other fascinating subjects), I immediately plunged into reading.

Sonja was born in 1939 in Shanghai, the child of Jewish emigrants from Germany. Her parents were Hermann and Ilse Krips. Her father was incarcerated in Dachau by the Nazis and her mother overcame almost insurmountable obstacles to set him free, arrange for passports and sail in March 1939 to Shanghai on the 'Conte Biancamano' – one of the last steamers to leave with refugees for China. After World War II, the Krips family returned to Germany together with 650 other Shanghai Jewish refugees. 500 remained in Germany among whom 300 made their way to Berlin, while the rest settled in other cities. 150 refugees traveled on to Austria.

Sonja's mini book is only 62 pages long, including photographs and several interesting documents: a letter from the '*Geheime Staatspolizei*' (*Secret State Police*); a map of Shanghai dating from 1939; her 'Children's Certificate, valid only up to 15 years of age' issued in 1941 under Japanese occupation, and her Birth Certificate from the 'Country Hospital' which had been established by the British when they and the U.S. ruled the International Settlement.



circulating alone. On September 18, 1860 he was removed by T'oung-Tchéou's people who live in the village between Tien-Tsin and Peking, wounded in his person and left without care. He was then transferred to the penal colony of Peking and released several weeks later, but gangrene deprived him of his hands.

In the first half of the year of 1861, the Rabbi Mahir Charleville evoked, during a meeting of the local Committee of Paris of the Alliance Universelle Israelite, the question of the Jews of China. The Central Committee of this Jewish organization sent to the Count Stanislas d'Escayrac de Lauture a questionnaire on the Jews of Kaifeng and on the Jews of China generally. "*The Bulletin of the Alliance Universelle Israelite*" published the letter that was sent to him in China clarifying its mission. The result of Escayrac de Lauture's researches, in the form of letter sent to the Alliance Universelle Israelite on July 15, 1861, appeared in "*Archives Israelites*" of this same year. He returned to France in 1862 in poor health, resumed with difficulty his previous life and died in Fontainebleau on December 20, 1868.

On his return to France, he dictated his recollections partially to his brother: not an account of his journey, but a summation of his knowledge of the history, the religion, the government, Chinese customs, which he had amassed during his stay. In the foreword, he honoured the quality of the work done by the Jesuits... This well written work, with rich and precise documentation, is part of the larger "*Illustration Universelle*". A big part of this work was published (edited) in the "*Monitor*" of January 1st, 1864. This brilliant scholar and diplomat was a member of the Society of Geography and a member of the "*Asiatic Newspaper*". In his chapter on the Foreign Cults in China, Stanislas d'Escayrac de Lauture clarified that:

"*The existence of Israelites in China has been known for a very long time: the Fathers Gaubil, Gozani and the others published a lot of information on these Israelites; "The Chinese Repository" does not contain less than fifteen articles relative to the Jews of the Extreme Asia; in 1843, James Finn summarized all that one knew; in 1777 and 1779, Olaf Gerhardt Tychsen had written in Hebrew to the Jews of China; in 1815, Morrison made them compose a similar letter, sent by London, which they were able to read; the other*

attempts stayed without result, because of the fear which was felt by the Jews to compromise them in the eyes of the authority by being bound to the Europeans. It is in Kai-fon, formerly Pyen, the current capital of Xo-nan, built near Kwan xo or yel-low river, that the Jesuits had met these Jews. Kai-fon was visited since then. In 1850, two Chinese Christians, provided with a letter written by a Jewish trader of Europe, established in China, went to it, spent some days there and collected invaluable information. The authenticity of their journey was not questioned because they brought back several books of theirs or portions of holy books, among which the comparison with the texts which we know presently are of interest. These acquisitions, probably deposited today in London, consisted of the six first chapters and some of the other chapters of Exodus (XXXVIII - XL); chapters XIX and XX of Leviticus; chapters of Numbers XIII through XV; of Deuteronomy II through XVI and XXXII; some parts, finally, of the Pentateuch and Psalms.

Doctor Smith, the bishop of Victoria, published in 1851 the results of his investigation of the Chinese Jews; the reverend A. Wylie gave recently, in "Chinese and Japanese Repository", two articles full of interest on the same subject, which seems about exhausted, and about which, as a consequence, I shall not extend. The Jews appeared in China under the dynasty of Xan, maybe before Christ, more probably in the first century AD, under Xan Ming-ti, between years 58 and 75 after Jesus-Christ. One believes that they came then from Persia, from which they seemed to have taken some terms and some manners, and that they had stayed for a long time at Samarcande. Their religion is called tyen-tchéou kyao, that is Indian religion, and tyao-kin-kyao, or the religion of those who remove tendons (from meat which they eat). They call God Tyen and Tchéouyen; Tyen's word appears to be the most usual. They honor Confucius. When they came to China, they counted seventy families; it does not appear there exist more than seven, including about two hundred individuals, almost all in the misery. They appear to be without a rabbi for half a century and no longer understand their books; one says that they no longer practise circumcision: however they keep the Sabbath and do not eat pig; they can have two wives, who should be of their race and their religion. According to a registration of their synagogue, it was built in 1164; rebuilt in 1296 and 1511, dates which

were placed there on the registration dedicated by the Jewish families called Yen, Li, Kao, Ciao, Kin, I and Tchang. Another registration, of 1489, gives curious details of the Jewish Community and its families, all indicated by Chinese names. This temple appears today to be in a state of complete decay. The Jews petitioned the emperor to obtain from him the required amounts for the reconstruction; the son of heaven did not answer.

The Israelites are numerous in Europe; many of them are rich; they manifest every day, by the abundance of the charities which they distribute either in Europe, or in Jerusalem, the proof of a deep devotion and a very wide charity: they can remember themselves one day their poor brothers of Kai-fon! It would not be difficult to reach them today now that China is opened, and it would not be very expensive to supply them the material and moral help which their unfortunate situation demands".

As Escayrac de Lauture noted about the foreign cults in China: "*Jews had come under Xian, probably two centuries before Christ, they had not made, and probably did not look for, proselytes*".

About the Author

Frédéric Viey is a historian, conference organizer and guide. He is a French specialist on the history of the Jewish Communities in China and has received the Special Prize of the Academy of Versailles. He also serves as General Secretary of the Council of the Jewish Communities in Seine-et-Marne (France). He may be reached at: fviey@hotmail.fr

The Olmert Family Sojourn

(continued from page 1)

churia, in the northeastern part of China. [2]

Why would a Jew like Iosif Olmert flee from one part of Russia to another to escape such problems as anti-Semitism? The answer lies in the peculiar nature of Harbin. It both was and was not part of Russia. It was constructed in 1898 by Czarist Russia on land leased from China. Here Jewish and non-Jewish Russians enjoyed an array of economic, political and cultural freedoms unavailable in Russia proper. Despite wars, revolutions and upheavals, many of these fundamental rights remained after the railroad zone was

sold to Japan in 1936. In these fortuitous circumstances the community grew from zero Jews in 1898 to the Jewish first settler in 1899 to a high point of about 13,000 residents in 1931. By 1982, in the wake of the Chinese communist revolution of 1949, the community had declined to one elderly resident.[3]

[2] "Passages"

It was both the "push" of Samara and the "pull" of Harbin that brought the Olmerts to the Far East. The vicissitudes of travel from one place to another in the turbulent Russia of the late nineteen teens effected both the ideas and personality of Iosif's son Mordechai, who had been born in Samara in January or May 1911. Mordechai was nine years old when his father made the momentous decision to relocate the family. By 1919 Iosif had reached Harbin but left his wife Michal and their two children in Irkutsk, north of the Chinese border. In that year Iosif wrote his wife, urging her to take the children and head southeast to Harbin.[4] In his autobiography Mordechai explains how this trip contributed to the formation of his Jewish identity. He records that "my mother immediately began preparations [for the trip] because many dangers were involved. Between Irkutsk and the Chinese border the Ataman Semenov took over and they hated the Jews. My mother warned us and stressed that we hide our national identity. In those days, because of my mother's warning, I was beginning to question what it meant to be Jewish. The question of identity is associated with other issues I found out about in Irkutsk from the Jews who were there. They were talking about a Jewish country of our own—Eretz Israel—where they were about to go. Those things were absorbed in my mind although I did not understand them and they were kept deep in my memory." [5]

[3] Finding "Identity" Within a New Geographical Context

Twenty hours after leaving Irkutsk Michal Olmert and her children reached Harbin and met Iosif. Both parents retained their traditional occupations, life styles and attitudes and became shopkeepers. This was definitely not the case for the younger generation, and particularly for Mordechai. His transformation can only be understood in historical context.

In addition to being a boom town from an economic point of view, the Harbin in which the Olmerts settled was a crucible

for Jewish intellectual development. In the words of Mordechai's son Ehud, Harbin "was not just another place." A contemporary of Mordechai recalled that "Harbin was a place where the interests of Russia, China, and Japan all converged. This gave the town a cosmopolitan character...where Russian was the language spoken by the Jewish population...a small island of Russian Jewry beyond its borders." [6] The city had a Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish publishing company. It brought out the Hebrew and Russian-language tracts of the city's long-serving Rabbi Aharon Moshe Kisilev [1866-1949], who had embraced the pre-Herzlian religious Zionism of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever while a student at the Volozhin Yeshiva. Twelve Russian-language Jewish periodicals were published in Harbin, including *Evreiskaia Zhizn'* [Jewish life]. The very freedoms that allowed those publications to flourish also enabled the left-leaning Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Vayter Mizrekh* [The Far East], edited by Meir Mendelevich Birman, to appear. The city hosted a variety of political movements ranging from Lazar Epstein's anti-Zionist Jewish Workers' Bund to the general Herzlian Zionism of Jewish hospital director Avraham Kaufmann to the ultra-religiosity of the non-Zionist Agudat Israel. Harbin also had a tiny community of Karaites, who were not formally recognized as Jews in Israel until the mid-twentieth century. Among the best known Karaites were the tobacco merchants Eli Aaronovitch [1874-1936] and Abraham Aaronovitch [1877-1953] Lopato, originally from Trakai [Troki], Lithuania. There were forty-one Karaite graves in Harbin's Foreign Catholic Union Cemetery before its demolition in the 1950s. Finally, there was a tiny clandestine Communist Party in which a few Jews were active. Arguably the most famous Communist sympathizer in Harbin was Lazar Epstein's son Israel, who later becomes a member of the People's Republic of China's National People's Consultative Congress.[7]

Perhaps the fullest description of Harbin's intellectual vitality at the moment of the Olmerts' arrival appears in an account published by General Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen, who had also visited the smaller Jewish communities of Singapore and Manila. Cohen contrasted Harbin's vitality with the relatively blasé Jewish intellectual life of Singapore and Manila. He wrote that Harbin's "vigorous Jewish consciousness" manifested itself in a struggle of parties, in which the Right,

Centre, Left, and Extreme Left were always engaged. There were ceaseless public discussions, especially on Saturday night, between the rival adherents of Zionism pure and simple, Zionism without Orthodoxy, Orthodoxy without Zionism, Zionism with Socialism, Socialism without Zionism, Hebraism in Manchuria, and Yiddishism in Palestine...I soon realized that there were...hundreds of Jews in Harbin who were eager to go to Palestine...There was therefore no need for me to gain converts: my task was confined to spreading information and obtaining donations from a relatively small group.[8]

It is clear, then, that by the time of the Olmerts' arrival in Harbin Jewish identity had been defined as a mixture of culture, language, politics, and religion. Both Mordechai and his future wife Bella Wugman matriculated at Harbin's Russian-language Commercial Gymnasium [Kommercheskaya Gymnasia]. Additionally, Mordechai studied Chinese at the Oriental Institute [Oriental'ny Institut]. According to Mordechai's contemporary Teddy Kaufman, Mordechai knew Chinese well enough to teach Russian to Chinese students in Chinese. It was in this Russified Sinitic-Judaic context that Mordechai took on a new Jewish identity. [10]

Prior to the Olmerts' arrival, and under the influence of Rabbi Kisilev, the older generation within the Harbin Jewish community overwhelmingly committed to General Zionism. By the mid-nineteen twenties many members of the younger generation, under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution, tended to sympathize with the left wing of the Zionist movement. By 1928, both Mordechai Olmert and Bella Wugman leaned toward the Leftist Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hazair. They had been influenced by the Russian refugees David Laskov and his wife Zippora, who had already had a taste of Siberia. They had been exiled by order of the Soviet government, and, at great peril, crossed the Soviet-Chinese border. The Laskovs suggested to the older Jewish youth in Harbin that they join Hashomer Hazair. A letter was sent westward to Hashomer headquarters, requesting formal recognition of a Harbin chapter. Even before a response was received back, the leftist Harbin Jewish youth began meeting under the banner of Hashomer Hazair.

brightly lit chamber seems poised to welcome hundreds of worshipers but is now filled mostly by their ghosts.

It is rare that the synagogue gathers a minyan, the minimum of 10 male worshipers required for a service. On many Friday evenings, only two people come to observe the Sabbath - Moses and Sammy Samuels.

Because the father, whose family is from Iraq, cannot read Hebrew, it is the son - who studied for a year in Israel - who reads the prayers, his young voice speaking for all the generations of Jews who have lived and died here.

It is more than 30 years since the synagogue called Musmeah Yeshua - built in wood in 1854 and rebuilt in stone in 1896 - has had a rabbi...

The synagogue, with a blue Star of David over its gate, is in the heart of the Muslim district of this capital - once called Rangoon - on a bustling one-way lane jammed with open-fronted shops selling paint, fishing nets, textiles and household goods. Like his neighbors, Mr. Samuels is a retailer, juggling businesses that include furniture and glassware...

It is not the government but the Jewish population itself that has brought about its decline. Emigration to Israel has continued, and some of the last families here may follow. Moses Samuels said his own two daughters, who are in their 20's, are also likely to leave for Israel soon. In addition to his three children, there are only two other unmarried Jews in Myanmar, both of them older and neither one likely to marry, he said.

"I could emigrate to Israel really easily," his son said. "But if I do that, who is going to take care of the synagogue after my father, and the cemetery and the Jewish community here? It is a great responsibility for me."

Sammy Samuels is planning to go to New York in August to study for the next few years at Yeshiva University and to look for a Jewish wife who is willing to return with him to Myanmar, he said...

The cemetery is just a few minutes' drive away, in the heart of the city, but it seems to be lost in a jungle. It is monsoon season now and the tropical vines and vegetation grow thicker every day, burying the 600 moss-covered tombstones deeper beneath them.

When the rains stop this fall, Moses Samuels will hire workers, as he does every year, to slash away the overgrowth and help him whitewash the tombstones.

The stone dated 1985 is the last that will ever be placed here. In 1997, the government ordered a stop to most burials within the city limits and said all the graves in religious cemeteries would have to be moved to new plots a two-hour drive away.

So far, the Jewish cemetery has not been touched, and Mr. Samuels has no idea when the order to move might come. But he is already preparing the 10,000-square-foot plot that has been marked off for Jewish burials outside the city.

There seems to be a lonely optimism in those preparations. Once the 600 old graves are moved, there will still be room for more burials.

Mr. Samuels's hope is that a new, more liberal Myanmar will emerge some day soon and that it will be an inviting magnet once again for Jewish merchants and traders. The synagogue would once again have its minyan, and the cemetery would begin to fill again with Jews who have settled here.

But here in the former Burma, history takes its time to unfold. Until that thriving new community emerges, it will be up to Sammy Samuels and his future wife and their many sons and daughters to keep his heritage alive.

Editor's Postscript: Since this story was first posted, Sammy has been to Yeshiva U., and graduated with high honors, according to a usually reliable source. Now all he needs do is find a wife...

Karachi's Forgotten Jews

reprinted from the Indian Jewish Congregation of the USA Newsletter Sept. 2007

As Pakistan marks its sixtieth birthday, 200 Jews still live secretly in Karachi, all that remains of a community numbering 2,500 at Independence. In this fervently Muslim country, most pass as Parsees. As one member of a Karachi Jewish family observes of his brethren: "They like to keep quiet."

All except one. A destitute and frail woman of 88, Rachel Joseph is the sole surviving custodian of the community's synagogue, even though it was destroyed almost 20 years ago.

Magain Shalome once stood at the corner of Jamila Street and Nishtar Road. It was demolished in July 1988 by order of President Zia ul-Haq, to make way for a shopping plaza. Ms. Joseph is suing the property developers who built it, saying they promised her space for another synagogue, and a flat to live in while she tended it. Meanwhile, she looks after the community's graveyard, in the Mewa Shah neighborhood.

The shul was built in 1893 by Bene Israel from Maharashtra, who came to work in the civil service, on the railroads and pressing coconut oil, joined by Baghdadi Jews from Bombay.

Quetta, Lahore and Peshawar also had communities, but Karachi's importance as a Jewish centre was such that the All-India Israelite League convened there in 1918. But with Partition came pogroms, and Israeli independence in May 1948 saw the Karachi synagogue set on fire. Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto's father, declared: "To Jews as Zionists, intoxicated with their militarism and reeking with technological arrogance, we refuse to be hospitable."

"My grandfather went from door to door, from Jew to Jew, to tell them that they had to leave the town," recounts Rachel Khafi, an American whose grandfather, Benjamin Khafi, organized the departure of Jews from Peshawar.

ries of suffering and humiliation, they sought to glorify the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the partisans. They were influenced by the Zionist ideology of David Ben-Gurion and attempted to provide an example for Israeli youth by fostering a myth of rebellion and power. A good example of this is Aharon Megged's play, 'Hannah Senesh.' That literature also contained elements of negation of the Diaspora."

And what about Chinese literature of that period?

"China, following the establishment of the republic, was also influenced by heroic myths," she says. "Writers then tried to educate the young generation by means of heroes. Most of the heroes in books of that period were strong and they fought foreign invaders. That literature ignored the daily suffering of simple people." Zhiqing points to Li Yang-Ru's "City," "Old Spring Flower," and "Wild Fair," and Feng Deying's "The Bitter Flower," as examples of that genre.

According to Zhiqing, the Eichmann trial greatly influenced second-generation Israeli writers in the 1960s. "It changed their perspective of Holocaust survivors," she says. "Gradually, authors began to recognize the suffering of simple people and began to understand that courage is not limited to fighting but also includes maintaining humanity. They developed more empathy for Holocaust survivors. Haim Gouri wrote about the Eichmann trial. Dan Ben-Amotz and Yehuda Amichai wrote about people who return to Germany after the war to search for their past. A new type of relationship with the past gradually developed."

What happened in China during that period?

"In the 1960s, authors suffered as a result of Mao's Cultural Revolution. There was no good literature then," she says. "The novels of the era were similar to those written in the 1950s, but after the revolution, in the 1970s and later, Chinese literature began to change. Writers tried to describe the other side of history, like Zhou Ir-Fu, who wrote six novels about the war against the Japanese. The first and

most famous of these was 'The Fall of Nanking.' He tried to portray the other side of history, what we call 'white history,' rather than the Communist Party's 'red history.' In the 1950s, they only wrote about red history. In the 1980s, Chinese writers were already writing white history and about Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Party. After 1978, there was less censorship of literature and writers attempted to understand what really happened in China."

The Japanese Embassy is visible from the window of the Israeli Embassy in Beijing. It is possible to see any anti-Japanese demonstration from here. "In the 1950s, the Germans began to recognize the injustice they perpetrated against the Jewish people," Zhiqing says. "But the Japanese still do not accept responsibility for their actions, not even the massacre and rape of Nanking. That's what really hurts."

Zhiqing also translates Hebrew literature into Chinese. She recently translated Amos Oz's "A Tale of Love and Darkness," and has translated a long list of Hebrew novels, including Oz's "Black Box" and "After the Holidays," by Yehoshua Kenaz.

How did you become interested in Hebrew literature?

"By accident," she says with a smile. After diplomatic relations were established between Israel and China, she worked in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Soon after, a collaborative agreement was signed between the Academy and Tel Aviv University. "They needed Chinese teachers and people who were familiar with Chinese culture," she explains. After she arrived in Israel, she taught Classical Chinese at Tel Aviv University and continued from there to Ben-Gurion University. She completed her doctorate at the Heksherim Research Center for Jewish and Israeli Literature and Culture, under the supervision of Professor Yigal Schwartz, and in collaboration with the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

In 1977, Zhiqing returned to China and began to work as a literary editor and translator of Hebrew literature into Chi-

nese. In Beijing, she also published many articles about Israeli literature and books by Amos Oz, Grossman, A.B. Yehoshua, Meir Shalev and Yaakov Shabtai. Last August, she published a book that includes the results of her research.

[She has translated 60 Israeli novels to date. 'My Michael' and 'To Know a Woman', both by Amos Oz, each sold 10,000 copies and were mainly read by literary figures and students.]

Burmese Jew Shoulders Burden of His Heritage

by Seth Mydans
excerpted from www.nytimes.com, July 23, 2002

YANGON, Myanmar - The moss-covered tombstones in the Jewish cemetery here present a collective epitaph for a once-thriving population that has shrunk to just eight families and is now on the edge of extinction.

The oldest tomb is dated 1876, a time when Jewish merchants and traders in teak, cotton and rice were pouring into what was then Burma from Iraq, Iran, Europe and India.

The last is dated 1985, when most of a population that once numbered more than 2,500 had already departed, many fleeing the Japanese during World War II and others leaving when their businesses were nationalized in the 1960's.

Of the remaining 20 Jews who live scattered around Myanmar today, only one young man is likely to marry here, but he will have to travel abroad to find a Jewish wife to carry on his family line.

This last hope for the Jews of Myanmar is Sammy Samuels, 22, a bright and talkative student who already carries on his shoulders the burden of his heritage.

He is the son of Moses Samuels, 52, the caretaker of the country's only synagogue, a well-kept, high-domed building whose

At that crucial moment a politically-astute businessman, Alexander Gurvich, arrived from Palestine. Gurvich had been born in Minsk in 1899 to a middle-class family which was very much part of the Russian Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment. He attended high school in St. Petersburg and, like such other maskilim as Chaim Weitzmann, Selig Brodetsky, and Harbin Jewish hospital director Avrum Kaufmann, sought higher education further west. In 1925 Gurvich matriculated in politics and economics at the University of Hamburg. There he embraced the right wing ideology of Vladimir Zev Jabotinsky's Betar movement, the ideological precursor of many Israeli parties from Herut to Kadima. Gurvich immigrated to Palestine upon his graduation from Hamburg. According to Mordechai, "Gurvich was our teacher. He came to us at a time of crisis in Zionist ideals, when many left Eretz Yisroel and returned to Europe. In those dark and overcast days, he acquainted us with Jabotinsky's theories [which] meant the obligation first of all of moving to Eretz Yisroel. Gurvich had not only made aliyah but was a chalutz, a pioneer, in the full sense of the word. He established factories, made employment for others, and went about developing trade and industry as well as the agricultural sector." [11]

Gurvich met regularly with the young Zionists in Harbin where, according to Mordechai, "he tried to prove to the youth that joining Hashomer Hazair had been a mistake...for based on their beliefs, they were closer to Betar than to Hashomer Hazair. Within a short time, the older youth came to the conclusion that they belonged to the National Camp of Jabotinsky. They sent a letter to Betar headquarters in Riga which approved their joining." A minority of the Harbin Hashomer Hazair refused to go along with the switch to Betar and instead joined the Communist party youth movement Komsomol. This tiny faction ultimately migrated to Birobijan in the Soviet Union and was never heard from again. [12]

Gurvich remained in Harbin until 1939. Under his influence, in 1930, Mordechai left China for agricultural training in Holland preparatory to his immigration to Palestine. His wife-to-be Bella Wugman left Harbin directly for Palestine on a phony marriage certificate to fellow Betanik Eliahu Lankin, who was already an official Palestinian resident. When Mordechai ultimately reached Palestine in

1933, the phony marriage to Lankin was dissolved, Mordechai married Bella, they settled near Binyamina, threw themselves into Revisionist politics, and had four sons in rapid succession: Amram [Ami], in 1936; Yirmiyahu [Irmii], in 1943; Ehud [Udi], in 1945; and Yosef [Yossi] in 1950. Yossi was named for his grandfather Iosif who was buried in Harbin in 1941. [13]

[4] Return to and Memorialization of the Chinese Homeland

In China, Mordechai and Bella assumed a Zionist Revisionist political identity and a commitment to leave China for Palestine. A second ideational impact of their China sojourn was a determination to maintain their China ties while living in Eretz Yisroel. Amram recalls chinoiserie in the Olmert house in Nahalat Jabotinsky, near Binyamina. Ehud maintains that "China is the country which hosted our parents. They studied in China. They spoke Chinese, and the Chinese culture is part of my heritage and memory as a young kid in the State of Israel. So China is not just another country for me." [14] An expression of that commitment has been the return visits to China by members of the Olmert family. These trips began in the 1940s and include a tangible and ongoing memorialization of the family's China experience.

The first member of the Olmert family to revisit was Mordechai in 1947. He had twin motivations. First, he wished to visit his mother Michal, who was still in China, and ease her exodus to Eretz Israel. His second motive was subversive. He was traveling on behalf of the Irgun, the Jabotinsky-oriented underground movement in Palestine. Mordechai was under the direct orders of Irgun Commander Menachem Begin and also in communication with his old Betar guru Alexander Gurvich. His assignment was to raise funds for the arms ship "Altalena," which was bringing weapons to force the British out of Palestine. In Shanghai and Tianjin Mordechai collected about \$100,000, a considerable amount of money in 1947. This sum was about 40% of the total cost to purchase and supply the "Altalena," which was ultimately sunk off the Tel Aviv beachfront in a pitched battle between Zionist Revisionists and Labor Zionists. [15]

The second family member to reestablish Chinese ties was Yossi. By 1989, the heirs of Jabotinsky had come to power in Israel via a succession of political parties which stretched from Herut to Gahal and ulti-

mately to Likud and Kadima. In that year Yossi, as representative of Yitzhak Shamir's Likud government, met in Israel with Chinese pilots, including the chief test pilot of Chinese air force, at a time when Israel was establishing its first military and diplomatic contacts with China. In 1991, again at the directive of the Prime Minister's office, Yossi helped China set up a Tel Aviv office for its official press agency Xinhua. This office, and a branch of China's official state travel service, Luxingshe, served as intermediaries between China and Israel until the establishment of full diplomatic relations and embassies one year later. In June 1992, after Likud lost national elections to Yitzhak Rabin's Labor party, Yossi went to China on a private visit. There, he became the first family member to actually revisit Harbin.

The third family member to reestablish Chinese ties was Amram. He was a professional agronomist who had maintained the family farm near Binyamina even as a teenager, when his father returned to China to raise funds for the "Atalena." In 1998 Amram visited China at the invitation of the Chinese Government, in his capacity as Chief Executive Officer of Agridev-Agricultural Development Company. While in China he learned that the grave of his grandfather Iosif was in dilapidated condition in Harbin's Huangshan Jewish cemetery, which, with over 700 graves, is the largest in the Far East. Amram returned to Israel and planted the idea in the minds of his brothers to help restore that tombstone, the graves of some other relatives, and also the graves of the grandmother and grandfather of [Ret.] Israeli general and parliamentarian Efi Eitam (Faine).

In 1998 Amram secured an appointment as Agricultural Attache in Israel's new Beijing Embassy. In that capacity he also laid the groundwork for his future appointments as Professor of Agronomy at Beijing's China Agricultural University and Qingdao's Laiyang Agricultural University. As Agricultural Attache, Amram also helped establish Israel's first Dry Lands Research Station in China, a project sponsored by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Foreign Assistance Program [MASHAV, headed at that time by Benjamin Abileah]. [16]

When Ariel Sharon's Likud party returned to power in the national election of 2001, Ehud became the fourth member of the

family to renew his China ties. By 2004 he had already served eleven years as the Likud Mayor of Jerusalem and was a Vice Prime Minister in Sharon's national government. In that capacity Ehud visited China. Under Ehud and Amram's supervision the family purchased two monuments for the Harbin cemetery and effectively inaugurated the process for the cemetery's total rehabilitation. One monument is their grandfather's re-entombed tombstone. The second is a triumphal obelisk at the entryway to the cemetery. It bears a heartfelt inscription, in excellent Chinese and cumbersome English, reading: "Thank you for the protection given to our community. From the standpoint of a past member of this Jewish community, we appreciate this protection. Thank you for the dignity that was provided. All of this will be remembered by most of the Jewish people who lived in this city—Harbin. Ehud Olmert, Vice Prime Minister of the State of Israel, June 25, 2004." [17]

Yet another way in which the Olmerts have preserved and utilized the memory of their Chinese experience is in a series of historical seminars about the Jews of Harbin. Two of these conferences have been jointly organized by the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Communist Party of Harbin's Daoli [formerly Pristan] district, Israel's Embassy in Beijing, and the Tel Aviv-based Israel China Friendship Society and Igd Yotsei Sin [Association of Former Jewish Residents of China], headed by Teddy Kaufman. The first seminar, in which this author participated, was held in August-September, 2004. [18] The second, in which Amram Olmert and his wife Regina participated, was held in June 2006. By that time Ehud Olmert had become Prime Minister of the State of Israel. In that capacity he gave videotaped greetings in English to the historical seminar. Amram Olmert and Teddy Kaufman recited the Jewish prayer for the dead at the grave of Isif Olmert in a ceremony covered by television, radio and print media crews from Harbin, Beijing, and Shanghai. [19]

On January 8, 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited China once again. His task this time was not to memorialize Harbin but to discuss the existential threat which Iran poses to the entire Zionist enterprise. [20] In a broader sense Prime Minister Olmert was rekindling his family ties to China that were first made during his

father's perilous train journey from Irkutsk to Harbin eighty-eight years previously. That train trip into China initiated the rich, fluid, and complex process of ideological formation of the Olmert family.

NOTES:

[1] COPYRIGHT JONATHAN GOLDSTEIN 2007, USED HERE WITH PERMISSION. Jonathan Goldstein is a professor of East Asian History at the University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia, U.S.A. This article was originally presented as a paper at a panel on "Passages" at a conference on "Jewish Journeys," University of Cape Town, January 9, 2007. See "Program, Jewish Journeys, International conference in association with the University of Southampton's Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/Non Jewish Relations, 8-10 January 2007, University of Cape Town."

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[2] Isif Isifovitch's name suggests that his father had probably died while his mother was pregnant. Hence he received his father's first name in an unusual exception to the way in which Ashkenazi names are chosen. Isif Olmert tombstone, Huangshan Jewish Cemetery, Harbin, China. In 1897 Samara had a population of 90,000, among them 1327 Jews. By 1917 the Jewish population had grown to approximately 3000-5000. <http://www.ijc.ru/istoki37.htm>. According to Teddy Kaufman, who knew the family well, the Olmerts were escaping anti-Semitism and Communism when they left Samara. Email: Teddy Kaufmann [Tel Aviv] to the author, 1 February 2007.

[3] For a general history of Jewish settlement in Harbin, see Joshua A. Fogel "The Japanese and the Jews in Harbin, 1898-1930, in Robert Bickers et. al. NEW FRONTIERS: IMPERIALISM'S NEW COMMUNITIES IN EAST ASIA, 1842-1953 [Manchester, U. K.: Manchester University Press, 2000], pp. 88-108; Boris Bresler, "Harbin's Jewish Community, 1898-1958: Politics, Prosperity, and Adversity" in Jonathan Goldstein, ed. THE JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME ONE. HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

[Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999], pp. 200-15; Israel Epstein, "On Being a Jew in China: A Personal Memoir," in Goldstein, ed. THE JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME TWO. A SOURCEBOOK AND RESEARCH GUIDE [Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2000], pp. 85-97; Alexander Menquez (pseudo.), "Growing Up Jewish in Manchuria in the 1930s: Personal Vignettes, in Goldstein, JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME TWO, pp. 70-84; Ya'akov Liberman, MY CHINA [Jerusalem and Hewlett, NY: Gefen, 1998]; and Israel Cohen, A JEWISH PILGRIMAGE [London: Valentine Mitchell, 1956].

[4] Isif's wife Michal, or Michele, died in 1965 and is buried in Binyamina Cemetery, Israel. Mordechai died in 1998 and is also buried in Binyamina. Mordechai Olmert, DARKI B'DERECH RABIM [Hebrew: My way on the way of many others]. [Tel Aviv: Or-am, 1981], p. 12; Interviews: Yossi Olmert, via telephone from New York, 10 December 2006; Ya'acov [Yana] Liberman, San Diego, Calif., 15 December, 2006; Amram Olmert, Tel Aviv, 1 January 2007.

[5] Mordechai adds that "there were two difficult years in front of us. My father was an administrator and didn't succeed in finding work that suited him. All the luxuries that we had became scarce. My mother opened a shop for milk and groceries. For the first time in our lives we were impoverished. I was then nine years old and with the beginning of studies in the 1920s I entered junior high school. My sister studied at the same school whereas my brother studied in a senior high school that was much more famous. The owner of this famous high school...was an administrator of the railway. Few Jewish students studied in it. Most of the teachers and students were ethnic Russians. On the other hand the high school where my sister and I studied was built shortly before and located in a Jewish area. A large part of the students were Jewish and even the building was owned by the Jewish community. In Harbin there was also a "Talmud Torah"—a Jewish elementary school—in which, besides general studies, Hebrew and religious studies were taught. In the city there were two synagogues, an old age home, and a huge library of the Jewish community. Community life was lively especially thanks to the hundreds of Zionists who left Russia and were on their way to Eretz Israel." Mordechai Olmert, DARKI, pp. 14-15.

[6] Alexander Gurvich, quoted in Joseph Christ, ALEXANDER GURVICH [1899-1980] PORTRAIT [Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 1986], p. 4. In the mid-1920s Manchuria was the "property" of the local Chinese warlord Zhang Zuolin, who was assassinated by the Japanese in 1928. In 1929 there was a skirmish between Chinese and Soviet forces near the border town of Manzhouli. Japan becomes a significant actor in Northern Manchuria after 1931.

[7] Sam Ginsbourg, MY FIRST SIXTY YEARS IN CHINA (Beijing: New World Press, 1982), p. 199; Isador A. Magid, "I Was There," in Goldstein, CHINA AND ISRAEL, pp. 41-45; Israel Epstein, "On Being a Jew in China," pp. 85-97; Liberman, MY CHINA, pp. 57, 95-97, 151-65.

[8] Israel Cohen, JEWISH PILGRIMAGE, pp. 203-04.

[9] Christ, ALEXANDER, p. 6. Veteran China

about Israel that seemed genuine.

Their attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, as expressed to me, were positive but vague and stereotyped. In an unconscious reversal of older western stereotypes of Chinese, they spoke of the Jews as a very clever people that had produced such great people as Albert Einstein. They also sought to highlight the friendship existing between Chinese and Jews. A professor, in introducing me at my first lecture, thus spoke of the substantial Jewish community that had existed in Shanghai as a haven for Jews persecuted elsewhere.

Where did the professor and students gain the impressions expressed to me? Part of the answer may be the way in which Jews are treated in the Chinese media. Admittedly, with my vocabulary of approximately fifty words in Chinese, I could not sample the Chinese language media during my stay. My impression relies on a few days of viewing the programs on Central China Television (CCTV)—a 24/7 English language channel. Even these few days of unscientific viewing, however, was enough to give me some clues. For example, a historical documentary on the Manchurian city of Harbin not only mentioned its large prewar Jewish community, but also added the comment that Jews were welcomed to Harbin at a time when they did not possess their own homeland. Another straw in the wind was a documentary on Egypt, which presented a quite traditional version of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt and their exodus under Moses' leadership. The narration mentioned with approval their rebellion against Pharaonic oppression and spoke also of their journey to establish their homeland in Palestine. Another image from CCTV was contained in a short photo essay entitled *Faces of Asia*. It portrays the diversity of peoples that inhabit the continent and concludes with the image of a young Hasidic man, wearing *tefillin*, praying at Jerusalem's Western Wall. Though there was some criticism of Israel in CCTV news programming, it did not seem particularly harsh in comparison with coverage of similar events by European media.

In this atmosphere of essentially benign curiosity, more and more Jews are coming to China to visit and to do business. It has been recently estimated that there are now more than 3000 Jews residing in Beijing alone. This growth has been matched by the expansion of Habad

houses in China, which caters to the Jewish needs of these people, to seven. On the one Shabbat I spent in China, I took the four hour journey from Ningbo to Shanghai by bus to spend Shabbat at Habad. I was not alone. On the same bus I took from Ningbo to Shanghai was an Israeli business woman doing the very same thing.

To say that Habad was crowded that Shabbat is an understatement. Services, and the Shabbat meals that followed them, were in two shifts. The Jews who showed up ranged from ultra-orthodox (I counted no less than four men with *shtreimels*) to mostly secular, interested in a Jewish experience in a foreign land, and familiar recipes cooked and served by a staff that numbered at least a dozen, by my count.

China, one of the world's oldest civilizations, has much to learn about the Jews and their own ancient civilization. Much of this education will be driven by commercial ties, as when the Orthodox Union instituted a Chinese language section in its website, explaining the reasons and methods of *kashrut* to Chinese manufacturers of food ingredients. In this context, did my own small foray do much to further the effort? It is certainly too early to tell. There is some importance, though, in the fact that I was invited to come to a university in China by a professor who thought that the lectures I had to offer were of value.

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A One-Woman Sino-Israeli Literary Axis

by Shiri Lev-Ari
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It is somewhat surprising to meet a Chinese woman who speaks fluent Hebrew and has encyclopedic knowledge of Holocaust literature in the Israeli Embassy in Beijing. She has read everything from Katzetnik to Etgar Keret. Her name is Dr. Zhiqing Zhong and she completed her doctorate in comparative literature at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Zhiqing first came to Israel in 1995 to teach Classical Chinese at Tel Aviv University. For two years she lived in the dorms in Ramat Aviv, taught Confucianism and the philosophy of Lao-Tze, and Chinese poets like Li Bai, Du Fu and Li Yu. Afterward, she continued to study for her doctorate.

Her Ph.D. focused on Israeli and Chinese literature in the wake of the horrors of World War II. She examined how Israeli literature responded to the Holocaust and how Chinese literature responded to the Japanese occupation of China. Zhiqing's research dealt with Israeli Holocaust literature, published after the creation of the state in 1948; and anti-Japanese, Chinese literature, published immediately after the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. According to Zhiqing, both literary traditions were part of an attempt to build a new, national identity following the horrors of war. For decades, both traditions were influenced by social and ideological needs, both were part of a process of rehabilitation and construction of nations, and - at least during the early period - both were used as educational tools.

In her work, Zhiqing divides the Holocaust and anti-Japanese literary traditions into three generations of writers: the early writers, who wrote in the 1940s and 1950s; the generation that wrote from 1960 to 1980; and young writers, including the descendants of survivors of both peoples, who entered the arena in the 1980s.

Zhiqing initially focused on Israeli writers who published in the 1950s, like Katzetnik (the pseudonym of Yehiel De-Nur) and Aharon Megged. She later examined 1960s authors such as Haim Gouri, Yoram Kaniuk, Hanoch Bartov, Dan Ben-Amotz and Yehuda Amichai. When she approached the generation of children of Holocaust survivors, she read books by David Grossman, Nava Semel and Savyon Liebrecht, after which she read books by Etgar Keret and Amir Gutfreund. She read most of these books in English translation.

"Israeli authors of the 1950s were influenced by heroic concepts of the Holocaust," she says. "In response to memo-

power," at the time, with a foothold in China, Africa or Central America.

I asked about the Tianamen Square tragedy and he remarked, "Well, I'm not so tragic about Tianamen. The west is, I know, but it wasn't so tragic when Chiang Kai-Shek was shooting people in the thirties. Of course, Tiananmen was a bad thing. I think these forces were bound to clash but it didn't have to take that form, and I don't think it will happen again. But I think in the west, it was a media event. This happened to be a time when the whole world press was here for Gorbachev and China was the center of attention: otherwise, you would have the normal number of foreign correspondents. So some people in the dissident camp thought that this was their big opportunity to make a dent." He acknowledged that some Chinese leaders were having soul searching on the event. "At first, it was hands off the students: nothing was done. Then you have this country in which there was no experience or conception of crowd control because you weren't supposed to go against a gathering. There was no tear gas, no strategy...So when it finally came, it was bullets."

Epstein went on to say that "now [1995] China is being slapped on both sides of the face. It's a sport. That's not to say things are perfect here: they aren't. But if your population is increasing, they say you're going to overrun the world; if you're going to have fairly severe family planning, then they say that you're slaying babies. If you're in economic difficulty, obviously, your economy doesn't work; if your economy begins to develop, you're going to develop into an economic superpower and then maybe a military superpower, so watch out. But you're also a great market with 1.2 billion consumers. And where the ideologues on the right would like to see this socialist country fall apart, the ones with investments here aren't so sure...."

He went on to sum up, "I saw the old China and the overthrow of three things. First, the new China is an independent country which she wasn't before; second, China's a united country which she wasn't; third, China is no longer feudal in its structure—there may be feudal thinking but there's no feudal economy."

Moving backwards, I asked about the history of Jews in China, particularly those who lived in K'aifengfu who came from Persia in the second century and were called "T'ai Chin Chiao," meaning "those who extract the sinews."

Epstein corrected me and said that this was not the modern word for Jews. The old expression applied to the Jewish community in K'aifengfu, and that was actually one place where there was complete assimilation. The Jewish community was very small, and through intermarriage, the Jews disappeared. The modern word for Jew is 'Youtai': it's really used as a descriptive word for the people from Judah. 'Youtai.' The old word is never used now. Historical."

A secular Jew formed in a different historical crucible in Asia, Israel Epstein is a revolutionary who fights with words. What is "being Jewish" in China? Is it in his anti-Fascism during the war; his abhorrence of violence against the Chinese by the Japanese, or the Chinese against themselves, or the government against the students at Tiananmen Square; his support for the underdog—the once feudal, often scorned and violated China; his pride in a nation that welcomed Jews in flight from the Holocaust, and that was never guilty of anti-Semitism; his memories of his secular Yiddish-speaking parents; or his image of his father standing outside the synagogue and listening to the singing the "Kol Nidre." But there is a serious split with the Jewish principle of "tikun olam"—healing the world—as Epstein never publicly acknowledged Mao's crimes against the Chinese people. He was a high-ranking Communist with enough status to meet with Mao in a cave in the thirties, with Soong Ching Ling, Edgar Snow, yearly with Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping: all part of the totalitarian government of China. Perhaps what makes him seem more Jewish than he acknowledged is his sense of being, at the same time, both an insider and an outsider in China: a Jewish state of being and mind. "My brothers turned to me and said, 'You are not Jewish. You do not go to the synagogue.' I turned to my brothers and answered, 'I carry the synagogue within me.'"

*Italicized portions are rabbinical observations and questions from Edmond Jabes, *The Book of Questions*, interspersed by the author into her interview.

A Jew in China

by Ira Robinson
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<http://www.isranet.org/>

It began with an email from Shelly, the English name adopted by Professor Chen Yujuan, a scholar of American literature at Ningbo University, Peoples' Republic of China. She had many questions about the North American Jewish novel and few resources at hand. So she turned to the internet and found the address of a Jewish studies scholar, me, who might be able to answer her queries. After a few exchanges of emails had developed a relationship of sorts, she extended to me an offer difficult to refuse—an invitation to come to her university and deliver a series of lectures on modern Jewish history and literature.

As a good citizen of the postmodern world, I am used to juggling multiple identities: American, Canadian, university professor, scholar of Judaic studies, Orthodox Jew. Now I would introduce a new complication to my juggling act: doing everything I do-in China. If my experience in China taught me one thing, it was the immensity and diversity of China and its people. I could not and did not see more than a thin sliver of China, but the little I did experience enabled me to glimpse some important trends.

The first thing I noticed is that Jewish studies is piquing the curiosity of some Chinese scholars. There are now Jewish studies scholars in Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai, and institutes devoted to the subject in the latter two. International conferences on Jewish studies have been held on Chinese soil. Even outside these centers, there are curious academics, like Professor Chen, who invited me to come all the way from Canada to speak on the subject.

Dozens of students and a scattering of professors attended my four lectures. Some of them, doubtless, were there to listen to a native speaker of English (for which any topic would do). But many students, through the intelligence of their questions, and the eagerness with which they took the material I had brought for them, bespoke a curiosity about Jews and

Betar leader Ya'akov Liberman asserts that "throughout the years, while the fate of political Zionism sailed between the calm waters of the Balfour Declaration and the rough seas of the British White Paper, Betar in China led the Jewish communities in their complete identification with Jewish independence and Statehood...The Jews of China were no longer identified solely by the method of worship. They were now seen on the various sport arenas, on street parades, assembly halls and public gatherings. The ghetto mentality was eradicated." Most importantly, "from the early thirties Betarim from China left comfortable homes and comparatively easy lives to join other Betar teams for "plugot avoda" duty in Palestine." Ya'acov Liberman, "Achievements of Our China Betar," in *BETAR IN CHINA, 1929-1949* [Tel Aviv: Igud Yotzei Sin (?), ca. 1974], p. 137.

[10] Email: Teddy Kaufman [Tel Aviv] to the author, 1 February 2007.

[11] David Laskov graduated from the Haifa Technion and served with distinction the Engineering Corps of the Israel Defence Forces [Zahal]. As of 2007 he holds the record as longest-serving active duty soldier in Zahal. Mordechai Olmert, DARKI, p.26; Bressler, "Harbin's," pp. 207-08; Chrust, ALEXANDER, pp. 3-6; Interview, Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, 2 January 2007..

[12] Olmert, DARKI, p.26; Chrust, ALEXANDER, pp. 3-6; Bressler, "Harbin's," pp. 207-08. Interview, Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, Jan. 2, 2007. In Harbin Gurvich was editor/publisher of the Revisionist Russian language weekly GADEGEL [the Cyrillic rendition of the Hebrew "ha-degel," literally meaning "the flag" and having specific reference to the blue-and-white Zionist flag. See complete issues of GADEGEL for 1940 and 1941 in Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv.] Gurvich's acceptance into the Harbin Jewish community was greatly enhanced by his marriage to Raisa Zondovitch, who came from one of the city's wealthiest Jewish families. She had been sent to study agriculture in the Nahalal collective settlement in Palestine. RE: the Komsomol youth organization: In Israel in 2007 there is a weekly Russian-language newspaper entitled KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA! The emphasis on the last syllable *DA!* meaning "yes." mocks the entire Komsomol enterprise, its hypocrisy and bloody history.

[13] Interviews: Yossi Olmert, via telephone from New York, 6 December 2006; Ya'acov [Yana] Liberman, San Diego, Calif., 15 December, 2006; Amram Olmert, Tel Aviv, 1 January 2007; Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, 2 January 2007.

[14] Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in *JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY DAILY BRIEFING*, 8 January 2007, p. 1; Amram Olmert interview, 1 January 2007. It is unclear just how much Chinese Mordechai and Bella Olmert understood and spoke. As already noted, they matriculated in a Russian-speaking high school, the Kommercheskaya Gymnasia. Both they and their parents surely knew some street Chinese or pidgin Chinese, which ethnic Russians and Jews used to communicate with the local Chinese population.

[15] Chrust, ALEXANDER, p. 21; Transcript of tape recording of Moredechai Olmert, approx.

1959, made by Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv [in Hebrew]; 1947-4; see also postal correspondence and four telegrams between Mordechai Olmert and Alexander Gurvich, in Russian and English, 1947-48, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv.

[16] Yossi Olmert interview, 10 December 2006; YEDIOT AHCHONOT [Tel Aviv], 6 March 2001, p. 5C.

[17] Amram Olmert interview, 1 January 2007; Olmert monuments in Huangshan Jewish cemetery, Harbin.

[18] Goldstein, Jonathan. "Chinese Jews Return to Harbin, See a Bright Future." *CHINA RESEARCH CENTER NEWSLETTER* [Kennesaw, Georgia] 3 [October 2004], pp. 2-3; <http://www.chinacenter.net/News/NewsOct04/News-10-04.htm>. Alternate versions in POINTS EAST [Menlo Park, CA] 19, no. 3 [November 2004], pp. 1, 7; THE SHOFAR [Chattanooga, TN] 18, no. 2 [October 2004], p. 11; ISRAEL-CHINA VOICE OF FRIENDSHIP [Tel Aviv], no. 50 [November-December, 2004], p. 5; THE FORWARD [New York], September 24, 2004, pp. 1, 6; BULLETIN OF THE IGUD YOTZEI SIN [Tel Aviv] 51, no. 382 [November-December 2004], pp. 7, 9; THE CARROLL STAR NEWS [Carrollton, Ga.], September 19, 2004, p. 7.

[19] Matanya Ben Avraham, "International Forum on the History and Culture of the Jews of Harbin," BULLETIN OF THE IGUD YOTZEI SIN [Tel Aviv] 52, no. 390 [November-December 2006], pp. 28-31.

[20] Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in *JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY DAILY BRIEFING*, 8 January 2007, p. 1; "PM Olmert's Speech at the Concert Celebrating 15 years of Israeli-Chinese Diplomatic Relations," Beijing, January 11, 2007, text issued by Prime Minister's Office and available on line as <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOeng/Communication/PMSpeaks/speeches110107.htm?DisplayMod>. According to Yitzhak Shichor, "upon his return Prime Minister Olmert ordered his aides to draft a plan for even deeper relations with China." For a full analysis of Olmert's January 2007 China trip, see Shichor, "Reconciliation: Israel's Prime Minister in Beijing," THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION CHINA BRIEF 7, no. 2 [January 24, 2007].

Being Jewish and Becoming Chinese: A Portrait of Israel Epstein

by Patricia Laurence

Five years after Mao's death, the Communist Party in China delivered the verdict that his crimes during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution had been thirty-percent wrong. Responsible for famine, economic waste and the death and hardship of millions, it seems a mild sentence. But as a recent article in *The Guardian* asserts "he was the man who

laid the platform for today's China": rail networks, higher literacy rates, women's rights to education and divorce, and better healthcare. As the PRC enters the global financial world with lightning speed, complex feelings about Mao and his historical role in China remind me of an interview that I had with Israel Epstein, a well-known reporter in China at the Friendship Hotel in Beijing in 1995. The end of my interview is where I begin. "I'm very interested in origins," he said as I was about to leave. "Where do you and your family come from?" I told him that my grandparents came from what used to be Austria-Hungary, and that I was not born—but became—Jewish after my marriage. He looked at me slyly, smiled, and said, "and I became Chinese."

Israel Epstein died at the age of ninety in 2005. Pursuing what it meant to be a "true believer" in the Chinese revolution, a prominent Communist, and to "become Chinese," I sought the famed reporter while on a research trip to Beijing. His apartment was in a labyrinth of lovely buildings with muted red and green up-turned roofs, a hotel and apartment compound used by the many Soviet experts in China in the early 1950's, and foreign experts and visitors today. It was designed by the much-admired Chinese architect Liang Sicheng, and built by Chinese workers. Wandering around this compound in the evening, map barely visible, I knew I was in foreign space. Edmund Jabes' *Book of Questions*—a book that seems to me quintessentially Jewish—was in my backpack, counterpoint for my questions and Epstein's about the meaning of his being Jewish in mainland China: a country that had welcomed persecuted Jews in flight during the Holocaust.

"You need space to read the world. Readability depends on distance," says *Edmund Jabes in His Book of Questions*.

I met Epstein in his tidy, brightly-lit living room lined with books, newspapers and pictures of him shaking hands with history—Mao, Edgar Snow, Soong Ching Ling (Sun Yat Sen's widow). Somehow history and commonality were joined in the man. Eighty years old in 1995, short, genial, with the look of Wallace Shawn, at times, Epstein was a well-known war reporter and author of several books on China's history and growth. His most recent, at the time, was *Woman in World History: Soong Ching Ling* (Mme.Sun Yat Sen),

whom he had met during his political activities in the thirties, and who arranged for his meetings with Mao and Zhao Enlai that, he said, changed his life.

His parents “never having been comfortable in what was then czarist Russia,” left just before the 1917 revolution to join another—in China. His father was a staunch socialist who had been jailed, and his mother spent time in exile in Siberia. Russian Jews, they had been formed in a political crucible, and had nurtured in Epstein his belief in “the idea of THIS Revolution, the Chinese.” He grew up in a colonial environment in Tientsin but because of his parents’ inspiration and the Chinese leaders he met, he developed a strong sympathy with the Chinese people and their revolution.

Curiously, he spoke with a British accent. He attended an American grammar school for six years and then a British school in China, and spoke only English. As for Chinese, he said, “no, not a word” until I was an adult. It was a “totally encapsulated society.... The Chinese had to learn a foreign language to function in the foreign concessions.” Though his parents spoke English quite well, they spoke mainly Russian at home. “They were fairly cosmopolitan” but, he acknowledged, “they spoke Yiddish to each other but I never really learned it.”

“I think most of the foreigners not including my parents didn’t consider themselves in isolation despite the encapsulation I describe.” They were, he said, “living on the peak of existence. Especially the British.” I reminded Epstein that they called Shanghai, “twelve miles of foreign settlement,” and he agreed that Tientsin was similar. Foreigners were about 2% of the population but foreign concessions occupied 80% of the city’s area. The foreigners generally spoke of the rest of Tientsin as if they were talking about a Chinatown in China. The foreigners were “it,” and the rest was a ghetto—though they were actually in their own. There were, Epstein explained, two types of Chinese who lived in the concessions. One was very rich and the other was servants and shopkeepers who served the foreigners.

In school, they weren’t taught Chinese, “not even as subject, not even an hour a week or anything like that. And, of course, nothing about Chinese culture and history.” We knew all the names of the presidents and the kings of England dating from

1066 on...and another fairly big chunk of time on India since it was the jewel in the fair crown.” But little on China. “There we were in China yet China was a long way off.”

His family, though, was different. From the beginning, Epstein said, “My parents were not like that. They weren’t in favor of colonialism. And they didn’t allow me to use contentious expressions for the Chinese as my schoolmates did. So we weren’t normal.”

“You can retrace a road in your mind or your veins” Reb Zam.

Tientsin was a place with originally eight or nine foreign concessions, each of which had its own little municipality. When Epstein was growing up, there were about five left, but originally there were the British, French, Japanese, Italian, German, Belgian, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and, briefly, an American concession established about 1860. But the American concession “turned into an administrative thing and was abandoned. There was an American presence, a garrison, American naval presence in the ship, *Ashville*, and, of course, the American consulate.

“Everybody’s existence,” said Epstein, “everybody who moves about is connected with history,” like my parents coming to China. After World War I, the German concession was handed back to China when it joined the Allies. The street that used to be Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse was renamed Woodrow Wilson Street. “You can gather who was coming out at the top of the heap,” said Epstein.

Epstein said at one point in the interview that “Everybody’s existence, everybody who moves about—like my family coming to China—is connected with history, and I’ve made myself part of Chinese history.” He worked for local Peking and Tientsin newspapers and broadcasters, the *United Press* and the *New York Times*, and is best known here for a series of eyewitness accounts about Mao in Yanan where he delivered his literary talks and the communist-led guerilla warfare behind Japanese lines). His career spanned sixty-five years. He started as an apprentice covering local news in the foreign community as a boy of fifteen in Tientsin. There was coverage of sports, and their one Olympic champion from the community was Eric Liddle, featured in *Chariots of Fire*; another notable was Margot

Fonteyn whose name at the time was Peggy Hookham who had been trained in ballet in by a White Russian teacher in Tientsin. He also discussed a schoolmate, John Hersey, who he’s also proud of having encouraged. Later, he covered the Guomindang and the Communists at the front and behind enemy lines in guerilla country in the thirties and early forties during the period of China’s civil war. He reported on China’s resistance to Japan brutal sweep across China, 1937-45, staying in China when his parents emigrated to the U.S, “wanting,” as he said, “to see the Japanese licked.” He saw them he said “with their tails in the air and their tails between their legs.” He was there when they came into Tientsin, Canton, and Guangzhou and in Hong Kong when the Americans attacked Pearl Harbor. “The war was wicked. Just like Hitler’s. The atom bomb was wicked for other reasons. At any rate, it shortened it.” He covered the establishment of the PRC in 1949 as did his friend, Edgar Snow, who published the classic *Red Star Over China*. He continued the coverage of the modernization of China until well into his eighties when he turned to writing his memoir.

“Quills are in some way kin to swords,” says Rabbi Bettelheim.

He was also imprisoned for five years “for suspicion...for unspecified charges,” he said, during the Cultural Revolution. He admitted it was “a long time. Good for my Chinese.” When I asked what the experience was like he said, “Oh I read a little bit [the few books allowed], and I paced the floor, and I read books in my head that I read before. What do people do in jail, you know.” Epstein was a very well-read man. He was released from prison in 1973, four years before the end of the Cultural Revolution, with an apology from Zhou Enlai, and he had little to say about it, or Mao or Zhou’s silence during his imprisonment. “I believed everything would come out all right. Which it did. I wasn’t sure about how long it would take.” But he insisted that he didn’t take it “personally. It was a real upheaval. Many people suffered.” When I recited the millions of Chinese who were killed during Mao’s Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, he acknowledged “all the vagaries we’ve had here, the Cultural Revolution, the ups and down, lefts and rights, zig-zags.” His reticence was abominable. He warned, however, that some of the young Chinese people had little sense of the past and “have a very

exaggerated idea of the west as a place of universal prosperity.” What would Epstein think of the prosperity in new China, for example, the new Starbucks (Xingbake in Mandarin) now plum in the middle of Beijing’s ancient Forbidden City.

Loyal to China and the Communists to the end in spite of Mao’s horrors, he became a Chinese citizen in 1957. When asked why, he said that he made the decision for several reasons. “One, this is home; the other is that I was stateless for a very long time given various historical vagaries. It’s the logical thing. Besides I believe in this revolution.”

When I asked if Jewish customs were observed in his home, he replied, “No, not religious customs. We were very atheistic. Very secular. My father was a very well-educated atheist, a Yiddishist and anti-Hebraist. And he didn’t approve of Zionism. He was a socialist. He was part of the Bund.” “Why were you named Israel?” I asked. He smiled, “Biblical.” His father was Jewish in a secular vein and Epstein explained the three distinct trends in China at the time: one of which was trying to assimilate, one was socialist and one was Zionist. When I asked about a religious strand, he answered, “Well, yes.” There was a synagogue at that time in Tientsin but he never attended. “At first,” he said, “it was in rented quarters, but then the community built one. We had a so-called rabbi—not a real one—we were a community of about 3,000—we had a sufficient size to have one but we never did.”

“My father,” he confessed, would go to listen to the cantor at the window of the synagogue. But he wouldn’t go in [laughter]. He liked that, he liked the singing. He liked the Kol Nidre and things like that.” When I asked about his father’s memory of songs and rituals, he said “Oh yes, my father knew more about religion than our rabbi. He’d been brought up, I suppose, in an orthodox community in (then Russian) Lithuania. They weren’t Hassidic, mystical.”

“If I told you that a rabbi’s chant during the service gives us back our land, would you believe me? Our world is a voice, a sob, a few holy words.” Edmund Jabes

Epstein’s own sense was of “being secular Jewish.” Some of his friends shared this sense but in the late thirties there were many Jews in China who were becoming

Zionist. Epstein’s father said of people who didn’t know much about China that they were “living on the scraps of Europe.” So they carried all their European views and differences into this little capsule in Tientsin. “So I knew all about this, what the difference was between being Zionist, Revisionist, General Zionists and all that, oh yes. The Jews had a little newspaper, a community paper, in Tientsin. Very parochial.”

“Every Jew drags behind himself a scrap of the ghetto, a scrap of rescued land where he takes refuge when alarmed,” says Jabes.

I mentioned that I read that swastikas sometimes appeared on the rickshaws in the German concession during WWII. Epstein immediately drew the line: “That was the Germans not the Chinese. The first time I saw the swastika was in the German consulate in Tientsin. Of course I knew what it was. The Germans in a place like Tientsin were not much into Nazism. They were a merchant community.” Epstein said that the relations between the Jewish community and the Germans were “pretty good” until Hitler. He recalled a story of a German of aristocratic background who fell in love with a Jewish girl in Tientsin, and he ultimately committed suicide. But the Nazis, Epstein said, started to put their mark on the community. He remembered that in the mid-30s in sports, there was a very good Jewish player on the German soccer team and they put him out. “I came out of school in 1930. Very young. So we knew what was going on in Germany.”

“So we are brothers in our faces,” Jabes.

“There was some anti-Semitism in Tientsin, but it was not Chinese, ranging from a sort of very cool anti-Semitism among the British, gentlemanly, but, nonetheless, there, to some very violent anti-Semitism among the white Russians, Russian emigres. But there was no sense of personal danger. I would say that the Jewish community didn’t feel—having come out of old Russia—didn’t find it very much out of the ordinary. Except that these people were not in control. There were no quotas or anti-Jewish laws or anything like that.”

When I asked whether his sense of Jewishness grew in this enclave during World War II, he replied that he was, “of course, anti-Fascist and part of this was

being Jewish. But it wasn’t the only part.”

“He reads. ‘Jews go Home’ scrawled in white chalk, in caps,” Edmund Jabes.

“And so I was interested in the war. I didn’t experience the war as a Jewish person. I mean, I wasn’t in Europe. I wasn’t in Germany. I was in China, and there was no anti-Semitism among the Chinese. In fact, most didn’t know what a Jew was.” When I said it was hard for a New Yorker to imagine such a world, he responded that “To the Chinese, there were two kinds of people in China, and the foreigners were very vaguely subdivided. There was a film made here in the 60’s about an American pilot shot down by the Japanese and saved by some Chinese guerillas. And apparently the Chinese script writers were scouring their minds for an all-American name, and they came up with ‘Epstein.’ So that’s how little consciousness.... That would do as if his name were Smith or Jones.”

Epstein said that he never personally experienced anti-Semitism during the war. “Not really as a Jew. We were in the intermediate stratum. We were foreigners. See the foreigners in China were divided into those who had extra-territorial privileges. You weren’t subject to Chinese law. You were tried in your own courts either civil or criminal. In other words, you got away with murder both literally and figuratively. And the whole foreign occupation was based on that. People who were from Czarist Russia (including the Polish part) had no extraterritorial rights after these were renounced by the Soviet Government. And the Germans and Austrians, through defeated in World War I, lost theirs. So if you were, as I was not, in these more or less privileged nationalities, you got home leave. In other words, you were treated as people who had come a long way to work in a difficult place and paid accordingly. You were paid more than the Chinese. So it was very stratified. Being Russian with extraterritorial privileges in China was more important than being Jewish—even during World War II.”

When I moved to the topic of the state of Israel, he noted that though it offered recognition to the PRC in 1949, it was not welcomed by the Chinese. China saw Israel, he said, as “a neocolonialist state” representing the interests of the “super-powers,” namely, the United States. He never mentioned Russia, another “super-