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- 2) The study of Jewish life in Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries.
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Points East

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

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**CONTROVERSIES FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN
 THE STATE OF THE "GHETTO" 2014: AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS**

CONTRADICTING REVISIONIST HISTORY

by Dr. Lotte Lustig Marcus

I am an 86-year old, Austrian, Shanghaileader refugee, who published in your journal in March 2009.

Let me be simultaneously forthright and succinct: to my knowledge, there were only two—*TWO*—significant occasions between 1938 and 1945 during which the Jewish refugee community in Shanghai and the local Chinese community wholeheartedly embraced one another.

The first was July 17th, 1945 when the Americans erroneously bombed the Hongkew ghetto where I was then working as an 18-year old secretary at the Shanghai Jewish Hospital (formerly the Ward Road Hospital, with Alfred Edel, the hospital administrator, and Dr. T. Friedrichs, the head physician). As a result of this American bombing mishap, 31 refugees were killed, many more wounded, and numberless, uncounted Chinese living outside on the nearby crowded alleyways (as was customary in those days) were either killed or seriously hurt. It was also the first time without any prior plans, meetings, consultations, etc., that dead & injured Chinese AND Jewish citizens were treated together in our medical facility, and we tried to take very good care of them—coolies, drivers, children, peddlers, beggars, bystanders—for which they seemed very grateful and happy to be in our hands.

The second occasion of intimate contact was on August 8th, 1945, when I was on Chusan Road, hanging out with other teenagers and the announcement of Japan's surrender came through on short wave radio. Instantly, people began hollering out the news in German, English, Russian and Chinese and, on the streets, all of us began dancing and singing and embracing together for hours; old, young, white, yellow, it didn't matter. What mattered was that the long nightmare of the War was over and we could finally look forward to a future in which we'd be finally able to take charge of our own destiny.

What I cited above were unique events; in the 7^{1/2} years I spent in Shanghai, except for these two exceptions we hardly ever cultivated private, or intimate, contacts with the locals at all; my family and friends never learned to speak anything but broken Chinese (and the Chinese never learned to speak German). Neither my friends nor I ever had Chinese girlfriends or boyfriends; we never cooked Chinese food; we hardly ever ate

A RESPONSE

by George Kalmar

I was the producer for the video portion of the recent Shanghai Ghetto Exhibit at the UCLA Hillel, and I find it necessary to reply to Dr. Marcus's recent essay on the subject.

All of us who have an appreciation of history will agree, I think, that there is no such thing as "historical truth." Past events are always recalled differently by every person. So it is with the events that surround the extraordinary survival of over 16,000 Jewish refugees in Shanghai during the Second World War as recalled by Dr. Lotte Marcus in her recent essay. Her account of experiences during these years in Shanghai will be and have been contradicted by other Shanghaileaders.

Most of what she reports of the political circumstances is fact. The Chinese were not in control of Shanghai, and they did not have the ability or the opportunity to welcome the refugees into their city, which was in many places reduced to rubble just two years earlier by the Japanese. Nor could the Chinese be expected to welcome any more white people who had, for the previous hundred years, ignored their nation's sovereignty and taken advantage of them in so many ways.

No, in practice, the Chinese government - if one can claim that there even was one in Shanghai at the time - did not save the Jews. If any "saving" was done it should be credited to the Japanese, who could easily have murdered all the Jews in Shanghai as they have done with millions of Chinese - but for a number of complex reasons they did not. The question whether the Chinese actually saved the Jews, or if the refugees were even friends with the Chinese, is ultimately irrelevant. Dr. Marcus' insistence that any suggestion of intimate relationships between the refugees and the Chinese is a "falsehood," is inaccurate. After listening to almost 300 testimonies from Shanghaileaders, it is clear to me that many of the refugees (although they may not have shared these facts with their children at the time) did in fact have close and daily contact with the Chinese. There were Chinese gambling places, shops, wholesale business ventures, and a number of other venues where many Jews interacted with the locals. There were many Jews who had close Chinese friends, and some who learned to speak Shanghai dialect well.

To what extent this was general practice is also irrelevant.

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FROM THE EDITOR

This issue's title comes from the famous saying in Pirkei Avot, the Sayings of the Sages, which says a controversy waged in the name of Heaven, such as those between Hillel and Shammai, will yield permanent value.

How do I interpret "in the name of Heaven"? Anytime people gather to discuss what is good and true, be it Torah or something else, and when what is discussed is done with a minimum of ego involvement—that is "in the name of Heaven."

We kick off Volume 29 with two such controversies: one regarding Shanghai and the other Kaifeng. As you will read, feelings run strong on these two subjects.

So I chose this title because, while it is obvious to me that the controversies within our numbers are being waged "in the name of Heaven", sometimes it bears reminding one another that this is indeed the case. Our controversies, be they about the Jewish past in Shanghai or the use of the past in the present, or about what to do in Kaifeng to assist the struggling community there, are worthwhile as long as we are discussing these topics sincerely, without seeking merely to triumph over the other person's point of view, regardless of the merits involved.

And while I'm in a rabbinic mode, permit me to quote another story: For three years there was a dispute between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel. Then a Heavenly Voice proclaimed: "These and these are the words of the living God!" And so it is with our disputes as well. May only good come from them!

Anson Laytner

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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researched subject, his narrative becomes more and more interesting, the characters more and more human, as he progresses to the Shanghai setting where they endure great hardship in their struggle to survive. Kalla, who is well known for his medical thrillers (he is an emergency room physician), centers this work around a refugee hospital in his fast moving, well-timed plot.

The author reaches his full stride in the second book. It is now 1943 and the Jews are under the control of hostile Japanese, including the threat of Nazi pressure to exterminate them. They have been herded into the Hong Kew ghetto, where their difficult life borders on the impossible. Subplots develop; moral dilemmas abound in the war-torn city. The colorful Shanghai of Book I is now a grimy shadow of its former self. However, even in the darkest of moments in this family and community saga of espionage and betrayal, glimmers of light shine through.

The two books can be read independently as Kalla neatly covers the back-story of Book I in the second volume. Both books are good reads, and he also leaves the door open for a third installment. I await it with interest.

Excerpts from both books and additional reviews can be found on Kalla's web site at <http://danielkalla.com/>

4. The journal *Sh'ma* just published a special issue "China, Israel and Judaism," Dec 2013, volume 44/705. The entire issue may be found at: <http://shma.com/category/issues/china-israel-and-judaism/>

Kaifeng Jews: Controversial in Two Countries

excerpted from *The Daily Beast*, 3 January 2014
 by Tiffanie Wen

"Are you Jewish?" my Israeli boyfriend likes to ask me every time I do something like mumble *oy va voy* when I spill a bag of oranges outside of the grocery store. It's a running joke, albeit not a very good one, since I'm ethnically Chinese.

But the premise of our joke—that the notion of a Chinese Jew is oxymoronic—is not technically true. Lately, Chinese Jews have been coming out of the woodwork, and, because of the obvious novelty factor, are getting a decent amount of media attention. In November, *Tablet* covered the return of a 28-

year-old Chinese Jew, Jin Jin, to Israel, where he now lives. *Haaretz* has been following the conversion of several Chinese Jews in Israel, including Yaakov Wong, who is studying to become the first Chinese Rabbi in over 200 years. And Israeli friends like to remind me that Eli Marom, who is a quarter Chinese, was the first Chinese Jew to hold a top military post in Israel, as the head of the Israeli Navy from 2007 to 2011. Marom's brother, Moshe Marom, served as the first representative to China for the IDF (Israel Defense Force).

As it turns out, scholars estimate that there are nearly 1,000 Chinese people of Jewish descent alive today—most of whom originate from Kaifeng, an area of the Henan Province in Eastern Central China. According to Irene Eber, a Professor of Asian Studies at The Hebrew University... "They were Han Chinese and also Jewish. This Jewish identity is again being affirmed today with the help of Jews that travel to China and guide them into a Jewish direction."

But whether or not the descendants of this ancient Jewish community...are actually Jewish, is cause for controversy.

Yiyi Chen, the Director of the Institute for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Peking University, is not convinced. "Regardless of how you define Jewishness—either in conservative or liberal terms—I don't think there are any Jews currently living in Kaifeng," he said.

"Some claim that they are Jewish with historical ties, but nothing has been preserved other than the newly learned Jewishness following the opening of China in the late 1980s and 1990s. The only tangible heritage they have is that since the 1980s—some of them are called the 'blue kippas' for example, and are being mixed together with the Muslim community in terms of their dietary restrictions. But other than that, there's nothing that they observe."

Chen describes the current phenomenon of rediscovering a long-lost Jewish heritage as a small but prominent trend among young Kaifeng residents, born in the 1970s to 1990s, who are attempting to reclaim a forgotten culture. "But it consists of no more than a few dozen people," he said. "I don't think they can safely claim that there is a Jewish community there. There is not." Instead, Chen points to financial motivators behind those promoting the notion of Chinese Jews, including academic, entrepreneurial and local governmental efforts to attract foreign tourists to Kaifeng and expand local revenues.

Officially, the Chinese government does not recognize Judaism as a minority religion, a status that would allow Jewish citizens to

frequent synagogues and potentially have more than one child. A recent Chinese documentary on the ancient Jewish community in China interviewed families in Kaifeng with Jewish ties and concluded that Chinese Jews simply no longer exist.

Nor do Kaifeng Jews meet the criteria for Israel's Law of Return, in which at least one grandparent must be Jewish. So those that consider themselves to be "Chinese Jews" still have to complete a lengthy conversion process in order to become an Israeli citizen.

Even Yecholiya Jin, the Kaifeng Jew profiled by *Tablet*, concedes that Kaifeng Jews did not abide by religious laws throughout much of their history. "It's only in the last 10 years that we began to pick up more of our condition and understand the traditions. Before then, [critics] are right in that we didn't really keep kosher or know Hebrew or much of the beliefs—we only knew we were Jewish and we didn't eat pork." Though Kaifeng citizens of Jewish descent are not recognized as Jewish by the Chinese government, Jin says that on a local level, members of her family and other members of the communities are able to pray together and meet regularly for Shabbat and holiday meals in Kaifeng. Her father even wears *tzitzit*.

Regardless of their hazy history, once converted, Chinese Jews are considered Jewish by the Israeli Rabbinat, and several have been granted Israeli citizenship. 26-year-old Yuguang Shi is one of a handful of Kaifeng Jews that arrived in Israel in 2009 with the help of Shavei Israel, an organization that assists "Hidden Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish community. He is one of just over a dozen Kaifeng Jews to convert in Israel after several years of studying. He became an Israeli citizen earlier this year.

"My identity as Jewish, from the time my grandmother told me about it when I was a child in China, was the start of everything in my life today," he said. "I feel Israel is special. It is the place I should live because it is a Jewish country and I am above all Jewish."

Perhaps Shi and others like him have a reason to feel special. Being from Kaifeng and of ancient Jewish descent—whether or not Beijing or Israel recognize him—still makes him, at least statistically, one in a million.

Tiffanie Wen is a freelance writer from San Francisco who has written for the Times of Israel, Newsweek, Cooler and more. She's currently based in Tel Aviv, where she's writing a book on love in the Middle East.

BOOK NOOK

New Books

1. *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews: A Collection of Biographical Reflections*, by Maisie Meyer

Hamilton Books has just published Maisie Meyer's *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews: A Collection of Biographical Reflections*, a compilation of twenty-six biographical accounts from the entire spectrum of the Shanghai Baghdadi community, from the strictly observant to the wholly secular, as well as the moneyed, middle-class and poor men and women who made the port of Shanghai their home.

This groundbreaking book provides the opportunity for genuine self-expression to members of the community who have so far not been heard, and amongst them, those who have since passed away. The narrative offers perspectives of personalities whose lives were shaped by crucial historical events, and fresh insights into the day-to-day lives of this remarkable community who lived through the major crossroads of China's history. Using previously unseen diaries and archival material, the editor has written five biographies, unveiling new perspectives and details of the lives of Sir Victor Sassoon and the family of Sir Elly Kadoorie.

The diverse narrative approaches of these biographical accounts piece together an integrated collection, warts and all, of this mercantile community, documenting their varied experiences in coping with the vicissitudes and challenges of life in twentieth century China. Never-before-seen photographs illustrate the lives and times of these individuals and the magnificent city of Shanghai.

2. *Western Jews in India: From the Fifteenth Century to the Present*, edited by Kenneth X. Robbins and Marvin Tokayer

Manohar Books has just published "Western Jews in India: From the Fifteenth Century to the Present, the first of eight volumes edited by the authors on Jews in India. It is the first book describing the roles of Western Jews in South Asian political affairs, medicine, painting, architecture and religion. The book is available for a check of \$90 [\$85 for

the book and \$5 for postage] from Kenneth Robbins, 5055 Seminary Road, Suite 108, Alexandria, VA 22311.

A time-line summarizes the contributions of Western and Indian Jews to the Indian Subcontinent. The Mother, a great mystic and leader of the Aurobindo ashram, was a French artist with a Turkish Jewish background. Maurice Frydman (Bharatananda), an important associate of Nisargadatta Maharaj and other gurus, tried to create a Gandhian democracy in Aundh. Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) was an important Islamic political thinker and government official in Pakistan. Jews provided the Portuguese, who persecuted them, with language skills and access to trading networks. Jean-Baptiste Ventura became commander of the Sikh armies. In 1921, Lord Reading and Edwin Montagu were the two highest British officials governing India. Garcia da Orta was a founder of tropical medical botany in the sixteenth century. Waldemar Haffkine, who created anti-cholera and plague vaccines, undertook large-scale vaccination programs in India. Louis Kahn created the iconic National Parliament House in Bangladesh. The buildings of Moshe Safdie, Joseph A. Stein, and Stanley Tigerman are very well known in India and Bangladesh.

The editors have commissioned original articles from eminent historians (Guy Attewell, Ainslie Embree, Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, Omar Khalidi, John McLeod, Marina Sorokina), architects (Moshe Safdie, Stanley Tigerman, and Terry Horowitz), members of Indian royal families (Arvind Singh Mewar, Kocha Varma) and the most famous living Indian Jew (Lt. General J.F.R. Jacob). Their articles written by a distinguished international group of scholars are combined with a very large number of illustrations ranging from paintings, photographs, maps, medals, stamps, and documents to photographic essays on painters and architects.

Volume 2 "*Jews and the Indian National Art Project*" is now with the Niyogi Books and should be out soon. Three other volumes are well along: Holocaust refugees, the military history of the Bene Israel [co-edited with Nissim Moses, Tony Pamm, and Rana & Adil Chhina of the historical research unit of United Services In-

stitute of the Indian Government], and Muslims & Jews in South Asia. Danny Ben Moshe and Kenneth Robbins will be working on a volume about Jews in Bollywood and Robbins is also planning an exhibition on Jews in India for the Rubin Museum of Art.

3. *The Far Side of the Sky and Rising Sun, Falling Shadow*, by Daniel Kalla

reviewed by Dr. Beverly Friend

I am continually surprised by how little the general public — even those well informed about the Holocaust — know about the history of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai during WWII. Now, two new historical novels will enlighten new audiences as well as add to the libraries of the cognoscenti.

Author Daniel Kalla aims to bring this often-neglected piece of history to light. He succeeds, while ensuring that readers will be "struck time and time again by the dignity, bravery, and sense of community among the indigenous Chinese and the transplanted German Jews — two oppressed peoples who lived side by side with remarkable tolerance and mutual respect, in an age of neither."

"*The Far Side of the Sky*" (463 pages) and "*Rising Sun, Falling Shadow*" (352 pages), are sequential novels based on the lives and experiences of Jewish refugees to Shanghai during World War II. (Both are available from Amazon in hard cover, paperback and kindle editions).

While the main characters — Dr. Franz Adler, a secular Austrian Jew, his young daughter Hannah, and Soon Yi "Sunny" Mah, a Eurasian nurse — are fictional, their lives and stories blossom in a finely researched depiction of wartime events. Many of the minor characters, including Nazi and Japanese officials, are actual historical figures.

The first novel opens — as do so many Holocaust depictions — with Kristallnacht. It is Nov. 9, 1938 in Vienna, and Kalla provides essential background to set the stage for all that follows, skillfully moving between Europe and Asia as his characters prepare to flee Austria for a (hopefully) more accepting homeland. Warming to his well-

Contradicting Revisionist History

(continued from page 1)

in Chinese restaurants (which I do often now in America). Nor did my family entertain—in the one-room space we had—Chinese acquaintances or friends on a social basis. Our relationship to the native population, in other words, was almost 100 % confined to service workers: laundry men, hot-water carriers, amahs who took care of children, rickshaw carriers, removal of human waste carriers or the reverse. My father sold philatelic stamps to Chinese collectors; my mother sewed American Indian suits for children to a Chinese toyshop. All these relations were functional and superficially "friendly"—carried out most of the time in pigeon English—"friendly" as in polite or correct. Nor do I recall that I was ever asked by any Chinese person about what had brought us to Shanghai.

Simply put: we thought of ourselves as an added sliver of "whites" among the 100,000 or so foreign residents—Americans, British, German, French, or involuntarily uprooted white Russians—all from different economic and professional levels, surviving (or thriving) in different ways, in the turbulent sea of 4,000,000 Chinese surrounding us on every side.

For this reason—among several others—I feel compelled to take vigorous exception to the misleading implications disseminated by Prof. Pan Guang, Dean of Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai, and elaborated by Prof. Xu Xin of Nanking University in your journal, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Hongkew ghetto, in which Prof. Xu Xin has glossed over the actual circumstances of our presence in Shanghai, by offering, in a "limited edition", a series of "Shanghai Memory Silver and Gold Medals" (as if they were some sort of premium in a popular quiz show), each bearing such accompanying (though flagrantly wrong in tone and texture) fictive story lines as "*we were warmly greeted by our Chinese neighbors*" and "*when I (the refugee) got lost, wandering through the rain swept narrow streets, with my dog and panda toy, a kind Chinese lady befriended me by holding an umbrella over my head to protect me from the rain and wind. The warmth of her gesture in this dark moment was like the bright rays*

of light emitting from a holiday menorah. I therefore became a witness to history and live today to tell the tale 70 years later...."

Nothing could be further from the essence of the actual experience I—and our circle of friends—had upon arriving in Shanghai all those decades ago. It is truly a kind of desecration—or travesty—of our (both Chinese and Jewish) situation, as well as a denigration of the Catch-22 situation both Chinese and Jews found themselves in after 1938 and indeed through all the post Pearl Harbor decades.

To begin with, we refugees did not expect to be and, indeed, under the circumstances, were *never*, in fact, greeted formally or informally by any Chinese representatives in Shanghai! But we were not simple "tourists" either. Quite by accident, it happened that, when I was 11^{1/2} years old my parents and I were among the lucky 4,000 or so Viennese Jews rescued by Dr. Ho Feng Shen, who happened to be the Chinese Consul General in Vienna at the time...

When our ship, the Conte Biancamano, finally docked in Shanghai: there were no official Chinese at dockside asking for our passports or our visas, or inspecting our belongings. Trucks sent by local Jewish groups arrived to lug our luggage in batches to newly improvised shelters in Hongkew. In those years, of course, 1938/39, no official Chinese authority existed to perform ceremonial exercises. The city itself was, in fact, not "governed" by the Chinese themselves, but by a loose consortium of British, French, Japanese municipalities (with Chinese police in attendance). And within a year or so, after thousands of Jewish immigrants had landed, and while Jewish local organizations kept writing worried letters for help to the United States State Department, these municipalities, consulting among themselves, decided to require "landing money" in the future—three hundred pounds per immigrant—a forbidding amount that would have prevented most of us from setting foot on land. In other words, the window of openness quickly closed. With the spread of the war in the Pacific in 1941, Shanghai, its harbors, its airports, its roads, became completely cut off from the outside world.

The fact is that it is the Chinese them-

selves who could have surely used the help of "*a kindly lady to put their arms around them*". In 1937, the future Hongkew ghetto neighborhood had been already bombed and was left an enclave of destroyed houses and of homeless Chinese. To the north, Chiang Kai Shek, a Chinese warlord (and later China's and Taiwan's President), and his army in Manchuria, was consolidating his forces and forming his Kuomintang national government, hoping eventually to "liberate" Shanghai. But the Americans beat him to it—and so did the Communists in 1949. Meanwhile, the Japanese were "raping" Nanking. Thousands of destitute Chinese refugees were pouring into Shanghai—with no "friendly" neighbors there to greet them either. It is hard to imagine the stench we smelled or the poverty we saw crowding the streets when we arrived; from the crammed sampans rotting on the Whang Po River to the beggars (often with amputations) roaming the dark lanes, to newborn babies abandoned on the sidewalks, to anonymous corpses left sometimes for days on the pavement—it was a dark spectacle to behold!

We, the Jewish immigrants, were forced by the circumstances we found to live parallel lives, not just with regard to the poverty we couldn't avoid seeing but with regard to the inflation that ravaged the local currency. Nor could we have survived on the infinitesimal salaries paid to the Coolies with whom we could not compete. Many of the books written by Shanghaiers contain detailed images of our appalling living conditions—our lack of hygiene and plumbing, or the fungus infections, cholera and typhoid epidemics, liver flukes (both my mother and I suffered the latter two diseases), and differing intestinal maladies, or the gnawing hunger of malnutrition that weakened us. Nearly half of our numbers—approximately 8,000 Jewish refugees—became dependent almost entirely on primitive soup kitchens and on crammed warehouse rooms (often shared with fifty other people) and so survived.

Nor could we even envision the fabled wealth among the upper strata of Chinese, or of the expatriate British, American, French and Germans. In a word: the last vestiges of colonialism itself were slowly strangling the great city itself (as exemplified, I remember by a race course sign in the British Concession that read:

"Chinese and dogs not allowed".

The twin scourges of Poverty and Disease—not just for the Jews but for the Chinese as well—reigned in the Shanghai I knew, so that the oppressed Jews could not help the oppressed Chinese or vice versa. Struggling for survival consumed everybody's energies, rendering the outside world as non-existent. It was, in fact, the real basis for the synthetic "apartheid" which seems to have persisted between the Chinese and us from the very beginning.

Prof. Xu Xin mentions the fact that, when we were declared "stateless" by the invading Japanese, it filled us with "dismay." *Dismay?* How weak and listlessly inadequate is this word to describe what we truly went through! To be "stateless", after all, is to be legally *non-existent*; it means to be excluded from protection from any quarter; rendering us twice vulnerable, in legal as well as human terms. Not only had we lost our homeland, we now lost our legal identity before the world in general. And the individual Japanese military, who were the official "guards" of our ghetto, ranged from civil to brutal, from courteous bows to beatings to random incarcerations for bureaucratic offenses. More than a "kindly Chinese lady holding an umbrella" was needed in the unpredictable ghetto situation that hung over us for 2^{1/2} years, even though it must be acknowledged that both the Chinese and ourselves crowded into Hongkew—if we survived hunger and disease—endured.

But, strangely enough, there was a semblance of assistance and protection provided: we were "befriended" primarily by "native" Jewish sources—local Jewish philanthropists with names like Sassoon, Abrams and Kadoorie, and original exiles from Russia during the Revolution, which had replaced Tsarist cruelty with Soviet Gulags, and most crucially by the work of a single, formidable, persistent, and brilliantly shrewd social worker named *Laura Margolis*, who had been dispatched to Shanghai in 1942 by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. At great risk to her own well-being and welfare, and amidst sporadic and unceasing squabbling by various contending refugee groups (which she found a way to pacify somehow), Ms. Margolis was able to raise urgently needed immediate American funds. To

accomplish this, though, she had to get special permission from the occupying Japanese authorities (which miraculously enough she somehow managed to get!). Indeed, it was through her efforts alone that 8,000 refugees in the Heime were prevented from starving. In short, she became an inexorable force endlessly striving for improvements on our behalf. If anyone deserves to be commemorated by a medal of gratitude, or exalted in song, it is Laura Margolis, whose work and life stand in eloquent rebuke to the public relations sentimentalities now being discussed.

When Prof. Xu Xin, in a talk given at UCLA this year, exalts the modern Chinese scholars' admiration for the Jewish religion, he avoids the fact that Shanghai's Ohel Rachel synagogue was only opened one or two years ago. He may well be fleeing from the darker, terribly difficult, and often ruthless years of struggle in China since World War II...which, in spite of improvements, continue to this day. When our Jewish story in Shanghai is feted by exhibitions, by paper and photo collections, or by Chinese Holocaust studies and classes, we are given an endlessly repetitive, sentimentally ritualized, wishful thinking, and well-rehearsed "never-Again" chorale which contributes to exude a kind of invisible plume of "Holocaust Fatigue" not borne out by the events. History and truth are not served when they are offered as sugar-coated, or trivialized with coins and turned into fairy tales.

The young, post Holocaust generation, which, by the passage of time, is inheriting ongoing replicas of the Jewish Holocaust around the world, deserve better. It requires of every Holocaust teacher, of every exhibit, to spell out in detail, the kind of tough moral courage—the kind written about and exemplified by author Primo Levy, or Dr. Ho Feng Shen or Ms. Laura Margolis—to inspire in students an ongoing vigilance in daily life and an active participation in political structural change, to model courage and risk so as to honor our communities' horrific losses. It may be better to be silent than to feverishly embrace platitudes and falsehoods.

[A letter exchange dated 1996 is available from the author around the moral questions about how to live in the grip

of the Holocaust, not the narratives we form after the Holocaust. To receive a copy, email Dr. Marcus at lottedoc@prodigy.net]

A Response

(continued from page 1)

What does matter is that so many Shanghailanders stick to their story that the Chinese saved them, or that they were saved because of China. We must ask ourselves why. To a great extent it must be because the survival of so many Jews gathered in any one place during the Holocaust years was a miracle - and it was a miracle that happened in China. (Some religious survivors even suggest that it was God's hand that saved the Jews in China - if so, then we must ask: why did God pick China?) Had these 18,000 Jews escaped to the Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, or my native Slovakia, Dr. Marcus would not be with us to tell her story. The Chinese may not have actively strived to save the Jews, but neither did they try to murder them, as did the Europeans. One may suggest that they could not have killed the Jews even if they wanted to since they did not have the power to do so, but there is historical evidence to suggest that they would not have done so. There is no time here to expound about the Chinese attitude towards foreigners, or more specifically toward Jews, but suffice it to say that the Kaifeng Jews, the Iraqi Shanghai Jews, the Harbin Jews and the Jews in China today have much happier stories to tell than Jews almost anywhere else on this planet. The Jews of Harbin, Shenyang and Dalian in the early part of the 20th century were tolerated by the Japanese, but the Chinese and the Chinese courts stood with them - even during the times of sadistic assaults on the Jewish community by the virulently anti-Semitic White Russians who lived there. A Jewish presence and its toleration go back many years in China; and Jewish contribution to modern Chinese history is also significant, with many individuals such as Two-Gun Cohen, Jacob Rosenfeld, Israel Epstein, and Sydney Shapiro remembered as heroes of the Chinese Republic.

Those of us who are concerned about the past and the future of Jewish/Chinese relations want to believe in the very great probability that an old Chinese woman did indeed hold an umbrella over a little

ences, including genetic as well as cultural aspects of assimilation in relation to the Jewishness of the Chinese Jews, see Paper 2012: 5-16.)

Conclusion and Implications

In the Nov. 2013 issue of *Points East* (28/3: 6-7), there is a description of a group trip to Jewish sites in China that ends with an oft expressed understanding of the Chinese Jews that is historically incorrect on two major points leading not only to a profound misunderstanding of the Kaifeng Jews but of Judaism in general: "...the Jews of the world have survived for so long precisely because they have been persecuted, which has kept them as a distinct community. In China, because they were never persecuted, they eventually intermarried and were assimilated. There is a lesson here for Jews in Western countries - the very freedom that we now enjoy may pose a risk to the survival of our communities." (Following this logic, Judaism in Israel will disappear because Jews are not persecuted there.) These two historical errors discussed above, that the Kaifeng Jews only lately intermarried and lately assimilated, are not causal and neither led to the demise of their Judaism.

The only religious difference between the Kaifeng Jews and Jews living in Christian and Muslim contexts - given their Mizrahi practices were the same as those living in Persia (present-day Iran and Iraq) - is their theology. The Jews in post-Medieval Europe, perhaps beginning after the First Crusade and especially after the Holocaust, developed a theology centering on a punitive deity who chastised His Chosen People en masse for transgressing religious injunctions. The Chinese Jews, living in a benign environment, had no fear but only love of God, understood as a non-anthropomorphic deity without such human traits as jealousy and anger, similar to the understanding of Saadia Gaon, Maimonides and most Jewish mystics.

Some may think that not to suffer as Jews is suffering; I happen to think that that is an appalling contradiction. As an American Jew, I was persecuted in various ways for being Jewish throughout the 40s, 50s, and 60s, but not since then.

Can Judaism only survive by Jews being forced to continue being Jewish? I should think the Jewish community that chooses to be Jewish is the most robust. Is Judaism so frail, so displeasing a religion, that one would leave it if one could? The Chinese Jews remained observant Jews without any persecution for over eight centuries because they wanted to be Jewish, not because they were forced to do so through discrimination.

The Kaifeng synagogue community continued as long as any synagogue community in Europe. They were highly successful because they had the same opportunities as any Chinese, which was hardly the case for the Jews in Europe, save for a relatively short time after Napoleon. The near complete demise of the Judaism of the Kaifeng Jews from the mid-19th century, after flourishing for nearly a millennium, was due to a convergence of factors which effected all Chinese, none of which is intermarriage or assimilation: counter-productive government policies regarding the seaports in the sixteenth century inadvertently cutting off the Chinese Jews from Judaism elsewhere; repeated massive flooding to which Kaifeng is prone destroying the synagogue; and the mid-nineteenth century Taiping civil war which twice devastated Kaifeng, leading to massive depopulation and destitution, from which it has economically and demographically never recovered to this day.

If a lesson is to be learned by American Jews from the experience of the Chinese Jews, it is not about intermarriage, which is occurring at an increasing rate - now over 50% according to surveys, but to welcome the spouses and encourage them to convert. For if the pattern of ostracizing continues, as occurs in many synagogue communities, even of those with converted spouses, then Judaism in North America will eventually disappear. As for assimilation, how many American Jews are willing to give up their Americanized names, their citizenship, speaking English, etc.?

As a corollary, American Jewish tourists and temporary residents should cease to encourage the few remaining Jews in Kaifeng to apply for Minority status and give up their designation as Han (Chinese). For if they are not Han, then what

are they? There is no such culture as Judaism in general; Judaism is a religion, not an ethnicity, and there are many Jewish ethnicities. Official Minority status in the main is reserved for those of non-Han ethnicity on the geographical fringes of China, who have had for millennia distinctly different languages and cultures - it is not a matter of religion. It is the equivalent in North America of being registered as Native American, with certain economic prerogatives but also with many disadvantages. Some American tourists, out of ignorance of Chinese and Jewish history and culture, are leading the remnants of the Kaifeng Jewish community to potential disaster. (The problems being created with the Chinese government due to this and other unsound advice from foreigners is a topic in itself.)

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seaport synagogue communities that the Jews in Kaifeng were able to keep in touch with Judaism around the world for many centuries. They only became isolated when the government moved the population away from the coasts in the late Ming period and forbade deep-water trade.

Male Jews began to marry Chinese women in the 17th century or later leading to a rapid decline

Jewish merchants spread first around the Mediterranean even before the Diaspora (70 C.E.), and slowly spread throughout the world, especially by sea. When merchants were putting down roots in new areas, it was the males that did the dangerous traveling, rather than families. Those Jewish males that sought to establish themselves in new areas took local wives, who converted to Judaism, and began new communities (see Sand 2009). This pattern undoubtedly was the case with regard to the establishment of the Kaifeng community. We know that the women converted. Thus wives were taken beginning at least in the 11th century, and this hardly led to a decline but the opposite. The Kaifeng synagogue community was one of the most successful in the history of Judaism — Chinese Jews became high officials — building an urban synagogue that was one of the largest in the world and lasting for nearly seven centuries, almost as long as the longest continual use synagogue in Europe.

Taking a Chinese name and wearing Chinese clothing led to the end of Chinese Judaism

If taking a name in a non-Hebrew language, while keeping one's Hebrew name for ritual purposes, and wearing local clothing leads to the end of Judaism, then according to the same logic, the Jews of Poland and the Ukraine should not have had histories lasting centuries, and American Judaism should no longer exist.

The Chinese government discriminates against Chinese Jews by considering them Chinese

The right to have Chinese names was given to the Chinese Jews by the imperial government as an honor for meritorious service. Slowly becoming Han (the major ethnic group) meant that the Jews were accorded the same treatment as all

Chinese, just as those Jews who became Roman citizens had the rights of Roman citizens. Would American Jews prefer to have special passports identifying them as Jews rather than Americans? Should American Jews give up their American identification because having such identification is discrimination?

In the 15th century the Chinese emperor demanded to be worshiped in the synagogue

The emperor was not worshiped in China. Indeed, it was the opposite. The emperor and his consort made offerings to Sky, Earth and other cosmic and natural spirits on behalf of the Chinese people. The emperor supported the building of the synagogue. As its patron, his name was on a placard above the Ark, but above that was the all-important *sh'ma* statement. This is no different than the placing of an American flag in an American synagogue by the Ark.

Those who studied other subjects besides Talmud-Torah ceased to be Jewish

This is an oft repeated statement, but one that makes no sense whatsoever. It posits that only those who studied for the rabbinate, that is, exclusively Talmud-Torah, were Jews, and those who also studied for the civil service examinations or medicine ceased to be observant Jews. The equivalent is to state that any Jew today who goes to a university rather than a yeshiva ceases to be Jewish, and that there are no observant Jewish physicians, lawyers or scientists. If that were the case, there would have been no need for a large synagogue, and Judaism would never have become established in China or anywhere else.

To provide a single example that exclusively studying Talmud-Torah is not essential in order to be Jewish, one only has to think of RaMBaM (Maimonides). Born in Cordoba (Andalusia), he studied classical Greek philosophy and Muslim theology, as well as medicine, at the great university in Fez (present-day Morocco) and was physician to Muslim rulers in Egypt. Although he was a medical doctor, he was one of the most influential theologians in Jewish history.

Chinese Jewish mode of honoring parents and patriarchs is contrary to Juda-

ism

Judaism has special practices regarding memorializing departed parents, including the lighting of a candle. In China, Judaism added aspects normative to Chinese culture. None were forbidden in Judaism. In the home, the burning of incense was added to the lighting of candles. There were two wings to the synagogue for similar practices towards the Patriarchs, Moses and Ezra. It happens that there is considerable commonality between Chinese and Jewish practices regarding memorializing the family dead. For example, in modern synagogues and modern Chinese temples there are little light bulbs by names of the departed that are turned on for the day of remembering particular deceased.

Assimilation and the survival of Judaism

The omnipresent fear of modern Judaism is "assimilation." Entering "Jewish assimilation" in Google led to 2,430,000 hits (26 December 2013). The most common criticism of Chinese Judaism is that assimilation took place leading to its disappearance. But the opposite is the case: assimilation took place early and led to the creation of Chinese Judaism and its continuation over many centuries. There is no such phenomenon as unassimilated Judaism. Ashkenazi Judaism, the dominant Jewish ethnicity, is an amalgam of Germanic, Slavic, Turkic (see Brook 2006: 197-207) and Semitic elements: the language is Yiddish not Hebrew or Aramaic, the clothing is northeastern European (some ultra-orthodox sects consider the apparel of 18th century Polish rent collectors to be holy garb) and Turkic (silk caftans and fur trimmed hats), and the food is Polish and Ukrainian. (Many so-called Jewish dishes are actually northern Chinese fare – the Mongol armies that reached central Europe had not only Chinese military engineers but also northern Chinese cooks). Why would speaking Chinese, as well as Judeo-Persian, while continuing to use Hebrew in rituals, wearing Chinese clothing and eating kosher Chinese cuisine necessitate one ceasing to be Jewish? Is this attitude due to unconsciously subscribing to the long-lasting animosity towards China in America resulting from China not falling under the domination of American Protestant missionaries? (For an extended discussion of this topic with many refer-

Jewish girl, because such things did happen, and because this image represents the miraculous sheltering of thousands of Jews among the Chinese historically, and during WWII, when the rest of the world ignored our suffering, or was busy building machinery for our speedy extermination. 18,000 Jewish lives were saved in China - this is a fact. No Chinese vigilantes, or paramilitary organizations, or hate groups, or even individuals made it their goal to hurt or murder this defenseless, desperate refugee community - this also is a fact. Is it any wonder then that so many of us wish to credit the Chinese people for the "happy ending" to this story?

I have just returned from Slovakia where most members of my father's family, including my grandparents, were murdered or deported during the war by their own neighbors. After the war, in the 50s, the same people who killed hundreds of thousands of Jews continued to persecute and kill Jews under the new "Communist" regimes. Today, in the very same town where my family was shot to death, there are weekly Neo-Nazi demonstrations and anti-Semitism is alive and well. I am ashamed to admit that I would not dare walk on Slovak streets with a *kippa* on my head, nor would I want to do so in France or Hungary and certainly not in any Arab country. In China I would not give it a second thought. This matters.

To a great extent it is this sentimentality that drives so many Shanghailanders and other Jews to want to express our thanks and solidarity with the Chinese. The survival of the refugees in Shanghai was just another chapter in a long history of tolerance and mutual admiration by our two communities; and it is not uncommon in these "cultural love affairs" to exaggerate or embellish a little - and why not?

China does indeed want to propagandize their role in the Shanghai refugee story. Like other governments, they too are looking for a way to show benevolence and get some credit. (It is hypocritical for any American to criticize China for trying to create some good spin, or for its shortcomings, when our own backyard is littered with political propaganda...) It is also worth mentioning here that, by 1939, the Chinese had suffered yet another series of devastating and humiliating military defeats and, like the Jews,

had lost millions of civilian lives - an estimated 20 million in the entire WWII. Chiang Kai Shek was not a "war lord," as Dr. Marcus suggests, but the leader of the Nationalist Chinese government recognized by most of the countries in the League of Nations including the United States. He never had any substantial forces in Manchuria. That area was under Japanese control and occupation since 1931. Chiang Kai Shek's forces were concentrated in central China and were first fully engaged in the battle for Shanghai in 1937. (For an excellent account of Chinese activity in WWII see Rana Mitter's "*Forgotten Ally*," Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.) It was in fact the Communist forces under Mao Zedong that put up a fight in North China in the later years up to 1945. By the time the Jewish refugees arrived in Shanghai, the Nationalist government has moved to Chungking and it was preoccupied with the task of repelling growing Japanese aggression. It had no presence in Shanghai.

Neither Professor Xu Xin nor any other scholar will claim that this Chinese government was responsible for saving the Jews. What they and I want to stress, is that we can, and we must, use the common Shanghai survival experience as an important symbol of the lasting positive relationship between our two communities; and a more universal example of human coexistence, resiliency and self-sufficiency under the threat of annihilation. If there ever has been a tale that stands tall in the history of Jewish survival, surely this is it.

Some fabrications, inaccuracies and exaggerations are a common thread in all national myths. But in all of them there is an element of truth. The truth in the Shanghailanders' story is that they survived because of China and because of their Chinese neighbors, who bought their goods, rented them apartments, supplied their food, cleaned their toilets, took care of their children, became their friends, and shared the fear and misery that comes from persecution and displacement. When organizations such as UCLA, or the Spungen Foundation, celebrate Shanghai refugees like Dr. Marcus, they do so to commemorate their will and strength to create a life for themselves in a Chinese city among the Chinese people. Like two soldiers who have fought in battle together side by side, the Jews and the Chinese have a bond simply because of the

circumstances they have shared and managed to overcome together.

It is an experience that is important to remember and one that can bring our two peoples closer in the years to come. Surely, Dr. Marcus can overlook a few embellishments by those who write this history from their hearts rather than the book.

A Disclaimer

by Danny Spungen

Professor Xu Xin and Dr. Pan Guang had nothing to do with the design, production or distribution of the numismatic pieces. The idea of the numismatic commemoratives was the idea of one of the Directors of the Shanghai Mint at a lunch I attended back on December 7th, 2010 (Pearl Harbor Day ironically). The following day I was introduced to one of the Shanghai Mint designers. To make this happen, I became the sole financier of the project and sponsored by Shanghai Finance University. After the design by one of the most famous designers in China [was made], we asked Prof. Xu and Dr. Pan (among many others) for their support of the text for the commemorative box and the "scroll" that accompany the medals.

This was/is the first time in history that "any" Jewish theme has been produced "in" an official Chinese Mint. This was a complicated process with many restrictions but "I" believe an important step in China for so many reasons (which I hope to convey to you at a later time).

...I personally take 100% responsibility for the final product and I think anyone that wants to "revise history" on the numismatic points should first gather all the information possible and in this case, they would include "me," given I am the one responsible for the project, events, content, and use (partially) as an educational tool.

One final note on this point: Our Foundation (www.spungenfoundation.org) had nothing to do with the actual production, sale or promotion of the numismatic commemoratives. The Foundation only supported the educational events that gathered the survivors/refugees and guest speakers. The Foundation did not contribute to the cost of production or profit from any sale of the numismatic pieces.

I think after a short time you will be satisfied with the entire process that took place and you will rest easier knowing there are many people who want the history of the Ghetto properly documented and not exploited for the wrong reasons. Just as important, with efforts like those of Prof. Xu Xin at Nanjing University, there is real growth in Jewish Studies programs rising up all over China, which generates more opportunities for education at all levels.

Another Response

by Prof. Steve Hochstadt

We have had a very useful exchange of messages prompted by Lotte Marcus about the relationship between Jews and Chinese in Shanghai. This is a subject which greatly interests me and about which I have talked to many people, including many former refugees.

Lotte's original message demonstrates how much refugees' personal experiences influence their understanding of the whole experience in Shanghai. She wrote: "to my knowledge, there were only two significant occasions during which the Jewish Refugee community and the local Chinese community wholeheartedly embraced one another": the July 1945 bombing and the celebration of the end of the war. Those were unique public events.

She also writes that "we hardly ever cultivated private contacts with the locals". That might have been the most common situation for refugees, but it was not the only one. I have spoken to many former refugees who worked alongside Chinese, who ate Chinese food and participated in Chinese culture, who befriended Chinese, who went to Chinese homes and family celebrations, who learned Chinese. It will never be possible to measure how many refugees interacted with Chinese more than Lotte and her family did, but it certainly was a considerable number. The image that Lotte uses of an "apartheid" between Jews and Chinese is not appropriate.

It is certainly true that there was very little official contact between the Chinese government in Chungking and the refugees, but even this was more than zero. Some refugees, notably some doctors, went inland and joined the Chinese army.

Recently a book by Gao Bei, a historian at the College of Charleston, argued that the Chinese government made significant efforts to help the refugees (*Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II*). In a review, I criticized this book because I believe she exaggerated the efforts of the Nationalist government and diminished the help offered by the Japanese government.

The point is to examine the types and amount of contacts between Jews and Chinese, which were mostly private and individual, rather than to claim there were none of significance.

Lotte also is critical of the efforts of Chinese today to remember and commemorate the survival of refugees in Shanghai. It is important to distinguish between scholars and government. Scholars like Xu Xin are genuinely interested in the Jewish experience in China. He was pioneer in the flourishing of Jewish Studies in Chinese universities since the 1990s, which is evidence of a widespread and sincere interest of Chinese scholars and students in Jewish history, even beyond the Jewish experience in China.

The official government attitude is more self-interested. As Manli Ho says, government spokesmen want to use the survival of Jews in Shanghai, and the longer history of Chinese acceptance of Jewish immigrants (Kaifeng, Harbin, etc.) to promote China as a place of tolerance. The lack of anti-Semitism in China does deserve to be celebrated in a world where this was rare, but the government, aided by some scholars, has exaggerated the number of refugees in Shanghai and the welcome they received from the local population. This is worthy of criticism. The exhibit of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum (a notable institution), that has been traveling around the US (NY, Chicago, LA), did a fine job of summarizing the refugee experience and detailing many contacts that refugees had with Chinese. The overall impression left by the exhibit certainly pushed the "friendship" between the two peoples to extremes, but there was nothing false in the exhibit. The fault lay in an overly romanticized version of this contact.

We come to the coin that Danny Spungen created. Danny's success in getting a Chinese mint to make this coin, which

explicitly notes Jewish refugees, is a triumph. Not a triumph of historical accuracy – again the image of a Chinese woman sheltering the Jewish girl represents a romanticized view of the contact –but a political triumph, moving the Chinese government another step towards full and open acknowledgment of Jewish history in China. That process has made great strides, but there is still more to be hoped for. For example, the Kaifeng Municipal Museum holds some unique artifacts of the former Jewish community there, but they are not open to the public. The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum charges admission at a level which is too high for most Chinese tourists.

I don't think that participating in and trying to influence Chinese memory of the refugees in any way "allows the Chinese to paper over their tragedies". The "Judeophilia" that Lotte mentions is real. It certainly has its useful side for the Chinese government, but that does not make it any less real.

Criticizing these efforts and the slow but sure progress of Jewish Studies in China is not especially useful. It is true that the history of Communist China is filled with terrible events of human tragedy. But the Jewish experience was not one of them, and researching it and remembering it is worthwhile.

To do that we need the first-hand accounts of refugees like Lotte and the work of historians to create from those accounts reliable narratives. Not everything that refugees believe is true. For example, Lotte writes that Sassoon, Abrams and the Kadoories were exiles from Russia, when they originated in Baghdad. She puts the number of Austrians rescued by Feng Shan Ho at 4,000, which is much too high. Her number of "8,000 refugees in the Heime" is several times too large, and Laura Margolis, while an indispensable help to them, did not save them alone.

George Kalmar noted the important role of the Japanese in allowing the refugees into Shanghai in the first place. Without Japanese willingness to allow refugees from Europe to enter Shanghai and settle in the Japanese controlled portions of Shanghai in 1939, the Western businessmen who controlled the Shanghai Municipal Council would have stopped immigration at the end of 1938. The Japa-

nese did force all refugees into the Designated Area in 1943. This was not a ghetto, although that became the common word used by refugees and since then. There is no comparison between Shanghai and Warsaw or Lodz or any of the ghettos that we think of when we hear that word. As Lotte wrote, the Japanese could be threatening; but they also could be helpful. They were not "in thrall to the Germans"; they developed their own Jewish policy, which involved killing nobody. While the refugees worried that they would be killed, in fact the Japanese never had any intention of doing that.

They were not saints, but when they are compared to every other nation during World War II, they look pretty good. Think about the American incarceration and dispossession of our own citizens of Japanese heritage, and Japanese treatment of these foreign refugees compares well.

Much more research needs to be done about the real daily connections between refugees and both Chinese and Japanese. In both cases, there are points of friendship and conflict. In both cases, various people will try to use these contacts to promote agendas that have nothing to do with history. But that is always the way.

Common Current Misconceptions about the Kaifeng Jewish Community

by Dr. Jordan Paper

A number of excellent studies of Chinese Judaism have been produced over the last century, but the last dozen years have also witnessed the publication of popularized works and the development of a Jewish tourism industry. Some of these popularized publications are written by Chinese scholars who are not students of Chinese history or religion per se (for example, Xu 2003) and by journalists and tourists (for example, Shaland 2013) who pass on what they picked up during their travels. These works often deliberately skew the history to meet contemporary concerns of Western Judaism or represent the typical anti-Chinese sentiments found in the United States. Thus, there has developed a common understanding in the West about Chinese Judaism that contains serious errors and perverted understandings. The following

discusses ten major misconceptions but not the outright lies told by popular "Jewish" guides in Kaifeng in order to be able to discuss Chinese Judaism past and present with some clarity.

Confusion between Jews in China and Chinese Jews

Imagine that a Jewish merchant from London moves to New York for a year to carry on his business. He would not be an American Jew but a British Jew in America. Should that person decide to remain in the U.S. and eventually takes out U.S. citizenship, then that person would become an American Jew. Similarly, over the course of history, there have been a number of instances of Jews in China who remained culturally distinct from those who became Chinese Jews.

We can assume that Jewish merchants traveled to China during the Han period, and we have firm evidence – documents in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian found in oases on the edge of China and books by Arab historians of the time – that they did so during the Tang. All of these are Jews in China. Considering more recent history, in the mid-19th century, Jewish merchants took up residence in Shanghai when it became the major port of entry for European merchants after the Opium Wars. In the late 19th century, a number of Jews fled pogroms in Russia to northern Manchuria, and later some Jews were able to escape the Nazis by fleeing to Shanghai.

From at least the late Tang period, and especially during the Song, Jewish merchants began to take up permanent residence in the port cities along with the far more numerous Arab traders. These merchants formed synagogue communities that continued for centuries. They adapted to the Chinese way of life and became Chinese Jews; that is, they became Chinese who are Jewish. The Judaism they brought with them was Mizrahi not Ashkenazi Judaism, which had yet to come into existence at the time they left Basra or ports in Yemen for China.

The Kaifeng Jews came to China via the Silk Road

A Jewish synagogue community developed in Kaifeng around the 11th century, building their first major synagogue in the 12th. It is commonly assumed that they came overland via the Silk Road.

The Silk Road has been heavily romanticized in the West out of proportion to its importance. The overland trade route was only viable during those times that the oases along the route were protected by Chinese or Mongolian armies, control that usually lasted but one to a few centuries. This occurred but several times: during the Han and Tang dynasties, and during the Mongol and Manchu empires. Even then, very few merchants traveled the entire route from Persia or India; rather, traders brought goods to sell at a trading oasis. There the goods were purchased by another trader to be sold at an oasis further along. Thus, the trade goods usually were moved in stages rather than in a single one or two year direct trip. (Far an in-depth history of the Silk Road, see Hansen 2012.)

The sea route was a different matter. Maritime trade took place between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley cities (present-day Pakistan) as early as five thousand years ago. Slowly the route moved down the coast of India to Sri Lanka and eastward, eventually reaching China. By the Tang period, most trade goods moved between Persia or India and China by sea in Arab, Jewish and Chinese vessels. At the time that Jewish merchants moved to Kaifeng, the Silk Road had been defunct for over a century. The Jewish merchants were invited to the then capital by the imperial government. An invitation could only go to a specific recipient, not to an unknown recipient in an undetermined place. Hence, the invitation for a group of Jewish merchants to move to Kaifeng could only have been sent to a synagogue community in one of the major seaports. The Jews who moved to Kaifeng probably came from either Ningpo or Yangzhou and comfortably traveled by canal barge and river craft to Kaifeng via the Grand Canal and the Yellow River.

The Kaifeng Synagogue was the first and largest or only synagogue community in China

There were seven or more synagogue communities in China before the 17th century, at least six being in the seaports. The seaport synagogues were earlier since the Jews who settled in Kaifeng would have come from at least one of them, and the ones in the major seaports must have been larger, at least in numbers, given the much larger number of Jews residing in the seaports. It is through the