



# Points East

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

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## 20 YEARS OF ISRAEL-CHINA RELATIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

excerpted from *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 January 2012  
by Editorial Board



*Former foreign ministers David Levy and Qian Qishen sign the agreement establishing diplomatic relations (Jan 24, 1992).*

Twenty years ago today, China and the Jewish state established official diplomatic relations. But long before January 1992, there was extensive, albeit secretive, cooperation...Until Mao's death in 1976, China's foreign policy was driven by Communist ideology and the championing of "oppressed peoples" and "victims of imperialism" which included the Arab nations. But starting in 1979, China began conducting major arms deals with Israel, who was represented by businessman Shaul Eisenberg...

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union's influence among Muslim states in the region helped facilitate China's embrace of a pragmatic, flexible diplomatic strategy in the Middle East driven primarily by the supreme economic interest of maintaining political stability.

During the first decade of relations with Israel, the Chinese were guided to a certain extent by the mistaken notion...that Jewish and Israeli lobbies had inordinate sway over decisionmaking in Washington.

This misconception was soon dashed after the US, contrary to Israeli interests, put pressure on Jerusalem to cancel a number of highly lucrative military deals with China.

In October 1999, US president Bill Clinton formally opposed the sale to China of Phalcon airborne early-warning and sur-

*(continued on page 3)*

## PETER BERTON: THE "GODFATHER" OF JAPANESE STUDIES

by Pamela J. Johnson

Dapper in a formal tailcoat, Peter Berton stood between American and Japanese flags as he accepted the Order of the Rising Sun.

The Japanese government honored the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations at University of Southern California (USC) with the award for his major contributions to Japanese studies in the United States.

"Dr. Berton is the godfather of Japanese studies," Junichi Ihara, Los Angeles' consul general of Japan, said during the 2010 ceremony.



Ihara lauded Berton for his many books and articles on Japanese politics and foreign policy, Japanese international negotiation style, Japanese socio-cultural and psychological characteristics, and the territorial dispute between Japan and Russia.

He praised Berton for launching the annual lecture series on Japanese art in 1988 at the

Los Angeles County Museum of Art in memory of his late wife and mother of their two sons Michele, who had a deep appreciation of Japanese culture and was a museum docent. The lectures sharing with the public the beauty of Japanese arts have succeeded for more than 20 years.

With the medal depicting rays emanating from the sun suspended from a red and white ribbon draped around his neck, Berton addressed the audience in Japanese and English. The first person he thanked was his father. "My father in 1926 had the vision and wisdom to leave Poland and seek an economic opportunity in China. His three brothers, their wives, his sister, their children, my maternal grandfather, my favorite 10-year-old cousin," he paused fighting back tears. "Everyone on

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## SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	189
China	20
Israel	16
Canada	14
England	5
Australia	3
Germany	3
Japan	2
South Africa	2
Indonesia	1
Switzerland	1
Taiwan	1

**TOTAL:** 257

## FROM THE EDITOR

With Chinese New Year celebrations now a pleasant memory and the vernal equinox fast approaching, we spring into volume 27 of Points East. This first issue features reporting on the situation of Jews in Kaifeng and on that of Kaifeng Jews in Israel. We celebrate the life of Peter Berton, the celebrated "godfather of Japanese studies" and kvell at the successes of the Center of Judaic and Chinese Studies at Sichuan International Studies University. We commemorate 20 years of Chinese-Israeli diplomatic relations and mark SJI's re-entry into the publishing field with its forthcoming publication of Rabbi Dr. Simon's pioneering study of how ancient Kaifeng Jewish practice might have conformed to traditional Jewish law (*halacha*).

Enjoy!

Anson Laytner

## IN THE FIELD

### ♦ Understanding Judaism—in Chinese

A great introduction to Judaism in Chinese by Rabbi Brad Artson, Dean of the Rabbinical School of the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, is available at: <http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org/judaism-an-introduction-chinese.html>. Don't be put off by the website's name. [www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org](http://www.jesusjazzbuddhism.org) is a fascinating place to visit.

### ♦ A New Yiddish-Japanese Dictionary

The Forward has announced the publication of a Yiddish-Japanese dictionary: *Yidish-Yapanish Verterbukh / Idishu-Go Jiten*, compiled and edited by Kazuo Ueda, with the aid of Holger Nath and Boris Kotlerman, Daigakusyarin, 1302 pages, ¥60,000.

### ♦ From our Senior Scholar

Donald Leslie, the undisputed senior scholar of the Kaifeng Jews, sent a letter to let us know that, at the age of 89, he is alive and doing well enough down-under in Curtin, Canberra. Sadly, his wife, Helga, died about a year ago. For those in-

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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Al Dien, Leo Gabow

terested, he notes that copies of all his books and articles and most of his collections on Jews in China, and Islam in China, are held now in the TBC Library of Chinese Studies, N. 10 Huixin Donjie / Chaoyang District, Beijing, 100029. Tel. 6449-6914. "Keep up the good work!" says Prof. Leslie. "To 120 years!" we say to our senior-most colleague.

◆ **And from our Second President** Our long-serving (and long-suffering) second president of SJI, Prof. Al Dien, a youngster at 83, gave the 2011 commencement address at Stanford University's Center for East Asian Studies /East Asian Languages and Cultures joint ceremony. His speech may be found in the 2011 issue of HORIZONS. Yasher koach, Al!

◆ **Hong Kong to establish a Holocaust and Tolerance Resource Center**

Plans are in place to set up a centre in Hong Kong dedicated to promote education and awareness of the Holocaust. The Hong Kong Holocaust and Tolerance Resource Centre (HKHTC) main goal is to become a centre for scholars, teachers, students and the general public, to make accessible locally relevant material in Asia, specifically in Chinese. The HKHTC will promote conferences, workshops, exhibits and remembrance events. Spearheaded by local resident Jeremy Amias, the non profit organization...has taken space in the Elsa High School resource room, where it has some artefacts, books and dedicated computers which students and teachers can use to access web-based materials...The centre will also be responsible for overseeing initiatives already established such as the Asian delegation to the *March of the Living*. It will be organising UN Holocaust Remembrance Day on 31 January to be held at the Jewish Community Centre. Featuring guest speaker Dr. Stephen Smith, a Holocaust specialist who has started and operated many different Holocaust memorial centres. Currently in Asia, Japan has two Holocaust centres, one located in Fukuyama-city, symbolically near to Hiroshima City where the first atomic bomb was dropped. The Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center, is another, established in

1998 at the initiative of a small group of friends including teachers, historians, and a Hiroshima survivor.

Excerpted from the *Jewish Times Asia*, December 2011/ January 2012

◆ **Asian Fellowship Programs Open in Israel**

A new fellowship designed to build and invest in tomorrow's leaders of Israel-Asia relations has opened in Israel. The Israel-Asia Leaders Fellowship, which was launched by the Jerusalem-based Israel-Asia Center, is designed to supplement the university study programmes of Asian students studying in Israel, providing them with the high-level access, contacts, skill-set and support network necessary to build long-term, strategic partnerships between Israel and Asia throughout their future careers. The 12 fellows from China, India, Singapore, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan – range from bachelor degree holders to postdoctoral students, in the fields of study and research that include agricultural science, environmental economics and green energy policy, business and economics, environmental science, civil and environmental engineering, conflict resolution, Middle Eastern studies, Holocaust history and education, and architecture and design...The 8-month programme, that began in October, comprises seminars, field trips, skills workshops, internships, professional mentorship and host family programmes and ongoing support on return to Asia. Excerpted from the *Jewish Times Asia*, December 2011/ January 2012.

**20 Years of Israel-China Relations**

(continued from page 1)

veillance systems worth \$1 billion. In December 2004, the Bush administration objected to the Israeli government's decision to repair and upgrade the Harpy unmanned aerial vehicle that Israel had sold to China in the 1990s.

During the Cold War, Washington did not oppose Israeli arms deals with China because Beijing was needed as a counterweight to Moscow. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it began to see China as a threat to its strategic in-

terests in the Asia-Pacific region. US opposition has essentially put an end to all significant military trade with China.

One of the main challenges facing Israel, therefore, is developing non-military trade with China, which will soon become the world's largest economy, even if it grows at just half of the present rate of 8.7 percent annually. Bilateral trade, which in 1992 was worth \$60 million, is now worth about \$8b. a year, one-third of which is Israeli exports to China.

More than 1,000 Israeli companies operate in China and there is cooperation in the fields of industrial R&D, water, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. A consulate was opened in the southern city of Guangzhou, and another is planned for Chengdu, in the underdeveloped western province of Sichuan. Both locations offer unique opportunities in parts of China with untapped economic potential.

A Chinese firm built the Carmel tunnels, ChemChina acquired a controlling stake in Makhteshim Agan Industries and Chinese chemical companies have opened R&D facilities here.

Unfortunately, one area in which China's interests are at odds not only with the US's but also with Israel's involves Iran's nuclear program. But according to Prof. Yitzhak Shichor of University of Haifa's Department of Asia Studies, China's ties with Iran must not be misconstrued as expressing Beijing's identification with Iranian belligerence. Rather, it is a tactical move against US influence in the region.

According to Shichor, there is nothing that China wants more than quiet and stability so that its economy can continue to grow unheeded. Iran's threat to block the Hormuz Straits is seen by China as extremely counterproductive. Chinese foreign policy in the region has troubling elements. Beijing maintains strong trade relations with Iran while conveniently ignoring the threat posed by an Islamic Republic with nuclear capability...Hopefully, the Iranian crisis will be resolved peacefully so that mutually beneficial economic interests shared by Jerusalem and Beijing can be pursued against the backdrop of a stable, safe Middle East.

## Peter Berton

(continued from page 1)

my father's side was murdered by the Nazis. So, if my father hadn't left Poland, I wouldn't be here today."

At his Beverly Hills home, Berton found among stacks and stacks of books — including his more than 100 publications — a 2001 pictorial album titled *The Jews in Harbin*, authored by the Heilongjiang Social Science Academy. The coffee table book describes Jewish life in the city established in 1898, when the Trans-Siberian Railway reached the border of Manchuria.

"What the book does not say is that the Tsarist government bribed a Chinese viceroy to build a Russian railway in China with French money," Berton said.

Harbin was designated the 'Paris of the Orient' for the city's European architectural style.

An only child, Berton was 6 when he and his mother arrived in Harbin, one of the largest Jewish communities in the Far East. Berton's father, Claude, established himself as an accountant and businessman, importing heavy woolens from Europe.

*The Jews in Harbin* shows the 89-year-old Berton as a confident-looking boy sitting front and center with his classmates in a Jewish elementary school. He remembers 1931 when he was 9 and Japan launched an attack on Manchuria.

"The Japanese came in on tanks and the retreating Chinese armies on Mongolian horses were dropping firearms left and right," Berton recalled. "We kids picked them up and traded them. Can you imagine tanks against horses?"

In Harbin, Berton attended an English high school, modeled after schools throughout the British Empire. He then graduated from Y.M.C.A. College, established by American missionaries.

He played violin and graduated from The First Harbin Music Academy, where his teacher was Vladimir Trachtenberg, a pupil of the famous Leopold Auer in the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. As a member of the first violin section in the Harbin Symphony Orchestra, he toured Manchuria, Korea and Japan.

After music school, Berton sought graduate education in the U.S., but couldn't get a visa. His parents encouraged him to study violin with the world-renowned Alexander Mogilevsky in Japan.

That's where Berton's world changed. He became fascinated with the beauty of Japanese culture, art and calligraphy. He explored many aspects of Japanese culture. Studying martial arts, he earned a black belt in karate. His current Japanese garden and home — filled with Japanese artifacts, screens, swords, masks and paintings, including one of Mount Fuji, which he once climbed — are evidence of his passion.

In 1949, Berton's visa arrived after 12 years. It wasn't a student visa; he came to the U.S. as an immigrant seeking permanent residency. He immediately began graduate studies at Columbia University's East Asian Institute. While there, he learned that the Library of Congress was looking for someone with language skills to oversee their Manchuria collection. Speaking several languages, Berton became a consultant for the Library of Congress one year after his arrival.

He became acquainted with USC as early as 1953, when Rodger Swearingen, a professor of international relations, invited his colleague Paul Langer and Berton to collaborate with him in a Ford Foundation-supported project on the Russian impact on Japan.

In 1961, Berton returned to USC as professor of international relations and Asian studies and soon established the Asia Pacific area studies program, which he developed for the next 30 years. He also created USC's first course on Japan.

Los Angeles is also where he met his late wife Michele, who was born in Vienna, Austria, and was one of a few in her family who survived World War II. Of Jewish heritage, Michele's parents, who perished in Auschwitz, sent her to live with a family in England a few months before the war's onset.

Michele died in 1987 in Tokyo, Japan, while Berton was there as director of USC's and other California private colleges and universities' study abroad programs.

These days, Berton is finishing his latest book, *From Enemies to Allies*, a study of Russo-Japanese relations at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He doesn't see well and uses the Zoomtext computer program to read aloud to him everything he writes and receives.

"The copy editor sent me a 21-page, single-spaced document, about 300 queries and comments, which together with my answers grew to 46 pages," Berton groaned. "Now I'm bracing for the second round."



He has written some of his life story, and is compelled by the idea of writing a memoir.

"But," he said, "I have one more book in-between."

This article, *Profile: Peter Berton* by Pamela J. Johnson, originally appeared in the Fall 2011/ Winter 2012 issue of *Dornsife Life*, a publication of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Reprinted with permission.

## Kaifeng Jews in Israel

I Jin Jin

excerpted from the *Los Angeles Times*,  
25 November 2011

by Benjamin Haas

JERUSALEM - As a child growing up in Kaifeng in central China, Jin Jin 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 recalled, but "we didn't know anything about daily prayers or the weekly reading of the Torah."

Then in 2005, Shavei Israel arrived...So far the organization has helped 14 Jews, 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 Ju-

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

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."

**II A Chinese Rabbi in the Making**  
excerpted from *ajp*, 4 October 2011  
by Michael Freund

It is a warm summer day in Israel and despite the agreeable weather outside, Yaakov Wang is glued to his seat in the study hall...

But Yaakov is not your typical yeshiva student.

He is a descendant of the Jewish community of Kaifeng, China, and he is avidly pursuing an extraordinary dream: to

become the first Chinese rabbi in 200 years.



*Yaakov Wang (center) at morning prayers*

In recent years, an awakening of sorts has taken place, especially among the younger generation of Kaifeng Jewish descendants, many of whom wish to learn more about their heritage and reclaim their roots.

It was this stirring which propelled Yaakov and six other Jewish descendants from Kaifeng to make aliyah in October 2009....

For the first six months after his arrival, Yaakov studied Hebrew at a religious kibbutz in Israel's Beit Shean valley, before going to yeshiva to deepen his Jewish knowledge and prepare to undergo a formal process of conversion.

He dove into his studies with alacrity, thirsty to acquaint himself with the ways of his ancestors...

Yaakov is especially passionate about mastering Hebrew, in part thanks to the influence of his grandfather. "He knew Jews had their own language," he explains, "but he didn't know the language itself"...

Since his arrival in Israel, Yaakov has immersed himself in his studies. He particularly enjoys the Bible...

Once he completes his conversion, Yaakov plans to study towards rabbinical ordination. And while he is aware that this would make him the first native Chinese rabbi in two centuries, his focus is less on making history and more on helping others.

"I want to help other Kaifeng Jews to learn more about our heritage," he says modestly. "They deserve a chance to become more knowledgeable Jews. That is what our ancestors would have wanted."

Every day, three times a day, Yaakov attends services in synagogue, saying that he prays that the remaining Jewish descendants still in Kaifeng will be able to return to the Jewish people and make aliyah "as soon as possible."

And if that day should indeed come to pass, Yaakov Wang, perhaps bearing the title "rabbi", will be there to welcome them home.

*Michael Freund is the Chairman of Shavei Israel.*

### III Teaching Kaifeng Jews in Israel

excerpted from the *Shavei Yisrael Newsletter*, 8 Dec. 2011. This article first appeared on the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* website.

by Ilan Yavor



*Ilan Yavor (second from left) with his class of Chinese students in Israel*

As I was growing up in the largely Ashkenazi Jewish community in Milwaukee, I rarely met someone whose native tongue wasn't Yiddish, English, or Hebrew.

It was only after I made *aliyah* more than 12 years ago that I began grasping how diverse the Jewish people has become, having incorporated foreign peoples and cultures into its main body... By the time I began studying for my masters' degree at Bar-Ilan University, I had grown used to living among Ethiopians, Yemenites, Brazilians, Indians, Russians, and so on. But one Shabbat on campus, I discovered that I hadn't known the half of it. For sitting in front of me was a young man whose facial features were undeniably East Asian...

My young friend — Shi Lei was his name — eventually returned to China, and we lost contact, but he had ignited in me a new passion: to learn more about these long-lost cousins of the Orient.

After Bar-Ilan, I spent five years in the Israeli army; and like so many post-army Israelis, I was determined to travel during my “gap year,” and China was the obvious choice of destination.

I spent a few months brushing up on conversational Mandarin, and then headed east for three months, making my way from Hong Kong to Beijing [to Kaifeng]...Somewhat disappointed with my findings in Kaifeng, I got back on the train and continued traveling, and a month later, returned to Israel. I continued studying Mandarin through Internet sites. I felt it could always prove useful at some point in time.

One day I had been surfing on YouTube, and a clip caught my attention. It was about seven young men from Kaifeng who had been brought by an organization called “Shavei Israel” to Israel...

Minutes after I saw the clip, I was on the phone with Rabbi Chanoch Avitzedek, an employee of the organization responsible for “the Chinese program.” My heart raced. Was this my chance to play my tiny role at a momentous moment for Jewish history?

I eventually met the rabbi, and I was also to meet the Chinese, but geography and my full-time job prevented me from making any long-term commitments. When I left my full-time job, I tried to reconnect.

By that time, the Chinese guys had been studying at a yeshiva in Gush Etzion, not far from Jerusalem, and the rabbi said I was welcome to come in and teach them something from time to time, on an informal volunteer basis... But what would I teach them? They had been in Israel for more than 18 months and were studying Jewish texts, Shabbat and holidays, etc. Eventually, I thought of teaching them Jewish history, to give them some background on the lives and communities of our nation’s foremost thinkers and leaders.

Our first class was shaky. My students were exceedingly courteous and respectful — not surprising given their place of origin. But despite hours of preparations and endless notes, I saw plenty of blank stares. I was speaking in English, and though several of the students had a high level of comprehension, others were lost. I tried again a week later, and not much

had changed. I had to find a way to get through to them, and to make them love history as much as I do.

Several weeks later, Rabbi Menachem Weinberg, a rabbi at the yeshiva, contacted me. The Chinese students’ regular teacher had to leave for India, to help a local Jewish community with Passover preparations, and would be gone for more than a month, he explained. They were in dire need of a replacement, and he asked me if I was interested.

I was, but how could I be more successful with the students? “Why don’t you just teach them in Chinese?” he asked.

I had barely had a conversation in Mandarin since returning from China. Would they have patience for me? It was a crazy idea, but worth a try. So I told him I’d be happy to teach them three times a week, three hours a day.

After an evening of cramming, note-taking and translating, my first days as a substitute teacher had arrived. Armed with my trusty Beijing-bought dictionary, I stepped into the classroom. I took the *bai ban bi* — the whiteboard marker — and scribbled what to me were Chinese characters and to them was probably unsightly graffiti. The room went silent.

In a rare moment of courage, and in my best Ashkenazi Mandarin accent, I announced: “Today, we’re going to discuss how the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem affected Jewish communities in Israel and the Diaspora, and how a lay leadership class had begun to develop in both Roman Palestine and Babylonia.”

All eyes were now intently focused on me. No more blank stares, I had gotten their attention now.

For the next two hours, we had a painfully slow but nonetheless engaging class on ancient Jewish history. I had a dictionary and an English-Chinese vocabulary list on the table in front of me, and I improvised the rest. The more bilingual students helped me out with the words I didn’t know, which I listed on the right side of the whiteboard.

It wasn’t perfect, but all things considered, it worked. The Chinese students were thrilled, or maybe just amused, at the sight of the sweat collecting on my forehead during my painful attempts to

string together a grammatical Chinese sentence.

Two hours were enough for me, though, and I asked their permission to finish the class in English. I wasn’t worried. There were another 12 lessons to go, and either my Chinese would get better, or they would get fed up with me. I hoped for the best.

The class became my main activity for the entire month. To complicate matters, every western name, from Einstein to Eleanor Roosevelt, has a specific Chinese equivalent, which often sounds nothing like the original to our western ears. Thus, Maimonides becomes “My mung nee de,” and Purim is “Pooh are jie.”

I guess the Chinese have already thought of everything; my job was only to apply it. Oh, and to expand my Chinese vocabulary to include concepts like political emancipation, the Reform and Conservative movements, ghettos, pogroms, religious Zionism, and more.

I taught the first several classes in a mix of Chinese, English, and Hebrew, but as we progressed, I found the experience of teaching in Chinese more gratifying than anything else. My students were also very knowledgeable and advanced, and this was very helpful.

One student — his name is Shai — was particularly talented at translating written texts, and I often brought in supplementary quotes, often belonging to reputable rabbis or philosophers, which he would translate out loud. Another student, Gidon, was my official transcriber for the whiteboard.

As our relationship grew stronger, the scope of the class grew. The students began asking me questions taken from a list given to them by the bet din [rabbinical court], before their conversion can be finalized.

I began to get to know these seven remarkable young men — their families, their histories, their hopes and desires. The more I familiarized myself with them, the more my respect for them grew.

Everyone knew that once they had finished converting to Orthodox Judaism, returning to Kaifeng would be practically impossible. Most of them would need to make aliyah or integrate into Jewish

communities elsewhere.

Conversion in Israel is a complicated matter that demands an incredible amount of patience and perseverance. In China, however, patience is a virtue that is nurtured from childhood, as echoed in a well-known ancient proverb: "With time and patience, the mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown."

With the Jewish people now more in control of their destiny than any time during the past 2,000 years, I hope that, with some patience, we'll see more brave and inspired individuals rejoining the Jewish people, diverse in background, but sharing a common hope for the future.

## Kaifeng: A New Beginning

by Eric Rothberg

Nestled deep in China is an ancient community of Jews who are proud of their identity. Through the tumultuous episodes of history, the Kaifeng Jews gradually lost knowledge of their heritage. In order to know how to help them one has to understand their current situation. As someone who has spent over two years trying to come to terms with their situation, I have dealt with the trials and tribulations of volunteering for the cause of bringing back an endangered culture. I hope this article will shed some light on this issue, so that others can better know how to help.

### Understanding Kaifeng Jewry

Since I started being involved with the Kaifeng Jews, my perceptions of them and of myself have greatly changed. There are so many issues confronting the *kehillah* (community) of Kaifeng, and there are so many things for us to consider as advocates for it. I started in Kaifeng with many hopes and dreams about how the descendants of this once-flourishing *kehillah* should develop. However, no matter how hard one works for an end goal, one's viewpoints are bound to change with time. I discovered that things weren't nearly as simple as I had thought them to be. In this article, I will try to express how the Kaifeng question is such a multi-faceted one, and how the *kehillah's* difficulties might be lessened.

First off, in order to understand what the issues facing Kaifeng Jewry are, one has to have a basic understanding of the

Kaifeng Jews. Though it is easy for an outsider to generalize, the Kaifeng Jews have no unified identity. There are multiple identities that depend on a number of issues: level of Jewish involvement, identification with the outside Jewish world, knowledge of familial Jewish ancestry and practices, etc. Furthermore, Jews in any country are influenced by the surrounding culture, and the Chinese Jews are no exception.

### Problems in Historical Understanding

The difficulty for foreign Jews is that most literature on Kaifeng Jewry is all based on history. When I began studying about Kaifeng Jewry, I read Michael Pollak's *Mandarin, Jews, and Missionaries: the Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire*, and that gave me a longing to understand what the current situation of Kaifeng Jews was. Having finished Pollak's book, I read Bishop William White's book *Chinese Jews: a Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of Kwai-fêng Fu* and Donald Leslie's book *The Survival of the Chinese Jews: the Jewish Community of Kaifeng*. Both books were mainly based on historical circumstances, though I found Leslie's book to be much more credible and relevant. I discovered that most consequent publications were based on White and Leslie's books, and I then realized that there was really very little information on Kaifeng.

During the ten-or-so months that I spent in Kaifeng, I discovered that the literature on Kaifeng set me up for some serious misconceptions about the current status of the *kehillah*. The literature was mostly based on either information from centuries long past or only as recent as the Qing Dynasty, or soon after. Though Pollak covered some of the events during the Nationalist era, for example, there wasn't much information, and the Communist period was totally left out. The only book I found that mentioned any information about the Communist period was Sidney Shapiro's *Jews in China*, though it didn't mention a whole lot.

During my year in Kaifeng, I discovered that there were some authors who published literature on more recent times, but they were largely inaccessible for the general public in the West. Thus, I went to Kaifeng with a concept of Kaifeng Judaism as a type of fusion with philosophical Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Granted, it's not like the com-

munity did not stay true to the ideals of Judaism, but their Judaism had been highly acculturated to its Chinese environment.

Yet, my preconceptions could not be farther from the truth. Since the Qing and Nationalist periods, China has changed remarkably, and Westernization and Communization had taken hold in the hearts and minds of Chinese, oftentimes regardless of ethnicity or religion. Therefore, Kaifeng Jewry was no longer that interested in traditional Chinese concepts, just as many Chinese today are not. Their culture is not all too different from the overarching Chinese culture in which they live in.

Of course, this is not to say that the Kaifeng Jews are not aware and proud of their Jewish heritage. On the contrary, China's emphasis on ethnic pride and diversity has allowed them to feel connected with who they are as Jews. They see themselves as a unique group of Chinese, different from the Han, but still proud of their nation—the rising China. Consequently, they do not see themselves as at odds with any sort of establishment, like some religious groups in China. Rather, they are patriotic just as much as the average Han Chinese and their cultural conceptions of the world aren't that different from the Han either.

In short, in order to understand Kaifeng Jewry, one must understand modern Han Chinese society and modern China. However deep and philosophical it might be to study historical texts from antiquity about Kaifeng Jews, this study in itself won't lend to an accurate understanding of the community today.

### Today's Situation

If we are to assume that Kaifeng Jewry is rather similar to the surrounding Chinese populace, then we can make some basic assumptions about how to deal with the situation in Kaifeng. First off, there is the issue of the Chinese government's involvement in the *kehillah*. The most important factor that a foreign Jew looking to help the *kehillah* must take into consideration is that utmost respect must be exercised for the Chinese government. Without this very basic understanding, every ounce of help that we have given to the *kehillah* will have been for naught. For those who are frustrated with the current political state of China, they have to be aware that it is not our place as

foreigners to judge how another country runs its affairs. Certainly, we all have our viewpoints, but if anyone is interested in helping the community, then that person has to forfeit his/her activism for the greater benefit of the Kaifeng Jews.

Having made this basic point, we can move to the situation at hand. The Kaifeng Jewish population statistics are very rough with estimates of the Jewish population there between 500 to 2000 people, and they are often not from credible sources. The more complicating factor is that one can't look at those numbers and then judge how to aid the *kehillah*, because they don't tell us how many people are involved with regaining or researching their Jewish heritage. Most are proud of their identity but that doesn't mean they are interested in the practices of their ancestors. One has to make the distinction between ethnic, cultural, and religious identification.

Not everyone in Kaifeng of Jewish ancestry knows much about their ancestral culture and religion. Though Kaifeng was once the capital of China and the most booming economic center of the Song Dynasty, it is now a fairly poor and underdeveloped Chinese city. This affects the lives of Kaifeng Jews, and the lack of development means a lack of exposure to the outside world, and, hence, to other Jews. Therefore, Kaifeng Jewry will gain more understanding of their Jewish heritage with increased exposure to the outside Jewish world.

### Hope

The Kaifeng Jewish community is now, more than anytime in the past few hundred years, embarking on a process of regaining their ancestral religion and culture. A growing number of Kaifeng Jews are showing interest in Judaism and Jewish culture. Because the Kaifeng *kehillah* lost nearly all of its Jewish religious and cultural possessions, and due to a gradual loss of Jewish study, they are now dependant on foreign Jews to help them regain what they have lost.

That having been said, I have been working with this community for over two years, and I am never ceased to be amazed by their dedication to regaining their heritage. They are more committed than many Western Jews in their study. Though those who are engaged in this study are only a small number in China's population statistics, they represent a fan-

tastic rebirth of an ancient community.

### Possible Initiatives

There are many things that can be done to aid these fellow Jews. As I discovered, the most change can occur in the *kehillah* with a resident volunteer. As outsiders, we can discuss Kaifeng Jewry's affairs as much as we want, but if we don't get involved somehow, then Kaifeng's Jews will not be helped. Of course, at the end of the day, we have to ask ourselves one question: "Did we serve the community?"

As Jews, we have a unique concept of spreading our culture, religion, and identity; to me, Judaism is a religion of choice and freedom. Whatever happens, it is up to the Kaifeng Jews to make decisions about who they want to be as descendants of an ancient Jewish *kehillah*. However, they will never be able to make that decision, if no one gives them the chance.

Thus, getting back to possible methods for helping the Kaifeng Jews regain their heritage, we have to consider how we as foreigners want to help. In order to shed light on this situation, one has to realize what the basic components of a Jewish community are. Every organized Jewish community, regardless of denomination or level of observance, has leaders and resources. Leaders include presidents of synagogues, rabbis, etc. A healthy community has understanding, kind, and knowledgeable leaders and representatives. Resources include space for Jewish activities, funds, and literature. These are all issues for Kaifeng, just as much as for any other Jewish community, and I hope that others will take interest in the Kaifeng Jews' troubles.

### A Jewish School for Kaifeng Jewry

With the help of charitable organizations and individuals, I helped to found the Beit Hatikvah School in the summer of 2010. The year leading up to the dedication of our school was trying and frustrating to say the least. I did my best to help that portion of the *kehillah* that I was involved in, but I made my mistakes. Yet, that is the chance one takes in trying to make a difference. Since I have returned to the U.S., attending university and finishing my undergraduate degree, I have tried to maintain a relationship with the kind and welcoming community members of Kaifeng, who helped me to aid the *kehillah*. Without my students,

host family and friends in Kaifeng, I would not have been able to accomplish what I did.

I have also tried to work for the community's progress while in the States. Before I left Kaifeng, I did my best to establish a working apparatus for maintaining communication between the outside world and Kaifeng. My students and I procured a computer, webcam and projector, with which video conversations and classes could ensue between teachers, community advocates, and our Kaifeng Jewish friends.

Upon returning from Kaifeng, I embarked on a program to teach my students via video conversation. I continued my teaching schedule for about a year. Initially, I taught every week. After teaching for over six months, however, with the help of a fellow Kaifeng advocate, I found another teacher to help me in my efforts. At that point, I decided to split up my teaching schedule with the *kehillah's* new teacher, and I began teaching biweekly.

To make a long story short, having started out aiding the community with few connections to help me, I have found many other kind and giving friends to help with my efforts. Now I and my first colleague in teaching don't teach anymore; rather, we concentrate on administrative and advocate duties for the school, Beit Hatikvah. Today we have four teachers volunteering to teach Beit Hatikvah's students each week, using Skype and QQ, a Chinese equivalent to Skype. Furthermore, we have a Kaifeng Jew, who spent extensive time in Israel, teaching weekly on-site at the school.

Throughout the course of all my experiences relating to Kaifeng Jewry, I have made many friends and learned a great deal. I am thankful to SJI for all the help they have provided me and the community, and I am grateful to be a member of this fascinating organization. I have learned how to organize fellow concerned Jews to help our brothers and sisters in another land.

Consequently, I have learned how to temper my optimism with realism, while maintaining a great hope for the future of Kaifeng. Unfortunately, I am unable to return to Kaifeng for an extended period of time at this point. Therefore, I hope that there will be someone willing to spend anywhere from a few months



to a year there. The most direct way of helping the community is to spend time there, although there are many other ways to help.

In reality, one of the most difficult objectives is planning and organizing. Even if there were plenty of people teaching students at Beit Hatikvah, there would still be many things to consider. Given that volunteers only have so much time to help, everyone has to prioritize and spread out tasks evenly among colleagues in our work. Each volunteer has a certain amount of time available, but often that time varies, and that person might find him/herself either without the necessary time or with much more time than expected. In short, anything can help. There are simply too many issues to handle by a small group of individuals.

### Conclusion

There are many problems confronting the Kaifeng Jews. We need to figure out how to understand them and then how to help them. There are so many obstacles in the way of this goal and I have only begun to explain them. I encourage anyone who is interested to pursue information on this issue. If you would like to contact me, my email address is rothberg\_3@hotmail.com. May we see a day when our brothers and sisters have the same opportunities that we have had.

*You may designate a gift to Bet Hatikvah—or any other SJI-supported program in China—through SJI. Simply note your designated institution on the memo line and make your check out to “SJI”.*

## A Burmese Chanukah Celebration

by Ben G. Frank

excerpted from the *JTA*, 3 January 2012



*U Tin Oo, a former commander-in-chief of Myanmar's army, lights a Chanukah candle (Sammy Samuels)*

In almost any other community from Moscow to Washington, it would have been just another public Chanukah menorah-lighting ceremony providing an opportunity for the local government and Jewish community to showcase their strong ties.

But in Myanmar, where the government has been run by a military junta and the Jewish community numbers just a handful of families, the occasion last week of a public Chanukah lighting ceremony involving government officials was remarkable.

On Dec. 27, the last night of Chanukah, Myanmar's eight Jewish families were joined by government officials, diplomats and former ambassadors at a Chanukah celebration in Yangon, also known as Rangoon. In all, about 100 people were on hand for the party at the Park Royal Hotel.

Earlier, Jewish community leader Moses Samuels visited the home of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and pro-democracy advocate...Suu Kyi had been invited to the Chanukah event but said she could not attend because it conflicted with a prayer ceremony she was holding at her home for her late mother.

The visits to Suu Kyi and the Yangon Chanukah party were signs of the changes taking place in Myanmar, also known as Burma, where the last year has seen significant economic and political reforms and new openness to the West...

Samuels, whose Burmese name is Than Lwin, has been instrumental in keeping alive the Jewish presence in Yangon. Every morning he opens the well-kept blue-and-white synagogue, even though most of the time there is no official prayer service—unless there is a *yahrzeit* anniversary for the deceased or a visiting Jewish tourist group. Samuels and his son Sammy, who lives in New York, run a tour company in the country called Myanmar Shalom Travel and Tours.

Until this year the community's Chanukah ceremonies were quiet affairs in the synagogue, according to Samuels. But with Myanmar opening up to the West, the community decided to make the event bigger this year, holding the rite at a hotel and including a photo exhibit of Israel-Burmese relations.

Among the Burmese officials present were Daw Yin Yin Myint, the director general of the Foreign Ministry; U Tin Oo, a former commander in chief of the armed forces who is the vice chairman of the opposition National League for Democracy party; Maung Maung Swe, chair of the Myanmar Travel Association; and U Hein Latt, vice chairman of the newspaper Popular Journal.

Diplomats from the United States, France, Russia, India, Singapore, Britain, Italy and Israel came, and the celebration involved not just Jews but also Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Baha'i.

Several thousand Jews once lived in Burma. The first known Jew to live in the country was Solomon Gabirol, who served as a commissar to the army of King Alaungpaya, who ruled from 1752 to 1760.

Growing numbers of Jewish merchants came to Burma over the years, and in the mid-19th century a group of Baghdadi Jews led by David Sassoon settled in Burma, India and other lands in the Far East. Burma's synagogue was built in 1854 and rebuilt in 1896. The community supports a cemetery; its oldest grave is dated 1876. After the Japanese invasion in 1941, many Burmese Jews fled to India.

Both Burma and Israel achieved independence in 1948, and the two countries enjoyed cordial relations for the first two decades of their existence. That included a warm friendship between prime ministers David Ben-Gurion and U Nu, who was the first head of state to visit Israel. A daughter of U Nu, Than Than Nu, attended last week's Chanukah party.

When a military junta took over Burma in 1962, installing a repressive regime and nationalizing businesses, most Jews left.

In a recent interview, Israel's ambassador to Myanmar, Yaron Mayer, told *JTA* that relations between the two countries had "remained good over the years." He noted that in 2011 a Myanmar delegation attended an energy conference in Israel.

Some of the few Jews left in Myanmar said they hope that with time and a continual opening of Myanmar's political system, the Jewish community here will grow.

Ben G. Frank is the author of the newly published "The Scattered Tribe: Traveling the Diaspora from Cuba to India to Tahiti & Beyond" from Globe Pequot Press.

## A Leap in Jewish/Israel Studies: CJCS-SISU Grant Report to SJI

by Prof. Fu Xiaowei

Since the Center of Judaic and Chinese Studies at Sichuan International Studies University obtained the first grant of \$15,000 from Sino-Judaic Institute and Rabbi Marvin Tokayer in 2009, it has taken a great leap forward not only in its development in Jewish studies but also in promoting collaboration between SISU and universities in the US and Israel, between Chongqing and Israel. The \$5000 grant seed money enabled the center to buy more than 100 books and to persuade successfully the university library to buy more books on Judaic and Israel issues each year. Now the center library is open to all students and teachers on campus. The translation series *Modern Western Thought and Jewish Cultural Tradition*, sponsored by Mr. Marvin Tokayer, was included in the 12th Five-year Plan (2010-2015) of key publishing projects set by China General Administration of Press and Publication. It's also the only one item in the category of philosophy in Sichuan Province. This is a great honor to our center and to the publishing house.

As the only academic institute on Jewish studies in southwest China, the development of the center began to work closely with the Israeli embassy in Beijing and Israeli non-governmental organizations in 2010. Since the first visit of Mr. Amos Nadai, the Israeli ambassador to China, to SISU in October 2010, collaborations between SISU and Israeli universities, and between Chongqing and Israel, entered into a brand new era. The center worked with the Israeli embassy to China and Chongqing Municipal Commission for Foreign Economic Relations and Trade held the "Chongqing Seminar" in early April 2011. And in November, it co-organized with the Israel Project the first "China-Israel Startup Economy Development Forum" in SISU.

In 2010, the center obtained a second SJI grant of \$5000 for the following programs in 2011:

- 1) Establish an annual undergraduate Paper Prize & Scholarship for Jewish Studies;
- 2) Set up a Graduate Forum for Jewish Culture with regular activities;
- 3) Initiate the Israel Educational Research Group of the School of International Relations;
- 4) Develop a compilation of the textbook Bible as Literature.

The four programs aroused an unexpected response from students and faculty in the university and the activities we made in the past year also helped change Chongqing people's understanding of Israel (namely from being unfamiliar, indifferent to interested and friendly). We will give a brief report on the progress of the four programs:

### Program Updates

#### A. The First SJI Jewish/Israel Study Paper Contest

The time line of the program spans a year— from November 2010 to October 2011. In April, Ms. Carice Witte, chair and founder of SIGNAL (the Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership) offered to donate \$1000 to the Paper Contest. The contest committee accepted their offer and turned the name from Jewish Study Paper Contest to Jewish/ Israel Paper Contest.

As it is the first university-wide event focusing on Jewish/Israel issues and the contest committee was uncertain of the response, we took some measures: \*First, to set the prize money a bit higher than that of other student research contests, and a higher proportion of awarding so that 60 of the 75 application groups were on the shortlist, each had the chance to get at least a certificate. \*Second, to organize two guiding meetings to give instructions to those interested in this contest and to set up an official blog for this paper contest.

\*Third, to collaborate with other departments to invite scholars from Israeli universities to give lectures on related issues. \*Fourth, to open the center library to all the candidates.

#### B. Graduate Forum for Jewish Culture

The Center set up a Graduate Forum for

Jewish Culture in December 10, 2010 and it also cosponsored with the Center of Foreign Language Studies of SISU the Bible and Western Culture Forum for graduate students and teachers at SISU in March, 2011. Some of the topics included:

- The Changing Attitudes of American Jews towards Israel and its Influence on American Jewish Identity Since 1980s by Li Xi
- The Issue of Intermarriage in the American Jewish Community by Wang Meizhe
- Distinguishing "Resurrection" in Judaism and Christianity from the Perspective of its Origins by Guan Haoyu
- The Roots of Jewish Disproportionate Participation in the Post WWa! American Social Movements by Duan Zemin
- The Masculinization of Jewish Philanthropy in Mid-Nineteenth Century America by Yang Mei
- The Judeo-Christian Tradition in the Pro-Israel Stances of America :An Extension of German Haskalah by Tang Li
- The Unique Hebraic Elements in the Founding Years of America by Deng Jie
- A Reading of the Ideological Codes in Hollywood Movies from the Perspective of Culture Studies: A Case Study of "Species IV: the Awakening" by Wang Yu

#### C. Israel Educational Research Group of the School of International Relations

The center helped the School of International Relations to set up the Israel Educational Research Group last year. And with the help of Mr. Seth Garz and the SIGNAL, one lecturer was sent to the seminar by the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, Brandeis University. Two were sent to study in Bar Ilan University. These lecturers plan to offer courses on Middle East and Israel in the new academic year mainly to students majoring in Politics and Diplomacy.

#### D. The Bible as Literature

This selective course *Bible as Literature* for undergraduate students in the School of International Relations turned out to be a success. 212 of the total 288 sophomores in this school chose this course. Four other teachers joined the teaching team and it aims to become the key course of the university.

## Achievements and Public Responses

Though the Center does not have full time researchers nor a full time assistant, with no fixed fund from the university, it has successfully promoted Jewish research programs in the university and, by holding the above activities with the help of Sino-Judaic Institute and SIGNAL, it has vastly popularized students' knowledge about Jewish/ Israeli culture at SISU and through the continuous media report quietly changed Chongqing people's knowledge of Israel and the Israeli people.

### A. Media Coverage

Since October 2010 newspapers in Chongqing, such as *Chongqing Morning*, *Chongqing Evening*, *Chongqing Business Daily* and Chongqing TV Station, *Chongqing and the World*, the magazine and cqnews.net began to report activities held by the Center: the two visits of the Israeli ambassador Amos Nadai; the Inaugural ceremony of Israel Study Program cosponsored by the Center and SIGNAL; the lectures by Yaakov Kirschen; the Opening and Award Ceremonies of the SJI paper contest; the Saul Singer lecture cosponsored by the Center and the Israel Project; China-Israel Startup Economy Development Forum and the tour lecture of Prof. Jonathan Wilson.

### B. Research programs

The translation series *Modern Western Thoughts and Jewish Cultural Tradition* sponsored by Mr. Marvin Tokayer was included in the 12th Five-year Plan (2010-2015) of key publishing projects set by China General Administration of Press and Publication. The translation series *Jewish Literary Classics* cosponsored by the Center and the Sichuan Arts and Literature Publishing House is going well. Three researchers in literature in SISU won funds from the National and Chongqing philosophy and social science fund projects.

### C. Positive Responses on and off Campus

More students and young teachers became interested in Jewish issues. This year SISU sent 10 students and teachers to attend the fourth summer school held by the Center of Judaic and Cross-Religious Studies, Shandong University. Other departments and research institutes offer to work with our Center to explore possible

collaboration in Jewish/Israeli studies in the future. The Graduate School hopes to work with the Center on sending students to study in Israel.

The School of the International Relations offers to hold the second Jewish/ Israeli paper contest in 2012. Students attending the contest suggested the establishment of a student research group on Jewish/ Israeli culture within the center. And the first research program of this group is a project on cultural obstacles to business cooperation between Israel and Chongqing corporations, which was made by the only team representing the student research achievement of the university. It soon became part of the Israel Study Program collaborating with SIGNAL. Now this project is recommended by SISU to attend the "Challenge Cup" Technological Innovation Competition organized by China Youth League in a partnership with China Association for Science and Technology, Chinese Ministry of Education, and The National Union of Students (NUS).

Other universities in Chongqing expressed their interest in doing Jewish/ Israeli studies. Researchers from the municipal government hope to work with the Center to explore Chongqing -Israel collaborations. Some travel agencies have come to the Center to consult the possibility of exploring Israel tours.

### Expectations

Both the School of International Relations and SIGNAL hope that the Center will organize a second paper contest in 2012. The Center hopes to get financial support from SJI for several reasons. First, SIGNAL's grant only goes to those issues on modern Israel. Second, the SIR hopes to help hold the second paper contest but the dean of SIR only offers assistance not money. Third, the Office of the Academic Research will no longer give money to the paper contest. So without financial support from SJI or other organizations, the paper contest in 2012 will be only an Israel paper contest, which will disappoint many of the possible candidates.

The graduate forums on Jewish culture and on Bible and Western literature need more financial support from SJI or other

organizations because any academic event related to such words as Bible (*shengjing*) and/or religion (*zongjiao*) is hard to get support from the university. Though the Center library is open to the students and teachers on campus, the books are always in circulation. And the result is most of the visitors leave disappointed, so more money is needed to enlarge the library.

*Prof. Fu Xiaowei is Director of the Center of Judaic and Chinese Studies, Sichuan International Studies University*

You may designate a gift to the Center—or any other Jewish Studies program in China—through SJI. Simply note your designated institution on the \_\_\_line and make your check out to "SJI".

## Israel Studies Program Set for China

excerpted from the JTA, 16 August 2011

An Israel studies program will open at a Chinese university for the first time. The program, offering undergraduate and graduate courses, extracurricular activities and options for study in Israel, will launch at the Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing for the 2012 spring semester. It is being started in cooperation with the Israel-based Sino-Israel Global Network and Academic Leadership.

Two of the university's lecturers will study for this fall semester at Bar-Ilan University to prepare them to teach Israeli history, culture and politics to Chinese students. Their studies are funded by a grant from the Diane & Guilford Glazer Foundation.

The university has invited lecturers from Israel, the United States and Australia to give introductory seminars, lectures and workshops on Israeli history, culture and literature. During the fall semester this year, the university will organize a series of forums to discuss Israel-related topics.

In addition, the American Jewish Committee's Asia Pacific Institute pledged to donate more than 100 new and used books on Israel and the Middle East to the University's new Israel studies library.

## BOOK NOOK

Andrea Alban, *Anya's War* (New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2011) reviewed by Steve Hochstadt

*Anya's War* is a young adult book based on the real experiences of the author's family, who fled Stalinist persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union for the safety of Shanghai in the 1930s. Unique in the world, Shanghai was an open city: nobody checked the papers of those who landed in the city's busy harbor.

The book beautifully reflects the cosmopolitan character of the city. Alban presents the customary rituals, daily routines, and superstitious beliefs of both Jews and Chinese as she tells of two days in the life of Anya, daughter of wealthy Odessa Jews who have just landed in Shanghai in 1937.

Anya has the usual anxieties of a 14-year old girl – meeting boys, struggling with her parents for control of her life, taming her frizzy hair. When Anya finds an abandoned baby girl near her home and brings it to her room, Alban creates sufficient tension to sweep the reader through to the end of her story.

The traditional Chinese preference for boys becomes a powerful vehicle for Alban's insistent theme of the value of independent women. Anya's worries about Amelia Earhart, whose plane has just disappeared, and her admiration for her Aunt Paulina, a doctor in the US, fuel her youthful insistence on equal treatment for girls and women. Alban's sympathetic and knowledgeable presentation of Jewish and Chinese cultures does not shrink from their misogynist prejudices.

Alban's father belonged to one of the three major Jewish communities in Shanghai: Baghdadi Jews who arrived with the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Russian Jews who fled the Tsars, the Revolution, and then Stalin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and German-speaking Jews who escaped the Nazis in 1938 and 1939. *Anya's War* provides a welcome window into the life of the Russian Jewish community, about whom little has been writ-

ten. But the book's historical basis becomes confused when Alban tries to include the refugees from the Nazis. The action of *Anya's War* occurs in the summer of 1937, when only a handful of German refugees had arrived. Yet Alban writes as if the flight from the Third Reich were in full swing: Anya worries about "the next ship of Jews fleeing Hitler"; her best friend is from Vienna, although the Nazis had not yet incorporated Austria into Greater Germany; so-called "little Vienna" had not yet been created out of the slums of Hongkou, where the refugees gathered.

The young reader will not notice this historical inaccuracy, which does not interfere with the smooth prose, the exciting story, and powerful argument for women's equality that Anya embodies. *Anya's War* has much to teach about the beauty of cultural difference and the value of all human beings.

### *Jewish Religious Observances by the Jews of Kaifeng China*

by Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons; self-published by the author: Kiriyat Arba, Israel, June 2010; to be published by the Sino-Judaic Institute in 2012; reviewed by Tiberiu Weisz

*While keeping our reviewer's critique in mind, SJI nonetheless believes that Rabbi Dr. Simon's book deserves to be read by people in the field because it is the first book to attempt to document the connections between the practice of the Kaifeng Jews and traditional halacha, whether actual or conjectured.*

*Thanks to the work of SJI Board member Dana Leventhal, Rabbi Dr. Simon's book soon will be available both online both as an e-book and as an on-demand hard copy book at retailers worldwide such as Amazon.com, Baker & Taylor, and Barnes & Noble. Further information about the book's availability will be posted to the SJI website and in Points East when the book is published in late spring or early summer.*

This book *Jewish Religious Observances by the Jews of Kaifeng China* by Chaim Simons (*Observances*) is an alternative story of the customs of the Kaifeng Jews in China. It explores the theory of how the Jews of Kaifeng would have observed the Jewish customs had the physical evidence survived. Very little hard evidence had been preserved from the Kaifeng Jewish community and Simons took on the daunting task of trying to prove that "there is a source in the rabbinical literature for almost all the activities which the Jews of Kaifeng considered to be Jewish practice (Pg 7)."

Simons' assumption is that the religious practices of the Jews in Biblical times (pre - 586 BCE) were the same as in later times during the Rabbinic period (from c.a. 300 BCE). He treats the *halacha* (rabbinic code/Oral Law) in *Observances* as being the source of Judaism rather than making it clear that the *Oral Law* emerged as an interpretation to the *Torah* (Bible). Thus he neglects to differentiate between Judaism in biblical times, centered on the Temple and the services/ceremonies performed by Levite and *Cohanim* (priests) and Judaism in the rabbinic period centered on individual communities lead by Rabbis. This important transition in Jewish history is disregarded. Instead the author has attributed Jewish religious practices of the Kaifeng Jews to rabbinic roots ignoring the evidence that pointed to biblical roots.

To substantiate his theory, Simons applied very loose interpretations to a rather large bibliographical material. Included are a few scholarly works, eyewitness accounts, observations, rumors and opinions. Though the bibliography is extensive, the *Observances* often emphasize opinions and unsubstantiated rumors by placing them in the realm of possibility. For example, Simons ponders whether or not the two ponds on the side of the old synagogue "could possibly be a *mikva*?" (ritual bath). He chose to believe that they served as *mikva*, one for men and one for women, which was in compliance with the rabbinic code. He dismissed the eyewitness's accounts that stated clearly they did not see a *mikva* in Kaifeng.

In another example, the author tried to show that the Jews of Kaifeng wore *tallit* [prayer shawl], or *tsitsit* (an everyday undergarment with fringe) or *tefilin*, etc...in compliance with the rabbinical code. He detailed the *halacha* of these garments and rejected the eyewitness accounts that: [they/eyewitnesses] "might have missed them". Or, in the case of the *amida* prayer, Simons had detailed the *halacha*, but neglected to mention that the Chinese version was inscribed in the 1512 inscriptions and that the two versions were quite different. The Chinese version derived from biblical sources, while Simons' version was composed by the rabbis in exile. Similarly, many of Jewish concepts, prayers, and customs are detailed in the *Observances* according to the *halacha* but with little relevancy to the Kaifeng Jews.

Dubious also were his sources for the *mezuzah*. The *Observances* quotes a paper by Dr. Leslie Malkin from California entitled *The Jews of China*: "Ai [presumably the Ai who met with Ricci at the beginning of the 17th century] mentioned Hebrew character (*sic*) on the door frames of the homes, perhaps confirming that the Jewish families had a representation of the *mezuzah* on the doorpost. Though Malkin did not give his source of this information", Simons treated Malkin's opinion as fundamentally solid evidence. Furthermore, in the next paragraph, the author quoted from "a book on *mezuzot* written by Dr. Belle Rosenbaum..." who "...does not state whether or not it (*mezuzah* in Kaifeng) has been examined." Yet, Simons assumed that: "Possibly this is the parchment inside the *mezuzah*" and proceeded as though it was evidence.

Even more questionable is Simons' choice of translations. He chose to accept Bishop White's translation despite the warning that "the Chinese scholar Wang Yisha claimed that he had found 123 errors or misleading statements in White's book on China" (pg. 13). One of the errors is the translation of the Chinese character for *Liehwei* (Levites). Bishop White translated it as a surname "Levi", therefore by extension, Rabbi Levi. But Leslie, an Australian scholar quoted extensively in the *Observances*, had his doubts and put a question mark after the word "Levi?"

Simons failed to include Leslie's doubts. Another questionable choice of the translation was the strange interpretation offered by another Chinese scholar, Chen Changqi. Chen, a scholar of Buddhism with a very superficial knowledge of Judaism, wrote that: "since the Levi clan traditionally had always served as High Priests and Chief Rabbis, he too must have been a "Rabbi Levi" (pg.48, fn. 433). Apparently, Levites, priests and rabbis were the same to Chen, but what is troubling that Simons chose to ignore this obvious misinterpretation and use it as supporting evidence. Needless to say that Chen's explanation was omitted in the *Observances*.

Historically, the book is inconsistent with the timelines. Although Simons mentioned in the introduction that the Kaifeng community preceded the rabbinic period (pre 300 BCE), he still proceeded with the "possibility" that the Kaifeng Jews observed the codes of *Rambam* (12<sup>th</sup> century CE) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (16<sup>th</sup> century CE). He assumed that the Jews of Kaifeng observed these codes and then proceeded as though that might be true. Then he outlined the essence of *Rambam* and the *Shulchan Aruch* but neglected to frame them in the historical context of the Kaifeng Jews. He also failed to explain how these works might have reached the isolated community in Kaifeng or to tie them to the Chinese Jews.

These are just a few of the many examples that I found to be the norm in the *Observances*. Primary sources are often paraphrased to comply with the author's theory, and by and large out of context. If they do not support his theory they are ignored or dismissed. Secondary sources, opinions and general articles are given more weight as "possibilities" that, according to Simons, should have been taken into account. Other "possibilities" that, for instance, the Kaifeng Jews were Levites and *Cohanim*, or that they followed the tenets of the Torah were unreasonably denied.

Simons displays a great knowledge of Judaism in the *Observances*, particularly in the area of rabbinic Judaism, and at the same time, he reveals a very rudimentary knowledge and understanding of

China in general and the Chinese Jews in particular. His explanations of the *halacha* are comprehensive, yet the corresponding explanations of the Chinese observances fall short. In summation, the *Observances* contains very little unbiased information to advance our knowledge of the observances of the Jews of Kaifeng.

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