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- 1) The study of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng and assisting its descendents as appropriate.
- 2) The study of Jewish life in Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 3) The support of Jewish studies programs in China.
- 4) The study of cultural intersections between Chinese and Jews, for example adoptions, literature, diasporas, etc.
- 5) The study of Sino-Israeli relations.
- 6) To cooperate with other groups whose interests lie in Sinitic and Judaic matters.

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**BACK TO THE FUTURE
IN KAIFENG**

by Moshe Yehuda Bernstein

My first visit to Kaifeng and encounter with the community of its Jewish descendants was in July 2009. At that time, I had come to Beijing to explore options for a semester of student exchange as part of the Chinese language major in which I was then enrolled at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. Although my main focus then was Beijing Language & Culture University (BLCU), where I ended up studying for the first half of 2010, I also made inquiries into the Chinese language program at Henan University in Kaifeng.

My main interest in Henan University, however, was not so much its program of Chinese language, which was not as developed as that of BLCU, but rather its proximity to the community. I had first heard about the existence of such a community of self-proclaimed Kaifeng Jews over a decade before from Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University, where I was then a guest lecturer to a large and enthusiastic audience during Hanukah 2000 on "The Survival of Jewish Culture in Diaspora". My subsequent investigations on this tiny minority, a drop in the ocean of China's vast populace, who managed to preserve a strong sense of their ancestral identity in the wake of massive acculturation, only increased my fascination with their unique story. Unlike in Europe, where a narrative of persecution and segregation facilitated the perpetuation of distinct Jewish religion and culture until the Enlightenment, China welcomed its Jewish inhabitants, an embrace that gradually led the Kaifeng Jews to adapt to those syncretistic elements in Confucianism and Taoism that were viewed as compatible with their eroding Judaism. At the time of that 2009 visit, I was preparing the groundwork for an undergraduate research paper entitled "Language Shift and the Maintenance of Cultural Identity: Kaifeng's Jewish Descendants". Through her blog, I had made contact with Guo Yan, a young woman who has dedicated her life to the promotion of Kaifeng Jewish culture. She in turn connected me to Yaakov Wang, a bright young student in his early twenties, who was my guide for the better part of that four day visit.

During that previous visit I observed classes of varying levels in Hebrew taught by Zohar Milchgrub, an Israeli student of Chinese language at Henan University. In my conversations with Ya'akov and several other young men studying Hebrew, I learned that they were hoping to go to Israel in the coming autumn to study in kibbutz ulpan. Ya'akov's dream was to be ordained as a rabbi in Israel and then to return to Kaifeng in that role,

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**THE NEW WAVE OF JEWISH
MIGRATION TO CHINA SINCE THE
REFORM AND OPENING-UP**

by Pan Guang, Wang Jiam & Wang Shuming

<http://www.cjss.org.cn/200706205.htm>
translated and adapted to English

by Tiberiu Weisz

[About the translation: I translated this article with the Western reader in mind yet stayed as close to the original Chinese text as I dared. The Chinese text is written for Chinese audiences, not necessarily following the Western train of thought. I made some adaptations, eliminated some redundancies and tried keep the flavor of the original Chinese text.]

(Background note: Two years after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, China has initiated the Four Modernizations – Agriculture, Industry, National Defense and Science and Technology that evolved in what later they called Reform and Opening-up.)

China opened her doors to the world after the Reform and Opening-up. Chinese society underwent previously unheard changes that gradually influenced the political and economic landscape of the world. The economic development of the Reform and the Opening-up movement focused the eyes of the world on China for future opportunities. The Jews, as the world most internationalized people, have also been watching intensely China's peaceful development and opportunities. In Nov. 2004 Prof. Shalom Salomon Wald of "The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute" said in his report *China and the Jews: Old Cultures in Modern Times* that the world Jewry is paying close attention to China's peaceful development. The report pointed out China's development could have an impact on Jewish interests in the future and Jewish policy makers must have a Jewish policy towards China. Apart from these broad policies and economic recognition of the Chinese market, the Jews came to China from all over the world and they had extensively and deeply influenced the development of the Eastern Seaboard of China. More and more Jews live in various places in China, and new Jewish communities are being developed and established in the Eastern Seaboard.

1. Jewish life in early China

Since the 1970's, Jews came to China in three waves: The first wave was in the 1980's. The opening of China attracted some Jewish merchants and travelers, but there were not many long time residents, very few workers and even fewer long-term investors. The second wave was in the 1990's. With the estab-

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SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	175
China	22
Israel	15
Canada	13
England	6
Australia	3
Germany	3
Japan	2
South Africa	2
Indonesia	1
Switzerland	1
Taiwan	1
TOTAL:	244

FROM THE EDITOR

We wrap up volume 26 of *Points East* with a number of fine articles relating to the Jews of China, both the Kaifeng community and the contemporary ex-pat Jewish communities of Eastern China. Also included is a summary of the Sino-Judaic Institute’s annual board meeting, which sparked some reflection on my part.

Over the years, SJI has gone from speculating whether or not there were still self-identifying Jews in Kaifeng, to wondering if they wanted—and if we could provide—assistance in any way, to actually supporting cultural activities for a strong contingent of Kaifeng Jews in a renaissance community. That alone is miraculous. Then too, as Pan Guang et al.’s article describes, there has been the stupendous growth of non-Chinese Jewish communities on the coast. And equally amazing has been the flourishing of Jewish and Israeli studies at institutions of higher learning in China. Zhen xiguai!

The Jewish High Holy Days are a time for reflection and self-evaluation. SJI is a small organization, with no staff and a tiny budget that consists primarily of paying for *Points East* and helping to support and sustain both Jewish life and Jewish studies in China. Much as we’d like to claim credit for all that has happened in our areas of interest over the years, we know we are but a bit player. Nonetheless, we are honored to have played our small part in these developments.

Shana tova. May you all have a healthy and happy new year!

Anson Laytner

TO THE EDITOR

Gentlemen:

There is a street in Jerusalem named for SIMA BLILIOUS, a philanthropist from Hong Kong who supported the Sefardi community in Jerusalem. That is all the information I have, except that the buildings on the street named for her, were built between 1909 and 1933, if that is significant. I am trying to find more information about her - significant dates in her life; who she was married to; children; occupation; did she come to Eretz Yisrael or did she do her philanthropy from abroad. If you have any information, please let me know.

Thank you,
 Roberta I. Cohen
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Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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FINANCIAL REPORT AVAILABLE

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

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Points East

B. Grants Update

SJI gives \$5,000 per annum to Fu Xiaowei at the Sichuan University of International Studies in Chongqing.

- It runs an essay competition for graduate students, holds grad student meetings, and offers Israel studies.

- It has empowered a group within the university and created opportunities for them to go abroad.

Den Leventhal, head of Grants Committee, reported on several prospective recipients:

- Zhang Ping is an academic who has been exploring the moral foundations of Israel and is translating the Talmud into Chinese. It was suggested to give \$5,000 to a grad student selected by Zhang Ping.

- Fu Youde is a philosopher who heads the Jewish Studies program at Shandong University. He has written of the ideological vacuum in the “post-Communist” era and espouses a Neo-Confucian approach informed by other religious/ethical traditions. Hochstadt said SJI should target grants to people, like Fu, whose work and reputation we’re aware of. Shandong U is second only to Henan University in the size of its program.

The conversation turned to how best to maximize SJI’s influence and avoid depleting our reserves prematurely. One way is by serving as a pass-through to Chinese institutions for large foundations (like Glazer, Schusterman, etc...). Another might be to annually fund in rotation a Chinese academic to attend major Jewish studies conference in the US, who could then return to China with information to share, rather than funding many projects.

A fundraising committee could leverage these success stories to secure further funding from foundations and individuals. Abraham volunteered to lead fundraising committee and Belzer offered to help.

C. Outreach: New Members

The Board decided to place an ad in *Asian Jewish Life*, a HK-based journal to promote SJI. Laytner noted that the publisher had agreed to exchange feature articles on the magazine and SJI.

3. New Initiative Proposals

- Rothberg wants to pursue conversion ceremonies for Kaifeng Jews. He thinks it would be helpful in confirming their Jewish identity and believes it is safer than many fear.

- Zhang Ping: Garz suggests we give him \$2,000 to \$5,000. Hochstadt says this needs to be a one-time only, seed grant, but it was left unclear whether Zhang should make a proposal to the Grants Committee or the Board was recommending funding outright.

- Hochstadt wants Fu Xiaowei to write an article for *Points East* in near future.

- Support Beit HaTikvah school:

- Siddur—SJI can offer a bit of funding

- Chinese language library of Judaica

- Chinese-speaking, Jewishly knowledgeable teachers are needed to help.

- Jack Zeller of Kulanu has facilitated Birthright Israel trips from communities in Uganda and Suriname. We would like to support

- Birthright Israel trips for young Kaifeng Jews.

- B’Chol Lashon is a U.S. organization doing disenfranchised Jewish community outreach and we are in discussion about organizing a trip to Kaifeng for Jews with adopted Chinese children as a way of confirming their Jewish and Chinese identities.

4. Electronic Media

- Rothberg has set up on Facebook:

- A public SJI Members page

- A private Kaifeng Kehilla page.

We need somebody to update FB page regularly.

- Abraham will add email addresses to mailing list

- Belzer will set up date and place for annual meeting (2012)

- Laytner arranged for an editorial intern to arrange for e-publishing of Chaim Simon’s book on traditional Jewish practices of the Kaifeng community. She put it on Kindle but we still need to publish it as an e-book. Dana Leventhal was proposed to help with this and with Sino-Judaica.

5. Kaifeng Jews Exhibit

- The SJI Exhibit consists of framed photos of the Kaifeng community past and present. It costs \$2,000 to transport from CA to East Coast, so it is best to use in the West in places like the Contemporary Jewish Museum in SF, Jewish Community Centers and in the Chinese community.

6. Miscellaneous

- * It was proposed that American Jewish families adopt Kaifeng Jewish families as a way of offering people to people, tangible help. Belzer suggested we advertise in Reform Judaism magazine.

- * Abraham has 10 boxes of Al Dien’s SJI papers. It was recommended that they be donated to the Hoover Archives at Stanford U.

- * Royal Ontario Museum’s Kaifeng Jewish collection would be ideal to offer as a special private tour fundraising tour.

- * Rothberg wondered if SJI could get a copy of the Jade Chime made as well as an actual Torah for Kaifeng Jews.

- * The Board discussed, without taking action, on the idea of developing a curriculum on Jews in China (Kaifeng, Shanghai and elsewhere) for use as a 3 week course in supplementary schools or in day schools. Audrey Friedman Marcus was suggested as a resource person as well as the Hebrew Union College’s school of education. We could pay up to \$1000 for this work.

- * Board Update: Laytner noted that he’ll step down as President after this year. Lily Yuan Ninberg resigned from Board but volunteered to help with translations. Len Hew has moved to the Advisory Board. Eric Rothberg and Marvin Tokayer were voted in unanimously as new Board members.

[Editor’s Note: Dr. Abraham was unable to travel to Kaifeng and elsewhere as had been anticipated at the time of this meeting.]

“The Jews of Kaifeng”

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restaurant, where they discussed which prayer should be uttered first: the one for the rice or for the fish.

“This is something that I, or most Jews for that matter, would never have given a second thought,” Freund said. “It shows how much they can add to Judaism.”

The first family of Kaifeng Jews to immigrate to Israel was almost sent back to China. Shlomo and Deena Jin (no relation to Yecholya Jin) had overstayed their tourist visas in 2005. As they faced deportation, Shavei Israel worked with authorities to allow them to stay after going through the conversion process. Shlomo, at the time in his late 40s, endured a circumcision to complete the conversion.

More recent arrivals have been in their early 20s and most have felt more at home in Israel than in Kaifeng.

Wang Yage said he stood out his whole life. His house was filled with Hebrew books, a language no one in his family understood, and even his name was different: It’s the transliterated version of Jacob, a biblical name.

After studying one year at Henan University in Kaifeng, the 25-year-old jumped at the opportunity to move to Israel. He hasn’t looked back.

“I feel Israel is my home and I’m more comfortable here,” said Wang, who now refers to himself as Yaakov. “Israelis help you out when you need it; it’s like belonging to a big family.”

After his conversion, Wang plans to become a rabbi to help Kaifeng Jews immigrate to Israel. If he succeeds, he will be the first Chinese rabbi in almost 200 years.

Despite this progress, bureaucracy in Israel and China may prevent larger-scale immigration. According to Shavei Israel, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior has been reluctant to give visas to a group not officially considered Jewish by Israel’s chief rabbinate.

Meanwhile, because Jews are not among China’s 56 officially recognized ethnic groups and Judaism is not one of the five officially recognized religions, the Chinese government is suspicious of the Kaifeng community’s efforts to organize.

“The government is still worried about religion and its negative effects,” said Xu Xin, director of the Institute of Jewish Studies at Nanjing University. “They worry it will affect stability and encourage fundamentalism”...

Haas is a news assistant in The Los Angeles Times’ Beijing bureau.

Summary of SJI Board Meeting, Berkeley, CA, Sunday, 26 June 2011

Present:

Anson Laytner, President
Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer
Arnold Belzer, Vice-President
Andrea Lingenfelter, Secretary
Wendy Abraham
Seth Garz
Eric Rothberg (new member of board)

1. Kaifeng Update A. Schools

Beit HaTikvah (BHT): Eric Rothberg decided to create a group comprised of people who could read Hebrew and had a foundation in Jewish traditions and holidays as an alternative to Yiceliye School and Timothy Lerner (a Messianic Jew and founder of that school). Jewish practice and education are goals of the new school.

SJI and Rabbi Tokayer both are strong supporters of this school. It is more active than the Yiceliye School and it uses Skype for virtual lessons since it doesn’t currently have a teacher-in-residence. Denise Bressler (a Jewish Chinese woman originally from Taiwan) teaches remotely, as do Eric and several others. They are teaching Jewish prayers and songs, holidays, English, and Hebrew reading.

Our hope: That the Kaifeng Jewish community can have an identity that transcends the divisions within it.

Rothberg is working on a Chinese-Hebrew siddur (prayerbook). Belzer suggested that Chinese be used for prayers rather than Hebrew.

B. Shi Lei’s Group

The Ai family left Shi Lei’s group for BHT. No teaching or observance appears to be going on in Shi Lei’s group.

Given his educational background and

training, Shi Lei could play a role as a tour guide, teacher of Hebrew, Israel etc.

Hochstadt noted that in 2008, \$5,000 in museum seed money was given to Shi Lei from Shelly Ehrlich and that both SJI and Kulanu have provided Shi Lei with speaking tours in US, but nothing has resulted from these efforts as of yet. It was recommended that several SJI leaders, who are close to Shi Lei, talk with him about his work and potential role in Kaifeng, including his being hired as a teacher in the BHT school.

Laytner outlined SJI goals for Kaifeng:

- Pay teachers at BHT school
- Support the BHT school
- Attempt reconciliation between BHT and Shi Lei
- Welcome more descendants into BHT school
- Fund teachers’ salaries, payment upon conclusion of course

Other suggestions:

- Teaching Jewish knowledge, such as history (non-religious)
- Endow a Chinese language Judaica library

Abraham will be in Kaifeng later this year and will do fact-finding while there.

C: Discussion of ways to foster group identity among Kaifeng Jews:

As a way to set a communal standard for “Jewishness”, Belzer proposed issuing certificates of membership in Kaifeng Jewish community, which prompted much discussion without any action.

2. Grants

A. Types of Funding:

The Board discussed the issue of annual grants as opposed to institutional support. Grants are given and reviewed annually, while institutional support is ongoing. There is a tension between the two objectives that remains unresolved. Should grantees’ be required to re-apply annually or could their work be converted into ongoing support. Currently, the Grants Committee handles annual proposals from individuals (see below) while the Board handles on-going institutional support to Shanghai Institute..., Nanjing U and Henan U.

Garz noted that, regardless of the kind of support, it is important to have groups report back on an annual basis and that continued funding be dependent on their accomplishments.

Back to the Future

(continued from page 1)

becoming the first communal rabbi in Kaifeng for over 150 years. In addition to meeting the students, I was invited to the homes of several of the Kaifeng Jewish families; at the home of the Li family, I was feted with a sumptuous vegetarian meal. They asked me many questions, including appropriate options for some of the younger children who had not yet been given Hebrew forenames. At that time, I was not yet aware of the emergent fissure in the community caused by suspicions of Christian missionizing, so I was puzzled by the many questions that were asked regarding Christianity and the Jewish attitude towards Jesus. On Friday late afternoon, following afternoon classes in Hebrew, I joined the community at the Yiselle School (Israeli School)—an unpretentious one-room unit on the second-floor of an aging shopping centre—for their Friday night *Kiddush* and a modest meal prepared by the congregants. I was asked to address the group and spoke to them about the incredible feat of preserving their cultural identity after centuries of isolation and the opportunities that now presented themselves to enrich that identity with both knowledge and practice. They were very grateful for my words and hoped that I would return to Kaifeng again in the near future.

When I returned again to Kaifeng for the second time in June 2011, the circumstances, both personal and communal, were considerably different. First, as I had spent five months at BLCU in 2010, my communicative skills had improved. Second, I was in Kaifeng for official field work for my Honours dissertation at the University of Western Australia. This thesis discusses the ways in which the Chinese policy of “openness and reform” has impacted on the Jewish culture of Kaifeng. Though many academics have focused on the process of assimilation that essentially hybridized Kaifeng’s Jewish culture with the Confucian traditions of its host, fewer have chosen to research the effect of Deng Xiaoping’s radical shift of 1978 on the Kaifeng descendants. My initial plan was to distribute a survey that would measure Jewish literacy and to conduct personal interviews with a dozen or so the community members. Finally, my wife joined me for this trip, and her skills with the camera and video

proved to be essential for my research.

In truth, I was somewhat nervous how my wife would react to Kaifeng. During the time we lived in Beijing, she had grown to love the cosmopolitan, cutting-edge feel of that bustling city. In comparison, Kaifeng, despite its reputation as the world’s most cosmopolitan city when it served as the Song dynasty’s capital of Dongjing at the time the Jews arrived about a thousand years ago, seems to have been by-passed in much of the frenetic development currently taking place in other major cities in China. The city has a decidedly old, depleted façade; behind this, however, is an ancient charm and almost magical atmosphere reminiscent of a China in days gone by. Thankfully, it was the latter that Batsheva, an ardent photographer, tuned into and that made our visit all the more special.

Before departing from Perth, I had already been made aware that circumstances in Kaifeng had changed dramatically since my last visit. The seven young men, including Ya’akov Wang, who had departed for ulpan on Kibbutz Sde Eliahu in October 2009, had opted to remain in Israel and were now studying for conversion at Yeshivat Hamivtar in Efrat. In my email correspondence with Guo Yan, whom I had asked to assist me in organising video interviews and distributing the survey, she made it known to me that the community was now formally divided. Moreover, her role as my “assistant” was provoking controversy. Apparently, not wanting to lose face, there were those who did not want the community’s fragmentation to be made public. Furthermore, there was a general sense of antagonism towards the Jewish literacy survey, which was perceived as a kind of “test” that would only expose the community to ridicule due to their presumably inadequate level of knowledge. My correspondence in Chinese to assuage and explain these matters was apparently counter-productive; instead, after consulting with my supervisor, Professor Gary Sigley, I decided to drop the survey and concentrate on interviewing whoever was willing to do so. I did my best to alleviate Guo Yan’s stress by adopting a more fluid approach: no need to get stressed, whatever would be, would be just fine.

Prior to arriving in Kaifeng, I participated in the International Symposium on

Monotheism and Postmodernism at Nanjing University from June 14 -17, organised by the Diane and Guilford Glazer Institute of Jewish Studies. Following the symposium, I had the opportunity for a lengthy interview with the Institute’s director and one of the foremost researchers on the Kaifeng Jews, Professor Xu Xin. Xu Xin’s devotion to promoting Jewish Studies in China had made an indelible impression on me following our first meeting a decade before; in many respects, that encounter was the inspirational trigger for my pursuit of Asian Studies and Chinese language.

Our discussion cut across a wide range of topics: the exclusion of Judaism as one of China’s officially recognized religions; the changing governmental attitudes towards religious expression in China; the bureaucratic hindrances to efforts to assist the promotion of Kaifeng Jewish culture; the personalities and issues behind the current communal divisions; and the concept of creating a Jewish cultural centre in Kaifeng, among numerous other subjects. Professor Xu was optimistic that attitudes towards religious expression were slowly changing for the better. He believed the exclusion of Judaism from China’s officially acknowledged five religions was simply because of the minuscule number of Jews in China at any time, rather than an inherent discrimination. He also believed, as did a few of the other community members later interviewed, that essentially two communities would develop in the near future, a religious one comprised of converted Kaifeng Jews residing in Israel, and a traditional community remaining in Kaifeng. He was convinced that recognition of the potential economic benefits in developing Kaifeng Jewish culture from the highest levels of the Party could ultimately set a process in motion that would filter down and speed up the lackadaisical wheels of local bureaucracy.

Before leaving Perth, I had an extensive telephone interview with Michael Freund, founder and chairman of Shavei Yisrael, the organisation that has been instrumental in bringing a number of Kaifeng Jews back to Israel, where they have undergone conversion and received Israeli citizenship. Michael mentioned how his first Kaifeng Jewish contact was with Shi Lei, who had studied for a year at Bar Ilan but opted to return to Kaifeng, where he works as a tour guide but also

conducts a small Jewish school and museum. When Guo Yan first mentioned the split in the community, I had presumed she was referring to Shi Lei's activities. While in Nanjing, however, I coincidentally received correspondence from Eric Rothberg, which brought to my attention that a whole new dynamic had been added to Kaifeng that I had not been previously aware of: the breakaway Beit HaTikvah School. The day before our journey to Kaifeng, I emailed Guo Yan to see if she were able to organise a visit to the new school.

After arriving by train and then checking into our hotel on the outskirts of the city, I phoned Guo Yan, who confirmed that the following day I would be interviewing her, her grandmother and the mother of Ya'akov Wang. She had also arranged a visit with the Beit HaTikvah group, who apparently preferred first to meet me and then decide whether or not they wanted to be interviewed individually or as a group. After speaking with Guo Yan, I phoned Shi Lei, who was out of town conducting a tour and was not due back in Kaifeng for several weeks. Nonetheless, he agreed to be interviewed by phone. Articulate and well-educated, Shi Lei explained his reluctance several years ago to accept Israeli citizenship and undergo conversion: he did not want to be the first to do so and felt it more important to return to Kaifeng and educate the community in the authentic forms of Judaism he had experienced during his time in Israel. He felt this was of importance, since he claimed that the founder of the original Yisellie School, Tim Lerner, harboured Messianic tendencies. When I countered that during my previous visit I had seen no evidence of any Messianic literature or Christian indoctrination, he assured me that his claim was accurate. The more recent establishment of the Beit HaTikvah School with the help of Eric Rothberg, who had been teaching the community during his year at Henan University, was also a reaction to putative Messianic underpinnings at the Yisellie School. Nonetheless, Shi Lei was critical of the fact that only a month after founding Beit HaTikvah, Rothberg had returned to the U.S., leaving the members to flounder on their own and unnecessarily dividing the small community.

The next morning we took a taxi to the Teaching of the Torah Lane, adjacent to the hospital where the Kaifeng synagogue

once stood for seven centuries. Though continually damaged or destroyed by the flooding of the Yellow River, over the years the Kaifeng Jews made stupendous efforts to rebuild it and maintain a centre of Jewish ritual and tradition. In a small room bordering the hospital, Guo Yan lives with her grandmother, whose husband hailed from the Zhao family, one of the original seven Jewish clans. Guo Yan, though nominally a member of the Yisellie School, is truly in a category of her own. Bedecked in a sparkling tiara, star-of-David earrings and necklace, and a sash over her neckline embroidered with the Shma Yisrael, she embodies the persistent spirit of the Kaifeng Jews. In the past year, she has altered the large sign in front of her home to indicate that it is the site of a "synagogue" rather than a "cultural centre". Although she has been questioned a few times by the Chinese authorities about her activities, fearless and feisty, she often ends up turning the tables and questioning the officials about their questions! She believes that going public, especially in China's new era of "openness", is a far safer bet than functioning in secrecy. A strong proponent of resurrecting the hybridized Chinese-Jewish culture unique to Kaifeng, she is very emotional when discussing the exclusion of Kaifeng Jews under Israel's Law of Return and the criteria of the Israeli rabbinate. She regularly entertains tourists both at her grandmother's and at the museum of artefacts she and her husband, a Han Chinese, have put together in a house in the rural suburbs of Kaifeng. More than the museum, her ultimate goal, which she would prefer to realise with the help of the Chinese government, is the rebuilding of a replica of the ancient synagogue, which could function both as a tourist attraction and a cohesive magnet for the local community of descendants.

Following the interviews at her home, we took a taxi together to the Beit HaTikvah. Located on the fourth floor of an apartment block opposite the Children's Hospital, I was also pleasantly surprised to discover a large plaque outside the Beit HaTikvah boldly announcing its existence as a Jewish school. Since the meeting was arranged for 11 am on a workday, not all of the members were able to attend, but around a dozen did manage to turn up. Almost all were familiar faces from the previous visit two years prior, including a few in whose

home I had been a guest. I explained to them in Chinese the topic of my thesis, and that I was happy to interview them individually or in a group, however they felt most comfortable. Unfortunately, my short speech did not seem to convince them. After an uncomfortable silence, the first question thrown at me was, "Are you Jewish?" I reminded them that I had been involved in Jewish education for most of my life, ten years of which as director of Jewish Studies and school rabbi in Australia. It was only when I started conversing in Hebrew, however, that the ice began to melt, and whatever suspicions they had entertained finally vanished.

What marked the group interview that followed was the unanimity of agreement on a number of issues. Since the 1978 "openness and reform" they finally had the opportunity to learn about Jewish religion and culture, their interaction with Jews and Israelis had increased exponentially and their sense of Jewish identity had become more palpable and public. All were disappointed at the stance of Israel's Interior Ministry and the Rabbinate at their non-Jewish status. None of them could recall any incident of hostility or persecution from their Han or Hui Muslim neighbours. None of them believed there was any contradiction between traditional Chinese culture and Judaism. After the interviews, they wanted to sing a few traditional Jewish songs, which we recorded, along with Hebrew and Chinese renditions of HaTikvah. Before leaving, I tried delivering a pep talk to explain why, despite the split into two or three schools, it was important for the community's development to establish a unified front, possibly in the form of a committee comprised of each faction. Although they nodded in agreement and had undoubtedly heard this advice before, it seemed apparent that such an ideal could not be realised in the immediate future without some form of prolonged external mediation.

Before leaving, they invited me to attend their Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evening. I apologised and explained that I had already agreed to attend the *Kiddush* at the Yisellie School on Friday night. They were not happy with that response, and a heated exchange in Kaifeng dialect between Guo Yan and the Beit-HaTikvah members followed. The result was a compromise solution presented as *fait accomplis*: the Beit HaTikvah would push for-

Judaism is an important religion and it is worth being recognized. We heard this answer for six years. At the time I became to understand that despite the politeness there is no intention of recognizing the religion of Israel, perhaps because of political considerations. Officials will not admit this, they will continue to smile and will do nothing."

What kind of political considerations?

"The Chinese government looks at request for religious recognition globally. If they allow Judaism to operate in China, then other religions, including Islam and Christianity, will claim religious discrimination. After all, everyone wants to work with 400 million Chinese. So it is better not to even address this problem, and they just ignore us. They are quite polite about this but we know that for all practical purposes, nothing will change. Everyone who comes to China must know that the government is very protective of its order and they do not want new ideas to capture the imagination of the Chinese people."

Is China coming closer to the West?

As a result of the increasing number of Jews and Israelis in China in the last few years, Rabbi Greenberg has had to intervene for those who got in trouble with local authorities. "People come here, they do not understand China and make stupid mistakes," he said sadly. "In order to help a stupid person you need a good lawyer and provide him with a lot of money to bribe the right people. Even then one needs to know who is hurt and who is behind the complaint. Once, I was accompanied by the Deputy Foreign Minister, a person with high status, to save an Israeli. Lately, I have been in contact with local officials who know me. Sometimes they can solve the problem before it gets out of hand. I advise those who come to China to accept the differences between China and the West and be aware of the sensitivity of the authorities, and simply not to make stupid mistakes".

But it is said that China is coming closer to the West?

"That is true. Ten years ago, when I arrived to Shanghai, people used to do their "things" in the street, and I am talking about a city that in the past was under the control of the West and a history with

foreigners. A lot had changed since then, and very fast. Today heavy fines are imposed on indecent behavior in the streets. There is more enforcement of the traffic laws, something that in the past was just a suggestion. There are other indicators that show that China is adopting more Western standards. But all is relative. There are still many strange things for a Westerner who live here and are not just touring. "

What is the most difficult for you?

"Loneliness. You feel like you are on a different planet. This feeling causes young Jews and Israelis who are visiting here to come to us for some homeliness. A foreigner in China does not have contact with local Chinese and even if they did, they would not understand anything. This is an exciting phenomenon that is at the expense of privacy. Young people start to look anew into their Jewish identity and they get to us. By the way...we encourage Israelis to take part in humanitarian activities. For example when there was an earthquake in Sichuan, Chabad encouraged people to go and help the victims. "

Do you expect that China will become the next place of Jewish - Israeli immigration?

"Despite the fact that Jews are attracted to places with opportunities, the huge hiatus between the two cultures will prevent mass settlement in China. In addition, the government is not interested in such a move and it limits the foreigners to several isolated cities. But gradually the dripping of migrating Jews will turn into a stream and the Jews will migrate to the east, this time to the Far East."

Kaifeng Jews Flourish in Israel

by Benjamin Haas
excerpted from the *Los Angeles Times*,
16 October 2011

As a child growing up in Kaifeng in central China, Jin Jin [Yecholya] was constantly reminded of her unusual heritage...

Her father told her of a faraway land called Israel that he said was her rightful home, she recalls. But "we didn't know anything about daily prayers or the weekly reading of the Torah"...

Then in 2005, Shavei Israel arrived. The privately funded conservative religious organization, based in Jerusalem, specifically targets descendants of Jews who have lost their connection to the religion, such as those forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition in Spain.

"Chinese have a strong reverence for ancestry," said Michael Freund, founder and chairman of Shavei Israel. "Even though they don't know how to read the Torah, they know they're Jewish."

So far the organization has helped 14 Jews, out of an estimated 3,000 who live in Kaifeng, move to Israel. But Freund complained that Israel's bureaucratic and religious red tape has prevented Shavei Israel from bringing over more of these Chinese Jews.

Because the community intermarried and based Jewishness on patrilineal heritage rather than matrilineal, the norm in Judaism, Kaifeng Jews who want to move to Israel need to undergo Orthodox conversions under Israeli law.

The process takes a year or more of study at an Orthodox yeshiva, and requires a final examination before a rabbinical court.

Jin was brought to Israel with three others from her hometown by Shavei Israel specifically to begin the conversion process. Once converted, she was eligible to remain in Israel under the country's Law of Return. The statute allows Jews to claim citizenship, which she did along with her three Chinese classmates. Jin's father remains in China, although she said he hopes to join her soon.

At first, Jin and others were indignant about the need to formally convert to Judaism.

"According to me and my family, we were always Jewish," she said. "I was confused why we needed to go through the conversion process."

But after she started studying in Jerusalem, Jin said, she realized how little she knew of Jewish traditions and rules.

Jin eventually became such an expert in prayers before meals, Freund said, that she stumped him at a dinner with other Jews from Kaifeng at a kosher sushi res-

tomatically lean towards the stronger side and rule in that favor. Lack of justice? Perhaps. The Chinese do not seek justice, they look for industrial peace, and in their eyes that is justice. This peace is the religion of the Chinese government..."

This characterizes the Communist regime?

"They are not necessarily connected. Beijing recognizes five religions that are legitimate in [the Chinese] eyes; one of them is Buddhism... One of the strictest prohibitions in Buddhism, for example, is to take the life of a live animal, even killing a fly. This restriction is enforced in India, so you will find many restaurants where, because they are vegetarian, Jews can eat. In China there are millions of Buddhists, but there are no vegetarian restaurants. When I asked Chinese Buddhists how they can explain this, the answer was elusive, or they said that 'only the extreme fanatics do not eat meat.'"

Another example: It does not bother a Chinese family that the father is Christian, the mother is Buddhist and the children are pagans. This does not create conflict. I have met such families. When you ask them how they get along, they do not understand you. From their point of view, faith is like being soccer fan, one is a fan of one team the other of another team, and they live peacefully. In China faith does not harm and it does not oblige. The only thing that people adhere here is to Confucianism—but that is not religion, it is a way of life."

They are never to blame?

Jews in China have to cope with difficult problems that derive from the fact that they are Jews. The laws of kashrut, for example. "Two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, we tried to bring in a shipment of kosher meat to the port of Shanghai. The intent was to host Jewish people in the city for the holidays as is the custom of Chabad in the world. The shipment was delayed in the port. I turned to the authorities with the request to release the meat in time. After three days we got an answer telling us that the shipment was ready to be picked up. Obviously I was glad and we sent out invitations to the guests. Then we went and opened the containers and our eyes saw black, the meat had spoiled.

It turned out that after the container was unloaded from the ship, no one thought of putting it in the freezer. It was left on the wharf despite the fact that there were signs saying that it had to be refrigerated. This is one of those situations when you do not know whether to laugh or cry. My wife and I stood by the container and started to laugh. Tears would not help, then at least we laughed, otherwise it is impossible to stay sane in China."

Did you cancel the Rosh Hashanah feast?

"Obviously not. The Hong Kong rabbi came to our rescue and we also moved our Jewish hinds. Thanks God, that Rosh Hashanah we hosted seventy people."

After the holidays, Rabbi Greenberg wanted to clarify as to who was responsible for the misunderstanding and he revealed again the Chinese culture is completely different from any Western culture that he knows. "The harbor manager admitted to me that whatever happened was not right, but when I asked who was to blame, it turned out that nobody was to blame. Everybody agreed that we were right, but they also said that what happened has nothing to do with them. We were stuck with a lot of excuses and nobody at fault. First I thought that is because I was new and in a few years I would understand what happened here. And here we are ten years later in 2008 and I still do not understand the Chinese dynamics. Between us, I gave up hope to understand.

There is anti-Semitic material even in China?

Shalom Greenberg and his wife started their Shanghai adventure one year after they got married. He is an Israeli citizen while his wife is an American. They have four children, two sons and two daughters, the oldest son is nine and the youngest daughter is three. This is how it works in Chabad: you get married and then they send you on a mission. Yet they had prepared and taught us about China, and we thought that we knew quite a lot about China. Only after we arrived we realized that if one does not know China from inside, one cannot know how different is from the Israeli or American views.

Why is there a need for a Jewish community in China?

"There is a large community here that needs a lot of services, and we are sup-

plying them. The community has increased in the last few years and I brought my brother here to help me. He opened another Chabad House in another part of the city.

How do you explain this success?

The Chinese appreciate teachers because in their eyes they teach to be successful in life and I am here as a teacher. The Chinese also appreciate the Jews because they are convinced that our people control the world finances, and they like money and its influence. Therefore, every Israeli businessman is appreciated here, [but]even more appreciated are Israeli teachers. When I presented myself, the first reaction from the Chinese was great respect. I was supposed to be some sort of monetary guru. And then they found out that I do not teach how to make money, instead I teach spirituality, and that confused them. They do not have respect for spirituality. At this stage most would leave me alone, only a small minority understood that there was something more important than money."

In a world that that is antagonist against the Jews in general and against the Israelis in particular, China is sort of oasis. When I [the Hazofe writer] asked Shalom Greenberg what was the reaction of the Chinese to Western stereotypes to the likes the Elders of Zion, he said: "China also has translated anti-Semitic literature that portrayed the Jews as dangerous to the world, but instead of causing them to hate the Jews, it caused them to admire us. The say 'if you have so much success to influence the world, it is a sign that you have some knowledge that is worth learning.' This is the way of life in China, this is how they see the world. There are Chinese who want to study Judaism and some want to convert, but we direct them to Hong Kong or Australia. It is forbidden to talk to these people in Shanghai and obviously it is forbidden to convert them."

Despite all the fascination with the Jews, Judaism is not one of the recognized religions in Beijing. The Chabad turned to the local Chinese authorities about six years ago to recognize Judaism as a religion with the assurance that we have no intention of converting any Chinese. "We also promised to obey all the limitations imposed by them. The officials listened to the request and they were very polite. They said that they do not doubt that

ward its schedule to begin Kabbalat Shabbat early at 6pm. I would attend one hour of services at the Beit HaTikvah School and leave before 7 to attend the *Kiddush* at the Yisielie School.

On Friday morning I decided to visit the Kaifeng Museum and check out the two stelae that adorned the original Kaifeng synagogue. Although the admission to the museum is free, foreigners can pay an extra 50 yuan (\$US 8) to see the stone tablets kept locked away on the top floor. After unlocking the door, the female curator led me up a flight of dusty stairs to the stiflingly hot room where the stelae are exhibited in glass cases. Arguably the most impressive relics in the museum, despite the erasure of most of the Chinese characters, I asked my guide why she thought these stones were hidden from the view of the Chinese public. Somewhat embarrassed, she answered that she did not know why. I surmised that perhaps such an exhibit would be seen by Chinese tourists as an acknowledgement of a Jewish ethnicity in China, a perception the government would be keen to prevent. During the taxi ride to Beit HaTikvah later on in the day, I discussed this with Guo Yan. She believed that the concealment of this exhibit—as well as the one in Qingming Millennium Park—was a holdover from the days of Mao, when China had no relations with Israel and were careful to cultivate strong relations in the Arab world. She agreed that a centralized exhibit of all the relics of Kaifeng's Jewish history could have potential as a tourist attraction, particularly if these were integrated into a vibrant community centre.

The Kabbalat Shabbat service at Beit HaTikvah was very impressive. Led by Gao Chao as the *chazzan*, apart from a few prayers recited in Chinese translation, most of the service was ardently chanted using traditional Shabbat melodies. Several of the congregants used Hebrew siddurim, while some relied on transliterations. At ten to seven, Guo Yan signalled us that it was time to leave. Although the congregation had just sung "V'shamru" and were nearly at the end of the service, Guo Yan was insistent that we had to leave right away to be on time for the *Kiddush* at the old school.

As it was in my previous visit, there was

no sign outside the windowless room of the Yisielie School; rather, the entrance was draped across with a white curtain to ensure privacy. Though we arrived only a few minutes after seven, *Kiddush* had already been recited and the meal had begun. Although there was still ample time before sunset, I had been instructed not to take any photos or videos. With the seven young men departed for Israel, the congregation was now considerable smaller and older than during my previous visit. Tim Lerner, the virtual founder of the school who has unstintingly devoted himself to the community and has been instrumental in coordinating their immigration to Israel, sat at the head of the table. I sat next to him, using the occasion to ask him a number of questions.

It became apparent in our conversation that Tim adheres to a broader, more heterodox interpretation of Judaism. When questioning him about the allegations that the school was being funded by Hong Kong missionaries, he made no bones about the fact that Christian groups indeed contributed—though not exclusively—to the school's funding. He saw nothing wrong with that; likewise, he had no control over the contributors to the school's charity box, many of whom were non-Jewish tourists. He felt that the reasons for the division stemmed more from a conflict of personalities than actual issues. During the meal, he bantered affectionately in colloquial Chinese with his flock; whatever the criticisms against it, the Yisielie School was still serving the function of a social matrix, where the descendants had the opportunity to communally express their sense of Jewish identity. Tim mentioned that for last year's Passover Seder, close to 100 participants had attended.

When Shabbat ended, I found there was an email from the Beit HaTikvah group, inviting my wife and me to come to a vegetarian lunch at the school the following day. The group proudly showed me their library, computer systems and numerous CD's for learning Hebrew. Gao Chao frequents a Youtube site for Hasidic melodies which he studies meticulously. At present, Wang Jiaxin, a teenager who spent a year studying at Yemin Orde in Israel, is the official Hebrew teacher, but the group is trying to organise some online

learning via Skype and anticipating future Jewish student volunteers from the university. The women taught Batsheva how to make *biaozi* (Chinese dumplings), and, in return, Batsheva taught them how to braid *challah*, a technique which they mastered with great dexterity. We thoroughly enjoyed the delectable lunch and the warm, friendly atmosphere; the meal was concluded with several of the group's favourite Hebrew songs. Before leaving, we signed our well-wishes into the school's Guest Book, which we had not had time to do with our hasty departure on Friday afternoon.

When I began my research for my thesis, I was convinced that China's policy of opening would provide the community with the tools for its revitalization. While it has indeed done so, it has also confronted them with multiple influences and dichotomies that have divided a once united community. While this is an almost inevitable feature of any normative Jewish community (as some have jested, it even attests to the community's "Jewishness"), it can also be an impediment to its future growth and development. Whereas the Yisielie School functions as a social milieu that allows communal interaction, Beit HaTikvah has taken further steps in acquiring deeper roots in traditional Jewish liturgy and culture. Meanwhile, Guo Yan resolutely conducts her one-woman show to recreate a Jewish-Chinese cultural synthesis in Kaifeng, while Shi Lei, through the travel agency for which he works, transmits the community's history to a growing number of Jewish and non-Jewish tourists. How all of these strands will converge together is extremely tentative, as this convergence hinges on so many external political, social and economic factors. In whatever way this intriguing narrative of this unique community moves forward, however, the determination, resilience and courage that maintained their Jewish identity for over a thousand years continue to flourish today.

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Trends in Immigration

(continued from page 1)

ishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel and the exchange of diplomats in 1992, entrepreneurs and scholars came to China. The number of Israelis who came to China increased steadily compared to the Jews from other places. Then a new period had started and the number of Jews in China increased rapidly. This was the beginning of the third wave. Two reasons: one was the rapid development of China and both countries joined the World Trade Organization. The other reason was that after 9/11 international terrorism was rampant. Obviously, many countries in the world were unsafe, and in contrast, China was safe and prospering. With this wave, the Jewish population of Shanghai increased faster than in Beijing or other places.

Available material about the Jews living in China is very limited and statistics is extremely difficult to gather. Apart from those Jews coming from Israel, Jews from other countries are affiliated with their country and they come not as Jews. The experiences and lessons the Jews have learned from living in different places is that they do not want to be either discriminated against or rejected or singled out as Jews. Therefore the Jews in China are sensitive and resist being the target of a survey about their activities. The original [material for] this survey comes from reports and interviews from leaders of Jewish communities and the Israeli Consulate.

Analyzing the material mentioned: initially the Jews concentrated in economic and developing cities in the Eastern Seaboard of China. There were about 8,000-9,000 people and those who worked in China stayed for longer periods of time. Their distribution is [now] as follows: The Jewish population of Hong Kong is 5,000-6,000 people, but only 3,000-4,000 are community members. Shanghai: in 1998 there were 200 Jews, and in 2002 it increased to 500, 1,000 in 2005 and to 1,500 in 2006. Shenzhen (Guangzhou) there are about 1,000 Jews. In Beijing, in 1998 there were 200 Jews (mostly from the US) in 2005 it increased to 1,000 (mostly from the US, Israel, Azerbaijan, Russia and Europe). In the cities of Taipei and Gaoxiung in Taiwan there are 150 Jews (50 households). In addition, there are Jewish merchants who

lived in other Eastern Seaboard cities, like Tianjin, Dalian, Qingdao, Suzhou, Nanjing, Kangzhou, Fuzhou, and Xiamen. Currently, the number of Jews has been increasing steadily in each place. According to the Shanghai community director, Mao Duansi, four Jewish families come to Shanghai every week. Most of them come from the US and Israel, fewer from Europe, Australia and Canada. According to our information from the Shanghai Jewish registry, there are also Jews from South Africa, Mexico and Turkey. Among these Jews some are with dual citizenship, like US-Israel, France-Israel, and England-Israel.

As far as visitors, service people or exchange programs and others who come for shorter period of time, the number of Jews is hard to estimate. Like in Beijing there are 20,000-30,000 Jewish visitors or businessmen. According to the Jewish Community Center of Shanghai and some travel agencies, the number of tourists and short-term visitors has reached 50,000 a year.

The Jews come to China today for three reasons: trade, work and study. They come mainly for trade and for economic reasons to Shenzhen and Guangzhou. Since Shenzhen and Guangzhou are not political and cultural centers in China, Jews travel between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and Guangzhou. In contrast, the number of scholars and foreign students is higher in Beijing because there is a high concentration of embassies and higher educational schools. Shanghai is positioned in between, more traders than in Beijing but less than in Shenzhen and Guangzhou. But there are fewer diplomats, scholars and foreign students [in Shanghai] than in Beijing but more than in Shenzhen and Guangzhou.

2. Jews and Jewish communities in Shanghai, Beijing etc. Today

Traditionally, Jews are scattered all over the world but they congregate naturally in communities where they are able to practice their religion, culture, education and live together.

The world Jewry can be divided into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements and within each movement there are smaller religious branches. As was earlier mentioned, the Jews began leaving China after 1945, their number decreased gradually and by 1966-67, the Jewish communities of Harbin and Shang-

hai had dispersed. Mainland China had no Jewish community left. But after the 1990's, more and more Jews came to live in China and they established new communities in Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou etc. Because of the lack of anti-Semitism in China, these communities mutually benefited from the Chinese friendship and the government. Consequently their presence expanded rapidly.

The B'nai Yisrael in Shanghai was established in 1998, with about 200 members from 15 countries. Set up at Beijing Street #1277, 19th floor, its Chairman was Elan Oved, President Albert Sassoon, Vice Presidents Jonathan Eisenberg and Seth Kaplan. In August of that year, Rabbi Shalom Greenberg and his wife Dina came to Shanghai. The residing Rabbi became the spiritual leader of the community. In 2002, the B'nei Yisrael Congregation moved to Hong Qiao Street # 1720, with a beautiful garden. The Chairman now is a French businessman, Maurice Ohana, and its membership is over 500. Recently the community set up a new activity center at Pudong Street #1168, lead by Avraham Greenberg and his wife Nechamie. Most of the members are from the Pudong area. Besides offering "kosher" food, and providing services for Jews at holidays, the center also serves as a companion to the Israeli Consulate.

The Kehillat Beijing was established in 1995 in Xinyuan Nanli #6, and belongs to the Reform/Reconstructionist Jewish movement of "World Union for Progressive Judaism". Earlier, in the 1980's, [it began with] some Jews congregating regularly in addition to the holidays, and Elyse Silverberg and Roberta Lipson established a community where they became the leaders. Silverberg was an exchange student in 1979 in Beijing, then she married a Chinese businessman and they opened their medical instrument business and home-based hospital. It can be said she connected with China and became the leader of a stable community. She said: "We live in a strange place and keep busy during the week but want to integrate/interact with the surrounding environment. Consequently we feel that there is a strong need to unite with Jews for Shabbat and Yom Kippur/holidays. She established the community, with a Jewish temple, but she could not offer "kosher" food though she offered formal religious [services] and education.

Or, as Robert Lawrence Kuhn, the author of "The Man who Changed China: The Life and Legacy of Jiang Zemin," expressed it: "China is a nation that underwent enormous changes and "enjoys previously unknown freedom". She [China] was unfairly treated and now her economy is growing rapidly, she has started to conform to international rules and conventions." He [Kuhn] is eyewitness to China's development and is deeply concerned about her long-term prospects. He [Kuhn] is an American Jew who is confident in his friendship with China. He is also a famous international investment banker and industrialist and, in addition, a TV broadcaster. His view is that the brilliant success of the Chinese economy is the second change. The first change, and the most important one, is the [open] spirit and the mind of the Chinese people, their opinions and views, and their faith in their country and its people. They are marching towards the world stage expressing that kind of enthusiasm, in addition to their individual freedom.

Many Jews who come to China have a keen interest in Chinese culture. They hope to retain/preserve their own tradition and culture and at the same time make efforts to understand and enjoy the Chinese culture, make friends with Chinese people and [live] in mutual harmony. Many people make an effort to study Chinese, like the wife of Rabbi Freunlich, who is fluent in Chinese, while the Rabbi's Chinese is fairly proper. In Shanghai, Maurice Ohana's two daughters enrolled in Fudan University to study Chinese and his wife has a keen interest in Chinese culture. She is studying the tea ceremony, Chinese medicine and massage. Maurice is interested in Sizhuan vegetable dishes and he likes spring rolls and dumplings.

From the answers to our survey, we have also learned that the Jews have a special affection towards the Great Wall and other famous Chinese historical sites. Some more than 100 Orthodox Jews in Beijing celebrated Shabbat at the Great Wall. In the Shanghai survey, about ¾ of the respondents indicated they have a good Chinese friend and some have married Chinese women. Most [surveyed] indicated that they like the rich variety of Chinese foods. Their impression of China is largely positive. When asked to

enumerate 5-6 impressions, the most common words were: "friendly", "safe" "old culture" "change" etc. The safe conditions in Shanghai and other cities received good criticism.

But the answers [in the survey] highlighted some problems that need to be resolved in the large cities in China. Foremost is pollution (including air and noise); next is transportation (including drivers—on rainy days cars are unattainable); crowding and problems with city people (including spitting, not obeying traffic laws, dress, speaking loudly in public); then there is a lack of appropriate/adequate entertainment places for foreigners; medical insurance and medical care is difficult to obtain; not enough signs in English; beggars, etc. In addition, the Shanghai rabbi expressed his hope to hold regular religious services in the [Ohel Moshe] synagogue. He thinks that this will attract even more Jews to come to live in Shanghai.

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How the Chabad Began in China

excerpted from *Hazofe*, Oct/Nov 2009 translated from Hebrew by Tiberiu Weisz

[Interview with the Hazofe correspondent]

"We arrived to Shanghai and started the preparations for the opening of the Chabad House". Not any different from other places here. We also publicized our presence to the Jewish business people and also established contact with the Israeli Consulate. One evening, almost as a surprise, several Chinese came to the new house and identified themselves as senior officers of the Chinese security forces. "You have two possibilities," they said in a threatening way to our face. "You either leave the country within 24 hours or you will be put before a Chinese court." "On what charges?" we asked dumbfounded. "You will be charged with disturbing the public order and with missionary work", they said.

Rabbi Shalom Greenberg, Chabad representative in China, reminiscences on the first days of the local Chabad House...: "Those days the Chinese did not know what Judaism is and they thought that we wanted to convert them. Today they understand that it is not like that".

Initially, as beginnings go, it was not easy. After the government people threatened Rabbi Greenberg, one of the Chasids said that they [Chabad] had no intention to leave and they are ready to stand trial. "They [the Chinese] were sure that we would pack up and leave", he said. They asked me if I knew what a trial was in China and if I understood the severity of the charges. I was not impressed, and told them that this trial would turn into an international media event. The first rabbi in 50 years to come to China since WWII and he was arrested and stood for trial."

The answer made the Chinese see a determined person in front of them who might cause them troubles. They probably went to consult their superiors in the Party, and after a while they came back and said that from their point of view, I do not exist as long as no Chinese was involved; and that we were not to build an official synagogue; and not to operate from an official site, only from a private lodging. They added that "any Chinese who shall be in contact with us will have serious problems."

What brought you to China?

"The opening up to the West and the rapid economic development. Today there are not only businessmen but also Jewish families and students who come to study and there are also Jews who married to Chinese, they are Chinese citizens."

What are the Chinese afraid of? Why did they limit your involvement?

"The government wants industrial peace and they are not ready to allow other ideas to endanger this quintessence. I will give you an example of the Chinese legal system. In the Western legal system in general, and in Judaism in particular, the search for the truth is the height of the legal system. 'What really happened' – they call witnesses, investigate and bring evidence. In China what really happened is not relevant. When a dispute between two sides arises about property or finance, the judges will au-

In addition there are some young Jews who find the China market attractive. They look at China as an opportunity, especially for those who lost their jobs or simply cannot climb any higher in Israel. Avrum Ehrich, PhD., an Israeli who worked for Bar Ilan University, came to China in 2004 to look for a teaching job. He was eventually hired as professor by the Religious Department at the Shandong University. Professor Ben Canaan of the Hei Longjiang University became the only permanent [Jewish?] resident in Harbin after the Reform and Opening-up.

Moreover, changes occurred in the professions of Jews coming to China. Initially they were businessmen, now they are more likely to be managing departments and middle level managers. Like former Israeli foreign service officer in charge of foreign studies, Arie Schreier, who moved to China with his wife and works for a private foreign brokerage firm. Or like Lanzeji [Yancy?], a graduate of Tel Aviv University, in East Asian Studies. After graduating, he came to Shanghai and works for a law firm. As a result of the expansion of the service industry in China, there are quite a few Jews experienced in foreign affairs who look for opportunities in China.

To return to the survey of Jews in Shanghai, we discovered that most of them are "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their work in Shanghai. Only one item [on the survey] was marked as "partial". The economic activity of Jews in China has raised a few acute problems: like engaging in widespread illegal and profiteering marketing activities. For example, Anli Corporation operated a large-scale marketing scheme that the government ordered closed down. But on the other hand, the lack of intellectual property protection in China is an important obstacle to the exchange and cooperation with foreign technology and talent.

5. The Development of Jewish Education in China

Previously the Jews in China maintained their Jewish tradition and culture and strengthened their Jewish identity. In addition to observing Shabbat and other Jewish Holidays, obviously education was the most important issue.

The Jews of Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing heavily emphasized education.

On the one hand they organized activities within the community, like organized traditional and cultural activities, including Hebrew lessons. For example, in Beijing they set up Ahavat Yitzchak Sunday School for children age 5-12. Every weekend they attend Hebrew language classes and every Wednesday the Rabbi taught an advanced religion class for adults for an hour starting at 8 PM. In addition they had Bar and Bat Mitzvah classes for children and a one-on-one session on Judaism. The Shanghai community curriculum had a list of topics such as "A Cup of Torah for Women" studies, and "The Role of Women in Contemporary Society". They meet once a week in the evening at Xingbake coffeehouse and organized a "Lunch Learn Study Group" that meets every Tuesday between 12:15-1 PM at Shanghai Dongfang Community Center. In classes on the Tanya, they studied the literature of the Orthodox [i.e. Hasidic] tradition; [offered] Hebrew lessons for children ages 2-10, and the most important topic in adult education was Jewish philosophy and mysticism.

In Hong Kong, each community had their own curriculum. The Conservative and Reform movement organized Shabbat [observances], and Torah studies and established the religious school (*Shorashim*) for early education to middle school children, and special Jewish education classes to other age children. They also operated an adult Torah and Hebrew lessons, including Torah for women. In Taipei [Taiwan] the Jewish community operates a Hebrew class mostly for children.

As was mentioned above, in the 1920s of the 20th century, Shanghai, Tianjin and other places operated Jewish schools to foster the talent in the Jewish community. In recent years, the Jews in China have also operated new all day Jewish schools.

In 1991, the Ohel Leah synagogue in Hong Kong had established the Carmel School, the first Jewish [day] school in East Asia. Initially, it was for early education and later it expanded to classes for middle school students. The school had 70 students in 1994 and now it has expanded to 250 students. The school offers courses at international standards and Jewish education. The most important courses were Jewish studies and acculturation. The curriculum leaned to-

wards contemporary Orthodox Judaism. The school has a very energetic principal, a teachers union, and scholarship and operating funds.

The Shanghai community established the Shanghai International Jewish School. It is comprised of the Kid Zone (3-5 years old), Youth Club (6-9 years old), Club Ed (10-13 years old), and Teen Club (14-16 years old). These four age groups have different curricula. The school has their own libraries with book collections on religion, Jewish history, and literature.

The Beijing community has also established its own school. It was an international school for early education to elementary school serving the entire Jewish population of Beijing and [it is an] unique Jewish school in Northern China. The curriculum includes: Mommy & Me for 1 year olds and that meets once a week for the children with their the mothers; nursery school for 3 year olds, that meets every day from Sunday to Thursday afternoon; the all day kindergarten for 3-6 year olds; the lower elementary for 1-3 grades; and upper elementary for 4-5 grades.

6. Jewish views and impressions of China

Many Westerners come to China with preconceived notions and opinions, often demonizing China, causing [them] to form negative impressions of China. But one picture is worth one thousand words: Jews who come to China see the changes in China with their own eyes and get a feeling of real China that is more objective and more positive. Then they can heatedly debate [about what they felt and received] [about their experience] in China and they are full of praise and satisfaction. Actually, China has become a hot topic in Israel recently. Israeli parents [used to] want their children to study French and German as foreign languages, now more and more parents let their children learn Chinese. Some American Jews often change their perceptions of China after they come to China. One American in our survey who had lived in China for 15 years pointed out that China is changing daily. A female librarian, who visited Shanghai in 2006 with a tour a group of librarians, was asked by a reporter about her feelings regarding this visit. She said: "What she had seen and heard in China was completely different from her previous information".

Since she had a close relationship with the Hong Kong United Jewish Community, she often received support from them. The community used the Reconstructionist prayer books. According to the 1998 records, [the community] consisted of about 200 members, most came from the US and were of different denominations. It is estimated that its members have not exceeded this number.

In August 2001, the Lubavitch Rabbi Shimon Freunlich and his wife arrived and they transformed the structure of the community. Shimon and his wife came from the Lubavitch Center in Hong Kong and they brought with them the nitpicking Lubavitch rules. They strictly observed the Jewish dietary laws and they invited Orthodox ritual slaughterers from Australia and other places, who went to Inner Mongolia to slaughter animals and birds to serve kosher meat in Beijing and Shanghai. He also instituted [traditional] observance of Shabbat and the holidays, and offered educational services in Beijing.

The Jewish Communities of Shenzhen and Guangzhou are branches of the Hong Kong Community Center. The Guangzhou center was established in 2003 during the spread of SARS and it was led by Rabbi Eli Rozenberg. The Shenzhen Community center was established in 2006 in Luohu district, led by Sholem Chazan and his wife Henny. These two centers serve mostly in the economic zone of Zhu Sanjiao and cater to Jewish travelers.

The relationship between the Lubavitch and the non-Orthodox community in Beijing is precarious. On the one hand, they had celebrated the most important Jewish holidays together, they set up early education centers together, and in 2003 they even talked about establishing a community center together. Rabbi Freunlich had also stated that he did not come to Beijing to replace the independent Jewish community, but rather to complement it. On the other hand, each side had maintained its differences and competitiveness, such as on the issue of equal status of women in the community. The Jewish New Year holidays of 2003 divided the celebration among three events: The non-Orthodox event was attended by about 100 people, the Lubavitch was attended by about 150 people, and about 130 Israelis attended

the evening celebration at the Israeli Embassy. Lipson, the leader of the non-Orthodox community said "even if both branches would celebrate the most important holidays together just for the sake of the Beijing Jewish community, the parties disagree on faith and [religious] practice. "

In Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, the leaders and rabbis belong to the Orthodox Lubavitch branch, so there is no similar conflict to the one in Beijing. Nevertheless, there are many non-Orthodox Jews who do not like the nit-pickiness of the Lubavitch and they do not attend their services. Instead they go their own ways or they attend events at the cultural centers but do not attend religious services.

3. The Jewish Communities of Hong Kong and Taiwan

Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China walked on the road to reform and opening up. The Jews of Hong Kong were delighted and encouraged, they positively supported, and participated in, the tide that swept China's Reform and Opening-up. In 1978, Lawrence Khadoorie visited China after a long 30-year absence. After he returned, he wrote: "I can gladly say that the relationship between the Chinese government and us is very good. They know that we are generous by nature for our small producing country. We are not resentful for the troubles and political issues. They made us realize that in order to make the world better, we must go an extra step. " He added excitedly: Following the lead of the Four Modernizations, Hong Kong has already embraced the changes more than ever before. In 1985, he met with Deng Xiaoping on his visit to China. He is inseparable from the establishment of the Great Asia TV station.

At the same time, the Jews of Hong Kong advanced the relationship between China and the West, recommended that China and Israel should benefit from the establishing diplomatic relations. Before the establishment of diplomatic relations, Hong Kong served as the go-between for Israel and China trade, which had reached almost 1 billion dollars annually. Very instrumental to the Israel-China trade was Shaul Eisenberg, a refugee from Germany who came to Shanghai, and later became an official and wealthy industrialist.

This year we celebrated the 14th anniversary of the establishment of relations between China and Israel that were established in 1992, for which the Hong Kong Jews had taken credit. Most of the Jews in Hong Kong today are those who came to China in the early 1980's to participate in the Reform and Opening-up. According to the 1989 data on foreigners, 63.8% of the Jewish population in Hong Kong had lived there for 10 years and only 14.1% lived there for 20 years. Another statistic from the same year showed that over 70% of the Jews were Ashkenazi, which meant the Sephardic Jewish population had declined significantly. Even the religious liturgy and rituals at Ohel Leah synagogue [the old Sephardic synagogue] adopted the Ashkenazi tradition to reflect the changing membership.

After 1978, the Hong Kong Jewish community developed quickly and benefited from the reforms and opening up of China, and from the improved relations with the West and Israel. The community's fortunes were tied to the development of China.

In the 1990's, the Hong Kong Jewish community started a new plan of development, including renovation of the Ohel Leah synagogue, the building of a new cultural center, expanding and building new schools and entertainment facilities. After a complete facelift of Ohel Leah, the synagogue looks like new, and it is celebrating its 100-year birthday.

Just in time, on the eve of 1997, Hong Kong returned to China.

The new Jewish community center was officially open, the building renovated, complete with Chinese décor. It was a place where the Jews kept their traditions. Inside there is a richly decorated library. Dennis Leventhal, the [former] Hong Kong Jewish historian thinks that: "The mutual concern of the formal return of Hong Kong to the Peoples' Republic of China in 1997, obviously shows that the Hong Kong Jews have faith in the future, and they believe that China will preserve the freedom of religion." After the return of Hong Kong to China on July 1, 1997, Jewish community prospered within the borders of the People's Republic of China. In his book *China and the Jews*, published in 1999, Leventhal commented: "Today the Jewish community feels optimistic about the future, its

membership has increased, and they rely on their natural ability to adapt. The community has expanded more than at any other time in the history of Hong Kong. "

Talking about religion, the Jews of Hong Kong belong to one of [four] groups: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform (the largest congregation) and a formal [non-sectarian] Jewish community. Since Yaakov Sassoon financed the renovation of Ohel Leah synagogue, which was built in 1901, [the synagogue] is still the oldest moderate Orthodox community center. Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier is the long-term spiritual leader. According to several year-old statistics, Ohel Leah has a membership of 256 households (about 600 people).

Because [Ohel Leah] is Orthodox, the Conservative and Reform Jews established the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong in 1990. They publish the *Shofar* [a magazine], the influence of which is rising in Hong Kong. Michael Schwartz serves as Rabbi of Hong Kong's largest Jewish community organization, with 320 households. The organization is under the umbrella of The World Union for Progressive Judaism (part of the Reform movement), and caters mostly to the Reform Jews, independent, Conservative and any other non-traditional Jewish households and individual members. Its members come mostly from North America. The majority are business people, reporters, teachers, scholars etc. and includes a wide range of households. This warmhearted and philanthropic community established the Tikun Olam (Repairing the World) Committee in October 2000 to enhance charitable activities in Hong Kong.

Besides these two large congregations, there are three Orthodox organizations; the most popular one is the Lubavitch, established in 1987, with 105 households. Mordechai Avtzon and his wife came to Hong Kong in 1987 and established the first Lubavitch center. Initially it started at Hua Yuan Street #51, and then moved to Macdonnel #7-9. Within a few years he set up other smaller branches but there were not much activities. Among their activities, they offer a daily *minyan*, children and adult education, daily holiday services, and counseling services. To maintain the daily services, they hired traveling rabbis in Asia to help them to support [themselves]. In 2006 he set up another new

branch in Jiulong.

Another Orthodox community is the Shuva Yisrael, which the Israeli Darwish household established in 1991 in the Sephardic synagogue of Hong Kong. It caters mostly to Sephardic businessmen and travelers. The center has a good library.

Then there is another group established by a Syrian Orthodox Jew, with its own rabbi.

The above mentioned communities utilize community centers, with executive committees and caretakers and offer several services to its members and travelers such as Shabbat and holiday prayer services, Jewish education, kosher food, entertainment, travel. Most of communities have their own library. Obviously, there are Jews in Hong Kong who do not participate in the religious activities and communities, and the above story does not include them. Some scholars estimate that the numbers [of independents] is between 2,000-4,000 people.

Generally speaking, there are 3,000-3,500 Jews in Hong Kong today; most of them belong to one of the five communities covered in this article. If we add the number of those who do not participate in these activities, the number of Jews in Hong Kong could reach 5,000-6,000 Jews.

The Jews of Hong Kong are mostly businessmen, teacher, lawyers, officials, diplomats, students, doctors and laymen. They come from 30 different countries, and speak over 15 languages. Among them Americans, (39%), British (27%), and Israelis (18%). Quite a few also come from Canada, India, Australia, South Africa and other English-speaking countries.

It is worth mentioning that the Jewish community of Hong Kong publishes the monthly, *Hong Kong Jewish Chronicle*, [among other publications].

The Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong was established in 1984. It has a positive impact on the study of the history of the Jewish communities in Hong Kong and China.

In summary, the quality of cultural life of Hong Kong Jews is high; they are relatively prosperous and have made signifi-

cant contributions to Hong Kong. It is believed that as China continues with the Reform and Opening-up policies, the Jews of Hong Kong will flourish and they will have an even more positive impact on the future development of Hong Kong.

Taiwan also has a small Jewish community, established in the 1950's. Initially, they were European businessmen, and US and then US soldiers and their descendants stationed in Taiwan. The community was registered as a non-profit organization in 1975. Recently, since Israel set up a trading office in Taiwan, more and more Israelis are going to Taiwan for business or to study Chinese. Most of them live around Taipei and there are about 50 households, or about 200 people, who attend community events. Most of these people came to Taiwan in the mid-1970s as businessmen with multinational companies. In addition there are a few scholars, students and diplomats. The leader of the community is Rabbi E. F. Einhorn, an Orthodox Jew; the chairman is Don Shapiro, a graduate of Columbia University in New York and an American Jewish businessman.

4. Economic Activity of the Jews in China

China opened her doors to the world with rapid development and globalization that included opportunities for Jews in the world. The more China developed, the more she became inseparable from the world. More and more Jews saw the development and changes in China positively and they were successful in China.

Anli Enterprise is a model of a small enterprise in China that expanded successfully and became big. The company started officially in 1995 and by 1997 its business volume grew to 15 billion Renminbi. After 1998, and the reorganization in 2005, Anli's business in China reached 175 billion Renminbi. In 2003 [Anli]'s business with China exceeded its business with the US and Japan together, to become number one in the world. Its name recognition and revenues increased rapidly and became a respected business in China. Anli Co. had positively helped China enter word markets. Besides Nail, [other] companies, like Morgan Stanley and Lehman Brothers, have expanded in China and they have very strong a Jewish presence. Former World Bank Chairman, the Canadian Jew Edgar Bronfman, had visited China sev-

eral times [where he] set up a beverage company in Shanghai. M. Kelinboke [Clinback?], an American, and president of an international company, not only invested in China, he is also the Chairman of the Advisory Board of the city of Shanghai. He had many good ideas about opening up.

A few Jewish industrialists who previously lived in Shanghai took advantage of the opening up of China and came here to invest and trade. They "pulled strings and built bridges" to expand the culture of international trade in China, and they also hastened the attractiveness of China's modernization. For example, Albert Sassoon, of the Sassoon family, who was Chairman of the Jewish Community of Hong Kong, comes to invest in China.

Jews have also established the diamond industry in China. Eisenberg was part of the Putong diamond stock exchange that he set up in 2001. After the Reform and Opening-up, he built a plastic factory Shanghai. The Khadoorie family built the electric industry. They contributed to the building of the Great Asia nuclear plant and were praised by Prime Minister Li Peng for "reclaiming [conserving] land in Hong Kong." Michael Khadoorie also visited Shanghai many times and opened an office there and prepared further plans.

The case of Maurice Ohana, Chairman of the Jewish Community of Shanghai, clarified this issue. He was born in France, he dealt in the textile industry and established joint ventures with Chinese companies. Once he saw the Chinese economic landscape, he moved to Shanghai with his family, bought a 5,000 square meter office space in Jiangsu Beilu, and founded the Longfield Trading Company. His business flourished. He introduced the transit trade to the Jews of Shanghai. His business volume has reached 20 -30 million US Dollars.

Other smaller ventures are in the electric, high tech and rental property. Business ventures in consulting, law and medicine operate on a smaller scale. Like the Jewish Medical Association, which has an exchange program with the Duanjin Hospital in Shanghai. Individual Jews are also scattered in the city but it is difficult to paint a picture of their economic activities.

Comparatively speaking, it is easier to trace the investments and manufacturing conditions of Israeli companies in China than those of individuals. Perhaps that is reflective of the growing influence and conditions of Jewish economic activity in today's China.

Before the establishment of diplomatic relations, Israel and China had successfully cooperated in military, economic and transfer of technology. After the establishment of relations in 1992, Israeli enterprises and individuals introduced the diamond industry to China. China's entrance into the World Trade Organization and rapid development made the Chinese market hot.

Israel and China mutually complement each other. Israel's advanced technology and management are highly respected in China. Branches of Israeli enterprises in China mostly reflect their distinct technology and dominant position. Irrigation, breeding and greenhouse [technology] have already occupied a dominant position in China. Now Israel has already opened three model agricultural stores in China, one is the Yongle store in the Jiao District in Beijing, and the others in Xinjiang with a variety of flower seeds and plants, milking and agricultural products. Hothouse [methods], breeding techniques, fertilizers and plantation are wide spread in China. There are also plans to cooperate with the *moshav* agriculture.

Israeli IT, medical instruments and diamonds companies have penetrated the China market with considerable equity. IT products are the most competitive products internationally and Israeli exports to China have practically built "half of Jiangnan." The fast growth of the China market is very important to Israel. Witness to this amazing growth is Ilan Manor, the Israeli Consul General to China who said that "Israel cannot ignore the China market, she cannot afford to lose it either".

Israeli enterprises like Scitex Vision and Check Points are well known in China. There have been research conferences, cooperative negotiations between China and Israel about IT products with the aim to attract other important Israeli businesses to join. Zim Integrated Shipping Services LTD has an important status in China. Formerly known as Zim Israel Navigation Co. LTD, it has established a

branch in China 1995. Zim Israel Navigation Co. LTD started to ship Chinese containers in the Far East and, with the increase in Chinese container business, the company gradually became one of the most important shipping companies in the world. It developed close to one hundred maritime lines. In addition, the scope of its business has constantly expanded and extended to storage, wharf/dock, transport of goods, and airfreight. It changed its name to Consolidated Transportation Corporation. In 2001 it established a sibling shipping company headquartered in Shanghai with branches in many other cities. It represents the main air transportation of Israel in China with two flights a week to Israel and Europe. In April 2006 it bought a 25% stake in the Ningpo Aviation Company for 2 billion Renminbi.

Recently investing in risk management [brokerage houses] has been on the rise. The entire Chinese market does not surpass the Israeli [market] of risk management. Lately Israeli brokerage houses have attracted the attention of China. In September 2002, the CEO of Giza brokerage firm, Zee Holzman visited Shanghai. The year 2004 became China's "risk investment year". In April, Shenzhen hosted a "risk investment forum" that was attended by many US and Israeli brokerage houses. Then in May-June, representatives of Infinity, Gillete, Yangfeng, PNV, and etc. brokerage houses visited their partner, the Shanghai Development Corporation. In June, Israeli brokerage houses held a conference in Shanghai attended by high-level Israeli investment managers. They further promoted the penetration of Israeli risk investment into China. The Shanghai Development Corporation hosted the "US- China high tech and risk management" [conference], attended by 29 US representatives, among them were 19 well-known brokerage houses. Among these experts there were many Jews. By the end of the year, the Israeli risk management firm Infinity and the Chinese firm IDB had established the first risk management firm in China. The establishment of the Israeli-Chinese investment firm assisted small and middle size Chinese businesses. On January 5, 2006, the Chinese and Israeli CHF Corporation established the first joint venture risk management firm—the Chenelong Development Corporation. Each invested 1 Billion US dollars to help develop new organic drugs.