



The Changing Status of the Kaifeng Jews

by Anson Laytner

In this paper, I will discuss the changing status and identity of the Kaifeng Jews as it progressed through a number of historical stages. These stages, as I see them, are three: the formative years, the open door era, and the period from around the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel down to the present. Due to space constraints, I'll focus on a few key events during each stage and offer some general conclusions. I want to acknowledge the invaluable research particularly by Noam Urbach and also by Moshe Yehuda Bernstein that serve as the foundation for this article as well as the first-hand experiences and observations of Eric Rothberg and Barnaby Yeh. I welcome your comments for this article's improvement.

Phase I: The Formative Years

The period running from shortly after the founding of the People's Republic, after years of physical isolation from Jewish visitors and well before China opened the doors of Kaifeng again to western visitors in the 1980s, is important in terms of establishing a baseline identity.

Between 1949 and 1980, the Kaifeng Jews had been visited by only two foreigners.¹ But this did not mean that nothing was happening. Quite the contrary!

In 1952, two delegates from KF represented the Jewish community in the National Day celebrations in Beijing. They met PM Zhou Enlai and People's Daily called Jews one of 46 ethnic groups attending the banquet. Delegates requested that they be recognized as a national minority.²

In the census of that same year, many KF Jews self-identified as Jews and their residence registration booklet and ID cards marked them as such. Local gov't accepted their claim and never challenged their identity.

In 1953, the local United Front asked Central United Front if it should recognize Jews as an ethnic group. In an official document published on June 8th, the central gov't officially denied the KF Jews ethnic minority status based on the five objective (i.e. Stalinist) criteria they used and instead declared them to be Han.

The final decision that "Kaifeng Jewry should be treated as a part of the Han nationality" was qualified by the caveat that the authorities "should take the initiative to be more caring for them in various activities and educate the local Han population not to

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Saved by Shanghai

by Kenneth Lubowich



On a recent rain-soaked Shanghai morning, an unveiling ceremony took place at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. The museum, housed at the former Ohel Moshe Synagogue, is located in what once was the refugee section of WW II Shanghai. Shanghai government officials, representatives of various foreign governments, students and scholars of Jewish studies, as well as, Sonja Mühlberger, a Shanghailander (a Jew who lived in Shanghai during WWII) were in attendance. They watched the unveiling of a bronze sculpture inscribed with 13,732 names to commemorate the Jews who survived the Holocaust by taking refuge in Shanghai.



View of Memorial and Donor Wall

Conspicuously absent were representatives from the Japanese government, which is interesting since the German government officials were present and even gave one of the speeches. The German speech was a fascinating balancing act that walked the fine line between respecting and supporting the need to remember the history while not apologizing for the atrocities and subtly trying to separate the Nazis from Germans.

The Japanese government's decision to skip the unveiling was no great surprise. Not only did Chinese officials talk about the triumph of the Chinese people in the "anti-Japanese war," but also the ceremony itself took place on the anniversary of the Chinese victory over the Japanese. The significance of the date, lest anyone forget, was mentioned by several of the Chinese speakers. Anti-Japanese feelings remain quite strong in China for both past and present reasons.

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FROM THE EDITOR

We wrap up volume 29 of Points East with continuing conversation about refugee life in Shanghai thanks to articles by Claus Hirsch and Ken Lubowich. Several SJI Board members have new books out and these are highlighted in Book Nook.

But the bulk of this issue is comprised of an article I've written based on a paper I presented last May at the University of San Francisco along with Dr. Jordan Paper and Dr. Xu Xin (via skype). It's a sad day when an editor has to resort to his own material as filler and I yearn for more people to submit articles to me. That being said, I think my piece is a good summary of more detailed essays by Moshe Yehuda Bernstein of Australia and Noam Urbach of Israel and it may help readers understand the complexities of the Kaifeng Jewish experience.

And, while I lament having to publish my own work, I want to warn you that we will mark 30 years of Points East with another article of mine tracing the founding of the Sino-Judaic Institute.

My best wishes for a good and sweet (Jewish) new year. May it be a year of peace and healing for all peoples and for those in Israel/Palestine in particular.

Anson Laytner

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Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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TOTAL:	233

A Reader's Response to the Shanghai Debate

by Claus W. Hirsch

I am an alumnus of the Hongkew (now Hongkou) so-called ghetto of Shanghai during World War II. My brother and I lived there in a one-room apartment, together with our parents, for 6 ½ years between late 1940 and mid-1947, after having escaped from Berlin and the Nazi regime. We attended school in Shanghai and experienced all the trials and tribulations of a wartime economy. It is this personal background that leads me to make several comments and observations in reaction to the three articles about Shanghai that appeared in the March 2014 issue of *Points East*.

The earlier *Points East* discussion features a strongly worded article by Dr. Lotte Lustig Marcus, who charges the Chinese with revising history by creating situations which simply did not exist. For starters, she alleges that there were only two significant events in which the Jewish refugees from Europe and local Shanghainese “wholeheartedly embraced one another”—rather than living together side by side and cooperating continuously, as often alleged by Chinese writers and speakers. She goes on to say that dialogue was nearly impossible because of language barriers and that the humble living quarters of most refugees made it impractical to entertain neighbors.

George Kalmar, the video producer about the Shanghai ghetto, issued a response and stated that “the question of whether the Chinese actually saved the Jews, or if the refugees were even friends with the Chinese is ultimately irrelevant.” He goes on to say that “there were many Jews who had close Chinese friends and some who learned to speak the Shanghai dialect well.” The tone of his article is generally laced with a spirit of generosity and he even says that the Chinese should be allowed to “embellish their history.” I appreciate his fair-mindedness but cannot accept the principle of giving anyone carte blanche to reinvent important historic situations.

Prof. Steve Hochstadt weighs in with his own well-balanced response to the debate and emphasizes the important strides made in correcting the exaggerated refugee population figures used by the Chi-

nese government and some of its yes-sayers. He also correctly points out that there were many events of human tragedy under the regime of Chinese Communists, but that historically the Chinese have been welcoming of Jewish refugees in both Kaifeng and Harbin, and elsewhere.

From my own point of view, I endorse Dr. Marcus's allegation that the likelihood of widespread friendships between Chinese and the refugees were precluded by both language barriers and tight living quarters—the statements of some refugees notwithstanding! What exactly does constitute friendship? I would answer that by including such components as: frequent social contact, shared experiences, and friendly discussions in a common language, shared ceremonies and shared meals, among many criteria. The gulf between the Shanghainese and the refugees was far too wide, in my opinion, to meet more than perhaps one of these criteria. As a child in wartime Shanghai, I did not attend classes with the locals, did not study with them, did not attend prayers with them or even included them in my games of soccer or marbles. No, we always lived in our own little worlds.

In conclusion, I—as one of the nearly 18,000 Jews from Central Europe who found a safe haven in Shanghai during World War II—am grateful that this area of safety existed and allowed my family and the families of close friends to survive the war. It is indisputable that some of the credit for this belongs to the Japanese occupiers, but it is also true that the local Chinese—unlike many locals in countries adjoining Germany and Austria to which Jews escaped in the 1930s and early 1940s—did not turn on us, as Mr. Kalmar notes (except for local Chinese gangs who tended to pounce on any foreign boy walking in their immediate neighborhood).

I am also thankful to the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum for its recent addition of a wall of honor listing over 13,000 European refugees who found safe haven in Shanghai. Finally, I have a deep appreciation for *Points East* for providing a forum for intelligent discussions of historic events in the Far East.

Finally, I want to add a few comments about Steve Hochstadt's remarks about the Japanese presence in Shanghai and the ghetto, per se. The Japanese did, indeed,

have a mixed record. On the one hand, there were the actions of a certain Mr. Ghoya—a short, psychotic and self-important Japanese functionary whose office issued passes for leaving the ghetto. These passes were sought by refugees who needed permission to leave the ghetto for work situations in other parts of the city. Mr. Ghoya seemed to relish humiliating the desperate refugees who came to his office.

On the other hand, there were acts of kindness and civility by other Japanese. I well remember a certain Mr. Tsuji who befriended my brother and me, as well as our parents. To this day I have no idea about this Japanese civilian's true role; all I knew is that he was kind to us. On another occasion, a Japanese military man came to visit our lane to demonstrate to the refugees how to organize a fire brigade. He was polite and allowed members of the bucket brigade to pour water on him from a certain distance by posing as the site of the fire. His behavior made quite an impression—even on a boy who must have been all of ten or eleven at the time.

As for Hongkew not having been a ghetto—like Warsaw—that was true. But Hongkew did have its defined geographic boundaries (without walls) and local, unarmed refugees were required to enforce the rules. My father, wearing a “Pao Chia” armband, was one of those guards.

Claus W. Hirsch, cwhirsch@rcn.com, resides in New York City.

TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

The Administrator General of Israel is charged by law with the administration of any abandoned property in Israel, that is, property whose owner (or legal heir/s) is unknown or cannot be located. In addition, the Administrator General is charged with undertaking investigations so as to ascertain the whereabouts of those with rights in such property.

In this capacity and according to an Administration Order issued by the District Court in Haifa, the Administrator Gen-

eral is managing money in the name of Bencion Kantor Davidovich (which probably means his father's name was David).

The office of Fahn Kanne & Co. Grant Thornton Israel has been authorized by the Administrator General of Israel to investigate the whereabouts of those with rights in such property on his behalf.

We are looking for the heirs of **Bencion Kantor Davidovich**. Bencion Kantor Davidovich purchased a land in Haifa, Israel in 1934. On the Deed he stated that he resides in Harbin, China. We are trying to look for his heirs but have had no success so far.

Could you help me in this matter?

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To the Editor,

Shalom. Maybe you can help me. Two weeks ago I launched a Chinese site to Learn Hebrew Phrases::<http://www.in-hebrew.co.il/chinese-index.html>.

I am looking for a native Chinese freelancer that does online blogging / marketing for websites. He / she should be active on the Internet (websites, blogs, social media). The work is to get the word out about my new site. I estimate it is about 20-25 hours of paid work.

Thanks,
 Jacob Richman jrlichman@jr.co.il, Israel

Dear Sir,

In an article in the newspaper "Hamodia" circa 2008 writes Rabbi Yosef Fabian:

I escaped with the Mirrer Yeshiva and spent the second world war years with them in Shanghai.

The Rabbi needed a German-speaking person to bring his message to this group of refugees and I was privileged to be cho-

sen for that task.

I became the Rabbi's secretary. The first thing was to translate large kol koreis (posters) that the rabbi published during Elul as preparation for Yamim Noraim, before Pesach, and also about the importance of Shabbos. Then the Rabbi wanted to spread the idea of taharat hamishpacha. The rabbi asked me to compile the most essential halachos and we started to prepare a pamphlet of about 30 pages.

After that the Rabbi published a pocket-size booklet in three languages: Yiddish, English and Russian, which he called the "Jewish Awakener" in which he outlined the main principles of the Jewish faith.

I would be very, very grateful to anyone who can help me find these books and posters.

With respect,

Shlomo Eizental eizental@gmail.com, Israel

IN THE FIELD

Double Headers

- ◆ Tiberiu Weisz
 Rabbi Josh Snyder composed a song based on the lyrics of Tiberiu Weisz's translation of the 1512 Stele. Check it out at: <http://shma.com/2013/12/from-the-1512-stele-of-the-kaifeng-jewish-community-song/>

Weisz also had an article "From East to Farther East- The experience of the Kaifeng Jews" published in Sephardic Horizons, 4:3, Summer 2014. The issue also contained his review of the Kaifeng Haggadah.

- ◆ Rabbi Marvin Tokayer
 Rabbi Tokayer was honored by the New York Consulate General of Japan with a "Consul-General's Commendation" on June 9th.

He also has a new book out, Pepper, Silk & Ivory: Amazing Stories about Jews and the Far East, which is reviewed in this issue.

And a Single

- ◆ Den Leventhal
 SJI Advisory Board member Den Leventhal is also making publishing

news with his volume How to Leap a Great Wall in China: The China Adventures of a Cross-Cultural Troubleshooter, which has a brief review in this issue with a full review to follow in the next issue.

The Changing Status of the Kaifeng Jews

(continued from page 1)

discriminate against or insult them. This will gradually ease away the differences they might psychologically or emotionally feel exists between them and the Han" (Xu 2004, 6).

This document continues to this day to be the basis for denying the KF Jews official recognition as a national minority. Over the years the central government's attitude towards the Kaifeng Jews has wavered between denial and tolerance.

In Feb. 1955, 3 officials from National Affairs Committee came to Kaifeng to study and write a report about the Kaifeng Jews. And in 1956, National Affairs Committee issued "instruction" on the report to guide the local authorities.

But while all this was going on, some Kaifeng Jews didn't eat pork and were granted an extra ration of mutton like the Hui Muslims; they cherished the well at the former synagogue site—and their local identity papers still identified them as Jews.

1957 saw two foreign visitors: one by the Czech sinologist Timoteus Pokora and a November visit by the Canadian sinologist René Goldman. The latter's account is telling about how the gov't managed the issue during this period:

In the course of this visit, two of us had to be quite persistent in our entreaties with the city Cadres before they acknowledged that indeed the Kaifeng Jews existed...They drove us to visit one such family which still lived in the ancient lane of the Chinese Jews...We were received by an elderly gentleman surnamed Li and his wife: unfortunately, because of the presence of the Cadre, the discussion was formal and reserved... when upon leaving the house I discreetly whispered to the old gentleman that two of us were Jewish he beamed effusively and shook our hands. (Pollak, 1980, 248).

Summary, Phase I

The primary conclusion to be drawn from the formative phase is that the Chinese government was attempting to unify the country and, as part of this effort, had embraced a single objective standard by which to determine national ethnicity, one that, by its own criteria, but not with intent to discriminate, excluded the Kaifeng Jews.

Phase II Openness in Action

As China began to open up following the purging of the so-called “Gang of Four”, foreign visitors and journalists began to visit Kaifeng again for the first time since the mid-1950s.³

The articles showed that the Kaifeng Jews maintained, at the very least, a vestigial sense of ethnic identity, which, of course, was being reinforced by the visits of foreign guests.

Also at the same time, Western Jews started to visit Kaifeng more frequently. A number of people who became the Sino-Judaic Institute’s founders were among them.

All this forced the authorities to reconsider the issue of the Jewish nationality. In March 1980, the local United Front again asked the Central United Front: Should the Kaifeng Jews be treated as a minority group and how should they be referred to and treated in foreign affairs? The national body reaffirmed the 1953 document and suggested setting up representative figures to meet with foreigners (Xu, 2004,7).

Dr. Ron Kaye and his wife visited Kaifeng in 1981. Because of the medical aid he provided there, the local authorities, who had said that the stone tablets, or stela, no longer existed, reversed their position and took the Kayes to the basement of the Kaifeng Museum where Dr. Kaye saw the steles and took rubbings of them. While there, he also led a *seder* with some of the Jewish families.⁴

Dr. Wendy Abraham led the first official group tour from America to Kaifeng in August of 1983 after the American Jewish Congress put Kaifeng on its China tour itinerary.

Dr. Abraham recalled that her group met with Shi Zhongyu and Zhao Pingyu—the two descendants that local authorities

would allow to meet with visitors. Security guards kept a close watch on the gathering, monitoring questions and responses. During their very first meeting, her group took some Polaroid photos and, after she gave one to Shi Zhongyu, he quietly handed it back to her. She noticed he had written his name and his home address on the back of it rather than his *danwei*, or work unit. She took this as the signal that he would like to communicate and that began her long correspondence and connection with the Shi family.

Meanwhile, in 1981, the eminent sociologist, Jin Xiaojing, published two articles in a popular Chinese magazine recounting her discovery of her Kaifeng Jewish roots. She had thought her family was Hui Muslim until she heard otherwise in a lecture by a colleague. The Kaifeng Jews were no longer just a subject of foreign interest.

Around the same time, Kaifeng municipal leaders began to explore how Western interest in the Kaifeng Jews might lead to a major expansion in tourism and economic investment for the city.

After SJI’s founding, Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer visited Kaifeng in 1985, visited the sites, conducted a *havdallah* service with the Kaifeng Jews without incident, and interviewed a number of them. Shortly thereafter, however, Dr. Abraham traveled to Kaifeng to gather oral histories and to share Jewish information with them. She was arrested and then expelled. But her interviews showed that her subjects maintained a strong sense of identity as Jews based on their shared history rather than any sense of religious observance, an identity still confirmed by their local—but not their national—identity papers.

That same year, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer led a Jewish tour group to China. While they were in Xian, the authorities called in Rabbi Tokayer and said that the group would be arrested if they went to Kaifeng. Instead they flew the group to Canton.⁵

What caused the change in attitude in China? Perhaps it was a February 1985 feature in *Time* magazine, entitled “New Hope for the Jews of China,” which stated that “the prospect that they may soon be able to rebuild their synagogue has given the Jews of Kaifeng new hope that their long years of decline are finally over” (Urbach 2008, 85).

In an apparent response, on July 16 1985, a decree released by the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council of China (*Guowuyuan Zongjiao Shiwu Ju*) proclaimed that:

In China there used to be a Jewish nationality, but they have long been assimilated into the Han nationality. Our country does not have Jewish *minzu* [ethnicity] and does not have Jewish religion: therefore, the question of building a synagogue does not exist (Urbach 2008, 94-95).

By September, the city government had officially denounced the *Time* article for spreading lies about rebuilding the synagogue and disavowed any involvement in the scheme. However, the real issue was that what was being planned in Kaifeng went against official national policy (Urbach 2008, 85).

The last episode to push the limits of openness, came in 1989, when the American Jewish investor, Marvin Josephson, whose wife is Chinese, asked Rabbi Belzer to arrange a bat-mitzvah for their daughter in the Kaifeng, with members of the Kaifeng Jewish community attending. But, before departing Beijing for Kaifeng, the Josephsons met with US Ambassador, which attracted media coverage, which led to the Kaifeng CITS being ordered to cancel the ceremony, even though a last-minute compromise was arranged.

The senior CITS official involved candidly later told Noam Urbach: “Everything we do needs to be done quietly. There is no reason to let the authorities in Beijing know every little thing, because they get the wrong impression....talk over these things can only do damage” (Urbach, 93). Nothing better states the conflicting agendas on the local and national levels.

Summary, Phase II

Despite the continuing national policy denying Jewish ethnic identity, the increasing number of journalists, tourists, academics and activists coming to Kaifeng to meet Kaifeng Jews led to a number of significant developments:

1. The residual identity of the Kaifeng Jews was strengthened by the visitors.
2. The Jewish education and acculturation of some Kaifeng Jews was initiated.
3. Dreams of capitalizing on foreign interest in the Kaifeng Jews emerged both in the minds of some Kaifeng Jews as well

as in those of municipal officials.

4. Foreign media coverage led to renewed scrutiny by national bodies of the situation in Kaifeng, to conflict between local proponents of economic development and those national bodies, and to renewed restrictions on both the Kaifeng Jews and foreign visitors.

Phase III The Period From Around the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between China and Israel to the Present

The local champions of economic development persisted in developing their project to lure foreign capital to Kaifeng by focusing on the Kaifeng Jews. Their vision was supported by the gradually improving relations between China and Israel, culminating in the establishment of full diplomatic relations in January 1992.

In May, the Israeli ambassador, Dr. Zev Suffot came to Kaifeng and was given the usual tour. Asked later by the Jewish Agency about working there and possibly bringing the Kaifeng Jews to Israel, Suffot said no, writing: "To claim they are Jews is absurd; there is nothing between these people and Judaism. It is obvious that this is the utter misuse of a term that has an objective meaning, not only *halachic* but also as an objective definition. We must deal with facts not with make-believe. This is my expert conclusion" (Urbach 2008, 99-100).

Buoyed by the new diplomatic relations, the KF municipal government allowed the founding of the Society for the Research of Jewish History and Culture in Kaifeng, headed by the Prof. Zhao Xiangru, a prominent member of the Academy of Social Sciences and a newly aware and active Kaifeng Jew, and the local scholar of the community and curator of the Municipal Museum, Wang Yisha.

In January 1993, the Research Society established a Construction Office to build a synagogue/museum, with Wang Yisha as its managing director. Two representatives from Kaifeng's Jewish community, Zhang Xingwang, also known as Moïshe Zhang, and Jin Guangyuan, were appointed as functionaries to the Construction Office. The official order emphasized that the creation of a Kaifeng Jewish History Museum was to be "in accordance with the country's policy in foreign affairs, minorities and religion" with its objective being to "advance the city's openness, contribute to its economy, promote tech-

nological and cultural ties, attract investments and technologies, and promote the economic advancement of Kaifeng."⁶

But Wang Yisha and Zhao Xiangru quarreled. Despite decades of friendship with some Kaifeng Jews, Wang Yisha followed the governmental line saying there were only Jewish descendants, not Jews; Zhao Xiangru, on the other hand, newly returned to his Jewish roots, was a vocal advocate for a distinctive Sino-Judaic identity and a revival of its culture (Urbach 2008, 91-92). Conflicts between Zhao and Wang—and Zhao's political indiscretion—led to his eventual dismissal from the Society.

In May 1993, Prof. Zhao and Prof. Andy Plaks, a sinologist at Princeton, convened 50+ Kaifeng Jews, the largest such public gathering of Chinese Jews since the 1919 conference arranged by Bishop White. In comments at the conference, Zhao called for self-revival and restoration of Judaism and *aliyah*. Going public in a May 12 *Jerusalem Post* article, Zhao declared that "we are part of world Jewry and we consider our ancestral home to be Israel" and reported plans to restore Kaifeng's Jewish cemetery, to construct a memorial hall based on the design of the Kaifeng synagogue, to establish an "Overseas Jews" economic zone for foreign Jews to engage in commercial activities and build factories. He was denounced to United Front and placed under house arrest in Beijing, removed from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and given early retirement. (Urbach 2008, 110-11)

In April 1995, Jin and two other Kaifeng Jews visited the Israeli Embassy in Beijing to inquire about the status of Kaifeng Jews under the Right of Return but he was not allowed to meet with any embassy officials.

Nine months later, in January 1996, the mayor of Kaifeng issued an order closing the Construction Office and suspending all of its pending projects. Although no particular reason was put forth, one can surmise that the decision represented the renewed application of the national policy and a reversal of the more lenient attitude that had prevailed since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and China. The mayor's edict was followed by intensive police surveillance of all Chinese-Jewish activities (Urbach 2008, 122-124).

Then Jin and his colleagues returned to the Embassy again in August 1996 after having their local residency papers (*hukouben*), which classify them as Jews, authorized by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The Israeli Embassy turned them away again. Upon returning to KF, the local police told them the documents were issued by mistake and attempted in vain to retrieve the Foreign Ministry materials.

A month later, the United Front and the Kaifeng police announced that all Kaifeng residents registered locally as "Jewish descendants" would be compelled according to law to change to Han or Hui, as they wished. But the Jewish identity option no longer officially existed even on the local level. Among the Kaifeng Jews, Jin is blamed for this.

Did the authorities act because Israel rejected the Kaifeng Jews as Jews? Or did they act because the Kaifeng Jews had asserted their identity and connection with Israel? It is unlikely, however, that the authorities and the Israeli Embassy were working in tandem, even if they favored the same result: that the Kaifeng Jews become Han.

During this time, Kaifeng began to attract American messianic Jews, or as I prefer to call them Judeo-Christians, who come to play an important role in the identity formation of the Kaifeng Jews.

The ironic part is that, even if conversion was their ultimate objective, along the way these Judeo-Christian missionaries did much good. For example, in 1999, the Jin family was linked with Finnish Christian Zionists and taken first to Finland and then on to Israel by the Shavei Israel, the Israel-based organization that seeks to return "lost Jews" to the Jewish homeland.

Jin's daughter became the first Kaifeng Jew to convert formally to Orthodox Judaism in 2002, while Jin and his wife converted and celebrated their marriage according to Jewish law in 2005. In 2006 he was able to return to Kaifeng, where he managed to regain his Chinese passport and now actively urges his compatriots to emigrate from Kaifeng to Israel.

Meanwhile other efforts were being made to educate the Kaifeng Jews. In 1999, Prof. Xu Xin led a group of 12 foreign Jews to Kaifeng to make the film "Minyan in

Kaifeng,” featuring a Shabbat dinner and service with Kaifeng Jews.

In 2000, the Israeli Noam Urbach, came to Kaifeng to study Chinese at Henan U. In 2001, the authorities allowed Shi Lei to take advantage of an offer by Rabbi Tokayer to study in Israel to study.

In July 2002, 12 Kaifeng Jews traveled to Nanjing for a 3 week workshop on Jewish history and culture hosted by Prof. Xu Xin at his Center of Jewish Studies at Nanjing U and, in 2005, Prof. Avrum Erhlich offered something similar for a group at Shandong U’s Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies.

However, the most remarkable achievement in recent years has been the establishment of the Yiceleye (or Israelite) School, the first Jewish school set up in Kaifeng in modern times. And for this, we have an American Judeo-Christian named Timothy Lerner to thank. Lerner says his aim was to help Kaifeng Jews “learn the Jewish lifestyle” and move to Israel.⁷

Eventually the authorities learned of his work and he was kicked out although he has still returns for short visits and also meets up with KF Jews in Israel.

In 2004, Shavei Israel’s founder Michael Freund came to Kaifeng with several Orthodox Israeli rabbis. Shavei subsequently started bringing young people to Israel to study. 7 young people: 6 girls and a boy arrived in 2006. Four of the young women converted and become Israeli citizens in 2007.

After Lerner was expelled for the second time, a young American Jew named Eric Rothberg eventually came to Kaifeng to teach at the Yiceleye School. Concerned by what he learned about Lerner, about the missionary intentions of the Hong Kong Christians who funded the school, Rothberg engineered a breakaway school, which he called Beit HaTikvah. It is significant that while the *Yiceleye School* operated furtively behind drawn curtains, the *Beit HaTikvah School*, located in a residential apartment block, had a sign with a Star of David by its doorway publicly proclaiming its identity as a center of Chinese-Jewish culture.

For a time, the Kaifeng Jewish community was more divided than ever, with four

distinct factions, as the Chinese call them: Lerner’s *Yiceleye School*, with links and funding from Hong Kong Christian-Zionists; the *Beit HaTikvah School*, initially led by Rothberg and funded by Diaspora Jewish organizations; a third group based around Shi Lei, and lastly Guo Yan, of the Zhao clan, who operates a small museum from her ancestral home.

In 2013, 7 young adult males, whom Shavei Yisrael brought from Kaifeng to Israel to study several years earlier, converted to Orthodox Judaism and became Israeli citizens. One, Yaakov Wang has declared his intention to become a rabbi and return to Kaifeng to lead his community.

At the same time, Shavei has sent Eran Barzilay and other young Israeli Chinese Studies majors, to Kaifeng to teach at Beit HaTikvah and help organize the community.

For a time, Shavei Israel and the Sino-Judaic Institute and a third US-based organization, Kulanu, worked cooperatively in Kaifeng despite ideological and theological differences. The latter two US-based organizations champion religious liberal practice and see it as more appropriate to the Kaifeng community than Orthodoxy; they believe the effort to revive the Kaifeng community is worth the effort; and they encourage giving Kaifeng Jews opportunities in Israel, in the Diaspora and in China as well.

Recently, however, Shavei has asserted its primacy because it alone has a continuous presence in Kaifeng. It did so by engineering a merger of the two schools under its banner.

At last year’s “Mid-Autumn Festival,” a national holiday which coincided with the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, about 60 Kaifeng Jews sat together under the *sukkah* on the courtyard of the new school. Present was one of the Kaifeng women who had made aliyah, and who had returned with her family to visit. These visits from Israel occur fairly often, enriching the Kaifeng community in many ways but also promoting Shavei’s agenda of aliyah.

Last March, Shavei Israel founder Michael Freund, plus Eran Barzilay, three Orthodox rabbis, and two Israeli immigration officials visited Kaifeng. Were they there

to determine the Jewishness of the community? To prepare them for aliyah? We just don’t know what Shavei is intending, nor do we know how this ultimately will go down with the local and national authorities.

Later, the school celebrated a rather public traditional Passover *seder*, conducted for the first time by 28-year-old Tzuri (Heng) Shi, who had made aliyah a few years back.

But shortly after this, the police, acting on complaints by neighbors about noisiness, shut down the school and Shavei has had to find a new space. So far however, the authorities do not seem to be bothered either by the prayer services or by Shavei’s *aliyah* program.

Summary, Phase III

The third phase yields several observations:

1. The collective memories, legends, customs and family histories were validated as authentic aspects of a Kaifeng Jewish identity that had persisted from earlier times.

2. Scholarly and popular essays/books in Chinese have stimulated interest and provided content in the vernacular.

3. Christian evangelists brought the Kaifeng Jews together in small groupings, shifting identity from that of an isolated clan to the more communal perspective of a school. Whatever their motives, the ultimate effect of early Christian activity in Kaifeng in the 1990’s was the coalescence of a sense of group identity; the increasingly Jewish Shabbat and holiday gatherings continue to be a prominent feature of Chinese Jewish cultural identity today. Furthermore, regardless of the intent of these missionaries, the immediate effects of Kaifeng Jewish *aliyah* to Israel has been the integration of a marginalized Jewish group into mainstream Jewish orthodoxy there.

4. The attention shown to the community by the many foreign Jewish visitors and the educational work being done by Israeli and American Jewish organizations improved their own sense of self-esteem, deepened their Jewish identity and offered them prospects for improving their economic conditions, whether in China, Israel or elsewhere.

Conclusions⁸

The attitudes of China’s central government, the State of Israel and the Kaifeng

municipality, sometimes working in tandem, sometimes in opposition, have produced a fluctuating ambiguity that persists to this day. The attitude of the Chinese national authorities has remained consistent. The current activities taking place in Kaifeng do not mean that the United Front has changed its policies; it is, rather, a reiteration of the tolerant side rather than the repressive side of governmental policy. The tolerance of various activities in the community has been provisional on these not crossing a perceived “religious” threshold. The same holds true for foreign Jewish involvement: as long as activity is garbed in cultural clothing, there is less chance of there being a problem; whenever activity crosses the line and is perceived as proselytizing, it has tended to provoke a critical reaction.

In contrast to its hesitancy toward Kaifeng’s Jews, the Chinese government has actively promoted its unique role in Jewish history in Harbin and Shanghai to attract an increasing and sizable number of Jewish tourists. But those were foreign Jews, and the Kaifeng Jews are Han (or Hui) and Chinese citizens; those belong to the past and these are very much alive. If the authorities were to change their stance—and if enough Jews remain in Kaifeng, then indeed their presence along with a suitable museum, could lead to significant Jewish—and Chinese—tourism.⁹

The government of Israel, which might have been inclined to welcome the Kaifeng Jews—Jewish descendants from its perspective—as it has grudgingly done to other marginal Jewish groups, feared to do so lest a) it be inundated with non-Jewish Chinese calling themselves “Jews” and seeking a better life in Israel and b), it provoke Chinese displeasure and a rupture in diplomatic relations, and c) it precipitate another debate in Israel regarding the Law of Return. In China, Chabad has established itself in cities along the eastern seaboard, but it doesn’t recognize the Kaifeng Jews as Jews because of patrilineal descent and, even if it did, it would not want to risk being labeled as doing missionary work. Both for Israel and Chabad, the number of Kaifeng Jewish descendants just doesn’t warrant the risk.

On the level of the Kaifeng municipality, there clearly was the desire to use foreign Jewish interest in the Kaifeng Jews as a vehicle for economic improvement. This legitimate desire was thwarted sometimes

by fear of the central government, sometimes by the intrusion of its power via the police and the United Front. Unfortunately, it is the city of Kaifeng that has borne the brunt of the central government’s ambivalence so that it has yet to capitalize on foreign interest in its most exotic citizens—but then its officials lack the power and connections of their counterparts to the east. I wonder if foreign investment had come in quickly enough and at a sufficient level, would that have changed attitudes and even policies?

And what of the Kaifeng Jews themselves?

1. Jewish identity. Thanks to their access to the internet, to the numerous Jewish visitors and teachers coming to Kaifeng, and in particular to Shavei Israel, many Kaifeng Jews are becoming educated in how to live as traditional Jews and do so with gusto. Foreign visitors have raised their sense of self-worth and, as Zhang Ligang of Henan U has observed, this renewed sense of self-worth combined with the Chinese reverence for the past and scholars has led the Kaifeng Jews to begin studying their own traditions and history.

Eric Rothberg noted the following in an email after a visit last year:

I was rather pleased to see how my students had grown accustomed to their regular weekly Shabbat services...whereas I had been the one singing my lungs out during services...now, they filled the room with voices of Jewish prayer, while I sang quietly to myself. I was shocked to see how things had morphed into this new reality...The service had become one of mixed Hebrew and Chinese; the prayers, whether Hebrew or Chinese, were recited by community members of all ages.

If there is a downside to this acculturation, it is that the Kaifeng community is being acculturated to Ashkenazi Israeli Orthodox norms. It is, of course, next to impossible to revive the indigenous Kaifeng practice—not that Barnaby Yeh isn’t trying—but one would have hoped that Shavei would at least try to connect the Kaifeng practice with the norms and forms of Persian Jewry, rather than Poland’s. Shavei Israel is a Zionist organization that supports the so-called “lost” Jewish communities making *aliyah* and

becoming Ashkenazi Orthodox in observance. Accordingly, from their perspective, which they then share with the Kaifeng Jews, Jews could never live truly observant Jewish lives in Kaifeng, only in Israel. Other diaspora Jewish organizations feel otherwise but lack the influence in Kaifeng to change minds and attitudes.

Kaifeng Jews are neither Jewish by the Chinese Stalinist criteria of ethnicity nor the matrilineal standards of Jewish law developed in the Western Diaspora. The community today is an admixture of descendants and spouses, both male and female, which defies easy definition. It is easy to understand why many outsiders reduce the current revival to crass economic opportunism. However, as Irene Eber has observed, while organizations like Shavei Israel, and the Sino-Judaic Institute certainly have provided some incentives and benefits to the community, these function more as catalysts to a deeper, internal cultural substance consisting of ancestral links, clan lineage, communal historical memories and shared rituals.¹⁰ Moshe Bernstein poetically notes that these internal factors, only revealed through talking with the people, are the metaphoric dough of Sino-Judaic cultural identity; the link to worldwide Jewry and the opportunities thus engendered is the yeast that enables that substance to leaven.¹¹

2. Factions. Every visitor to Kaifeng remarks on how factionalized the community is. As noted above, there are factions in the community and there are factions in the school. All are jockeying for power and influence, not to mention perks from Western Jewish organizations. At least some of the factions agree to share one roof and be part of a somewhat cohesive community. This allows them to brag that they’re the “only” Jewish community in Kaifeng. Others have specific reasons why they abstain from the school, ranging from dissatisfaction with the leadership to outright non-recognition of their Jewishness. This is the position taken by several factions who claim that only those with the Seven Surnames can be Jewish or even take the mantle of leadership.

It remains to be seen how the Kaifeng

would fare, if left to their own devices. The Kaifeng clans have been brought together time and again by foreigners: Bishop White, various SJI members like Wendy Abraham, Rabbi Tokayer, myself, various other visiting Western Jews, even Timothy Lerner. Given how fractious Kaifeng Jewry's clans were in the past and are even today, it is reasonable to think that the nascent community would fall apart again without the involvement of foreign Jews.

3. Economic opportunism. A number of visitors, myself included, cannot shake the feeling that all people ever want to do is use their identity as Jewish descendants as way to improve the quality of life for them and their children. Kaifeng is simply not receiving the riches that Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen are and, rather than try their luck in the big cities, some Kaifeng Jews would rather send their young to Israel for a better life, even if it means leaving China. One consequence of this attitude is that they'll loyally follow whoever can provide them with this opportunity, whether Christian missionaries or Shavei Israel. Shavei-sponsored *aliyah* and schooling in Israel are but two forms of patronage, so too are scholarships, donations, and medical coverage.

Eric Rothberg notes that when Kaifeng Jews meet an Israeli, they see a potential tool in helping their young make *aliyah*. When American Jews visit Kaifeng, the Kaifeng Jews ask if the visitor could help their children make their way either to Israel or America for study or work opportunities. Thus, it would seem that Kaifeng Jews are sincere both in their Jewish identity and seeking financial incentives at once. If one overlooks either side, then that individual will be misled.

I don't blame them in the least for seeking to better themselves or their children—my family made the same choice in leaving Eastern Europe for Canada—but I just wish they'd be less disingenuous about it.

4. Building or rebuilding a Center. Kaifeng Jews, like Guo Yan, and many foreign Jews, believe that only a community center/synagogue/tourist site would

focus the energies of the factions on a common goal. The tentative and tenuous merger of the schools shows that this might be possible. At the same time, other people believe that the re-acquisition of artifacts from the synagogue, now held at various museums or libraries around the world, or the fabrication of models of their artifacts, would also help. There are Kaifeng Jews who have never seen the stelae of the old synagogue, as they remain quarantined at the top of Kaifeng's municipal museum, viewable only with a 50 RMB fee and only then by foreign tourists.

Kaifeng Jews possess a pride in knowing that they had a synagogue, whether or not they know many of the details regarding this structure or the practices that were performed inside it, and they have always viewed it as the center of their identity. Throughout their history, the synagogue served as the center for the community and despite its dismantlement, it remains a symbol of identity—which is why even its well, tucked away, almost inaccessible, in the basement of the hospital, is still revered.

The grand cultural center/synagogue/tourist destination plan failed once. Simply put: competing agendas and the element of chance defeated the best made plans. One could also point to a lack of grass-roots involvement by the Kaifeng Jews in the process.

Since their identity is now being reinvigorated—and assuming that all the young and talented do not leave for Israel—their involvement in a renewed proposal to rebuild a synagogue/center may be the missing ingredient to its eventual success. At the same time, the authorities currently are permitting them to study and even worship in the space they rent—and that meets the need of many Kaifeng Jews, although they still crave the official legitimacy that was taken from them. Will the young all move to Israel? Will the authorities continue to be lenient? Will Kaifeng Jewish practice become Ashkenazi Orthodox or will Barnaby Yeh and others be successful in reviving quasi-traditional customs? All this is a matter of “chance”—and that is in the hand of Heaven.

Notes

¹ The Kaifeng Jews had been visited only sporadically in the mid 20th century prior to the founding of the PRC: David Brown in 1932, Harrison Forman in '38, by two Japanese officers in '40, by two journalists, Burke and Steele, in '46, and Joseph Buchholder in '48.

² Urbach, “What Prevented the Reconstruction of the Chinese Synagogue? Kaifeng Jews between Revival and Obliteration,” in P. Kupfer, ed. *Youtai—Presence and Perception of Jews and Judaism in China*, (Frankfort am Main: Peter Lang, 2008) p. 79, reports that the Jews were labeled “ren” or people as opposed to “zu” or nationality.

³ UPI correspondent Aline Mosby was the first in January 1980, while Kaifeng was still a closed city, followed by Micahel Weiskopf of the Washington Post in April 1982, Christopher Wren of the NYT and Tony Walker of the Sydney Moring Herald in May 1982, Stanley Oziewicz of the Toronto Globe and Mail in January 1983 and Michael Parks of the SF Examiner in February. All published articles on the Kaifeng Jews showing that they maintained a vestigial sense of ethnic identity. And this residual identity, of course, was reinforced by the visits by foreign guests.

⁴ Other SJI founders who visited Kaifeng included: Leo Gabow, who visited Kaifeng for the first time in 1982 and Rabbi Josh Stampfer, who went to Kaifeng in 1983. His group met with members of the Shi, Zhao and Ai families.

⁵ These events put a damper on SJI's early activism and led to an initial focus on academic research and on the other Jewish communities in China. Only in more recent years, with the further opening up of China, has SJI returned to the activism of its earliest days.

⁶ Moshe Y. Bernstein, “The curious case of the Kaifeng Construction Office: the dialectics of multivocal discourse and ambiguous agency in the production of Sino-Judaic cultural heritage,” unpublished presentation at W.U.N. Workshop “The Uses of Culture in China”, 17.

⁷ Bob Davis, in a *Wall Street Journal*, 16 August 2011.

⁸ I am particularly indebted in this section to the observations of Eric Rothberg and Barnaby Yeh, both of whom have spent many months in Kaifeng.

⁹ Currently, one can view the stelae, which are kept locked away on the attic floor of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum for viewing by foreigners only with an additional fee of 50 RMB. The Qing-Ming Millennium Park has a special historical exhibition of Kaifeng Jewry, created by SJI, but this too is closed to the general public and only opened for foreigners with the payment of a special fee. The Shanxi Shaanxi Guild Hall similarly houses a small exhibit on the historic Chinese-Jewish community, which has the distinction of being written in Chinese. Shi Lei runs a small gallery in his father's home, and Guo Yan manages a small exhibition from the Zhao ancestral home near the site of the former synagogue and a larger one in her private home on the outskirts of the city.

¹⁰ Irene Eber, "Kaifeng Jews: The Sinification of Identity," in Jonathan Goldstein, ed., *The Jews of China; Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, vol. 1 (Armonk, NY, and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999)

¹¹ Moshe Y. Bernstein, "Globalization, Translation and Transmission: the Reproduction of Sino-Judaic Cultural Identity in Kaifeng, China," unpublished doctoral thesis.

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Saved by Shanghai

(continued from page 1)



Frontal View of Shanghai Refugee Memorial

For the Jewish Shanghaianders the sentiments towards the Japanese are much more complex. While the Japanese were stern overlords and produced edicts that made Chinese and Jewish lives in Shanghai more difficult, the Jews have not forgotten that the Japanese government chose to ignore German requests that Jews be

treated in the same way which they were being treated in Germany.

The sculpture received financial support from both the German government and the Florence and Laurence Spungen Family Foundation. Danny Spungen, whose speech on behalf of his family's foundation, poignantly remarked, "The word 'Home' should not be taken lightly. 'Home' is place of comfort, safety and peace. We can draw the same comparisons to Shanghai during WWII. Shanghai became home to about 18,000 Jewish refugees. OK, 'home' back then was not very 'comfortable' but their Shanghai homes offered a sense of safety and peace. Today the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum teaches that Shanghai during WWII was being used as a 'safe haven' or a 'shelter' for the Jewish people. There is no doubt that if the refugees did not find refuge in Shanghai, many of them would have lost their lives."



Sonja Mühlberger points out her family on the wall of names.

Sonja Mühlberger, born in Shanghai and now residing in Germany, helped compile the names for the wall. At the press conference for the unveiling she said, "This memorial wall is different from others which are lists of people who died. This memorial is a tribute to the people who survived. In fact, people like my parents and their friends at times were ashamed to be alive because most, if not all, of the people that they left behind had died."

Sonja's father was taken to the concentration camp at Dachau, given the identifying number 30176 and prepared himself for a lengthy imprisonment. Amazingly, though, he spent only four weeks there. At the time Germany wanted to get rid of the Jews and take their possessions. One of their relatives, a journalist in Amsterdam, sent her parents blank applications from the Chinese embassy to go to Shanghai. With only those forms and a promise to depart Germany and leave all their possessions behind, he was allowed

to walk out of Dachau. In contrast to some German Jews who had become quite wealthy and acquired artwork, jewelry, and possessions of monetary value, Sonja's parents were a young married couple and had very little. They had to borrow money from family members for the boat ticket to Shanghai. Once they got the money together, they still couldn't travel because no tickets were available. Fortunately, Sonja's father had a classmate who worked for a travel company, and he was able to get them passage when another passenger cancelled his trip.

Sonja's parents left Germany in March of 1939. Their passports were stamped with a big "J," highlighting their status as Jews. Sonja was born in October, and was given a Shanghai birth certificate listing her name as "Baby Krips." Two months later she was registered as Sonja Krips. It is an unusual name, especially for a German Jew. Had her parents remained in Germany, the government would have required them to give her a Jewish-sounding name. One wonders if Sonja's parents gave her this name only because they liked it or also because they had the freedom to choose. Perhaps, in a subtle way, they were protesting the German government's insidious interference in the lives of Jews. It is conceivable that Sonja's love of names stems from having such an uncommon Jewish name herself. Whatever the reason, this made her the perfect person to help compile the list of names for the commemorative bronze sculpture.

On July 24, 1947, when Sonja was eight years old, she and her family left Shanghai and returned to Germany. She believes her father wanted to go back in hopes of building a better and more democratic society. This was an unusual decision that was frowned upon by others in the refugee community. Sonja remembers being spat on because her family was going back to the country which had treated them so badly.

As a survivor, Sonja feels that it is her responsibility to tell her story and the story of the other Jewish refugees of Shanghai. Sadly, the relative who got her parents their visa applications, those who gave them the money for the boat tickets, and the rest of her extended family members perished in the Holocaust. This included her cousin, Denny Herzfeld, who was born in Germany just a few months after she was born in Shanghai.

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Every Jew who came to Shanghai had his or her own story to tell, but many of the stories had common themes. People left home because of discrimination, persecution and pending disaster. They left behind family and friends; many (or even all) eventually were consumed by the Holocaust. They arrived in Shanghai with few worldly possessions, but with skills and knowledge from their previous existence, a belief that with hard work, persistence and faith they would survive, and the good fortune to be living in a place that would not exterminate them. They were grateful that Shanghai, unlike most other cities and countries around the world, allowed them entry and gave them a chance to live...

"Where will we go?" was one of the most difficult questions a World War II-era European Jew could ask. The answer, for more than 18,000 men, women and children was Shanghai. It was not one of their options...it was their ONLY option. The rest of the world had turned its back on their suffering—but not Shanghai. Life was not easy for anyone, Chinese included, but at least it was a life. The refugees, many now gone after living full and productive lives, maintained a deep, enduring gratitude toward Shanghai. And they passed that legacy of gratitude on to their children, their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren. On Passover these families can tell not only the story of the Exodus from Egypt, but a personal story of Exodus, one of more recent vintage,

where their family was saved from a turbulent sea by a lifeboat known as Shanghai.

Kenneth Lubowich is Director of the China Judaic Studies Association, U.S. Foreign Office and may be contacted at ajewsofchina@china-usa.org.

Impressions of the SJI Board Meeting

by Bev Friend

The face of Southern Hospitality is the face of Rabbi Arnold Belzer. He and his lovely wife Arlene could not have been more gracious in hosting the recent Board Meeting of the Sino Judaic Institute.

Although the meeting was not scheduled to begin until Sunday, we began Friday night when someone asked what Xu Xin's views might be on Kaifeng. I whipped out my Galaxy III and texted the following:

"I am at the SJI board meeting in Savannah and have been asked for your views of the future of the Kaifeng Jews. What are your predictions, and what would you like their future to be?"

Here is his answer — which acted as both an opening and a springboard for the formal meeting:

The future of the Kaifeng Jews: More individuals will stand up to claim that they are Jews (Jewish descendants). Many will want to learn more about their heritage and traditions. Many will try to immigrate to Israel and recover their identity. Local authorities may show more interest in the history of the Kaifeng Jews but are not likely to support the revival of Jewish life in the city in the next 10 years.

Prediction? More young people will go to Israel and convert to Judaism in the next five or more years. Consciousness of Jewish identity will grow stronger. Jewish holidays will be celebrated with some assistance from abroad. If classes of Hebrew and Judaic studies could be carried on and China continues on her liberal track, celebrations for Jewish holidays will be held more frequently.

Interest in the Kaifeng Jew's history will grow. More books, articles or media re-

ports (TV programs) about the history of the Kaifeng Jews will get published. It will help to increase the understanding of the Kaifeng Jews and encourage Jewish descendants to learn more about their heritage and traditions, which will eventually lead to the revival of a Jewish community.

And what would you like it to be? I hope that:

1. Some of those who went to Israel and have converted to Judaism with Judaic knowledge would return to Kaifeng, as they are Chinese.
2. A strong, knowledgeable and devoted leadership will appear.
3. Revival of a Jewish community. It should be a normal Jewish community established by local Jewish descendants themselves to create a normal Jewish life for those who claim that they are Jews. It is not necessarily an orthodox one but a cultural one.
4. Local authorities would accept it as a part of multi-cultural life of the city.

Sitting around a large table beside the Rabbi's pool, our Sunday meeting began at 11 a.m. and lasted until nearly 6 p.m. Much was accomplished and following are some highlights.

Probably the most exciting moments were provided by long, detailed presentations by two young men who have spent most of last year teaching in Kaifeng: Eric Rothberg and Barnaby Yeh. Currently, Barnaby is working on a *siddur* based on the original prayer books now housed by HUC in Cincinnati. Both men spoke of the successes and failures of the Jewish school, specific plans for the future, and of specific groups who have tried to skew their development to achieve spurious goals (initiated by messianic, orthodox and political factions).

Treasurer Steven Hochstadt gave a financial report, which neatly segued into Dennis Leventhal's report on current requests for grants to fund specific projects. The group agreed that the grant information should be more visible on the web site and include a list of former winners so that current applicants will have a better idea of what is being funded. Two recent recipients have been Professor Jonathan Goldstein in order to support publication of the Hebrew translation of his book "China and Israel, 1928-98," in Israel (the Chinese language version was published

in Beijing in 2005), and Richard Peritz, President of RCP productions, to support the production of more videos on Jews and Jewish Studies in China.

For "Show and Tell," I brought along one of the silver Shanghai Memory Coins, along with its written explanation, and one of the small books on the Survivors,

compiled by Danny Spungen and distributed at the dinners in their honor here in Chicago. I also carried issue #18, the most recent of the "Shanghai Jewish Light" weekly publications.

On a personal note, I felt a pang that my husband Jim did not live to see any of this, and know he would have jumped on the

next plane, eager to join Eric and Barnaby in their educational endeavors for the Kaifeng Jews.

SJI Board Member Bev Friend is Executive Director of the China Judaic Studies Association and may be reached at friend@oakton.edu.

BOOK NOOK

Review of *Pepper, Silk & Ivory: Amazing Stories about Jews and the Far East*

by Marvin Tokayer and Ellen Rodman (Jerusalem & New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2014).

reviewer: Den Leventhal

Opening *Pepper, Silk & Ivory* was like uncovering buried treasure. It is not only a delightful read, but also it is a broad brush exposure of a major lacuna in Diaspora history. In the aggregate, these stories, a collage of compelling characters, sketch a profile of life trajectories impelled from Jewish cultural traditions and shaped by powerful historical contexts. They reveal how even the most unique Jewish individuals feel the impulse to serve the greater interests of civilization and humanity-at-large.

The book starts with the story of a Jewish juvenile delinquent who later became a Chinese army general. It goes on to tell of a woman who fought successfully to ensure that the post-WWII Japanese Constitution included a section on rights for women; an American baseball player who spied for the USA in Japan; the Jew who served as Singapore's first chief minister; the 16th century Maranno physician in India who wrote a book on botany and pharmacology that transformed these sciences (while dodging the Inquisition); an eccentric Jewish writer who introduced China to the West with her pet gibbon always at her side. Other tales tell of the comedy of errors that revealed a long-lost community of Chinese Jews, Jewish contributions to East Asian music culture, Mao Zedong's Jewish sex therapist, and many more diverse actors on the stage of history in East Asia.

Some of the tantalizing chapters include:

Ch. 6 - "Jacob Schiff: How \$196,250,000 Changed History in Japan in 1904;

Ch. 15 - "The Only Place on Earth Where No One Knew When the Sabbath Was;

Ch. 18 - "Where and Why Did Prime Minister Indira Gandhi Say "Mazel Tov"?";

Ch. 20 - "Forgotten by History: More Jewish Women and the Far East"; and

Ch. 22 - "Why Did the Synagogue in Rangoon, Burma, Have 126 Torahs?"

Serving as a US Air Force chaplain, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer was stationed in southern Japan in 1962. He returned in 1968, serving until 1976 as the only English-speaking, university-educated rabbi for the Jewish communities throughout the East Asia. He coauthored (with Mary Swartz) *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews during World War II*.

Weaving elements of his own personal experiences into these stories of contact with the more contemporary actors on the stage of history provides a flavor of intimacy with Tokayer's subject matter.

From a personal point of view, his opus greatly enriched my knowledge of some of our Asia explorers and wanderers, and taught me about many I never knew. This *opus* will definitely be a superb addition to your Sino-Judaic library.

How to Leap a Great Wall in China: The China Adventures of a Cross-Cultural Trouble-Shooter

(US \$28.80) by Dennis Leventhal

Newly published and available from Uni-

versity of Hawaii Press and Amazon.com.

"During a 30-year career as a China business development specialist, Den Leventhal climbed a steep learning curve from cross-cultural engagement to intercultural understanding and significant commercial achievement. His stories are presented with a levity that will engage neophytes and seasoned professionals alike. The highlight of this business memoir is the breaking of a Chinese government monopoly—a virtual Great Wall—and a ferocious political and commercial war to defend a pioneering joint venture against a powerful, and angry, PRC government agency.

"Traveling to sixty-two Chinese cities and towns during this front-line corporate warrior's career put him into some surprising situations. He flew "cargo class" from Nanjing to Shanghai on an antique Russian propeller-driven aircraft. He sold tons of a specialty chemical product in Hebei Province by translating a twelve-hundred-year-old poem on a betting challenge during a twelve-course Chinese banquet. He lectured in the Chinese language on international trade risks in twenty-eight Chinese cities, becoming a minor local Chinese TV luminary in the process...."

Sino-Judaica 5: Jewish Religious Observance by the Jews of Kaifeng China

Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of SJI Board member Dana Leventhal, SJI's academic publication, *Sino-Judaica*, has been revived. *Sino-Judaica* Volume 5 is devoted to a single academic monograph, "Jewish Religious Observance by the Jews of Kaifeng China" by Rabbi Dr. Chaim Simons of Israel. This work connects the

actual observance of the Kaifeng Jewish community in its heyday with their sources in *halacha* (Jewish law).

Despite a critical review by SJI Board member Tiberiu Weisz (*Points East* 27:1, March 2012), SJI felt the book breaks new ground in the study of the ancient Jewish community and thus merits being available in printed form to a wider audience.

It is available at Lulu bookstore: <http://www.lulu.com/shop/rabbi-drchaim-simons/jewish-religious-observance-by-the-jews-of-kaifeng-china/paperback/product-21624818.html>. It is also available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Book data will also be sent to major bibliographic databases, including Nielsen and Bowker. Brick and mortar bookstores will be able to order and stock the book at their discretion through Ingram.

Interested readers can do a Google Book Search in order to preview the book on Google Books. The hard-cover volumes sell for US \$18, plus shipping.

The Man Who Brought Japanese Art to Haifa

by Jessica Steinberg

excerpted from *The Times of Israel* (www.timesofisrael.com) October 12, 2014

It's hard not to wonder how Haifa became the home of the Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art...(N)one of it seems to jibe with the mixed Arab-Jewish port city that functions as the de facto capital of Israel's north...Then again, Felix Tikotin, a German collector of Japanese art, was not always known for his logical decision-making.

It's all told in "Tikotin — A Life Devoted to Japanese Art," a detailed, touching 77-minute documentary made by Jaron Borensztajn, Tikotin's grandson — a software entrepreneur who always wanted to examine his grandfather's fascinating life...

Directed by Santje Kramer, in Dutch and English with Hebrew and English subtitles, the historical film focuses on Felix Tikotin,

a sophisticated, charming art collector and the challenges and secrets of his long, storied life.

Tikotin's family name came from Chikochen, a Polish village that still exists, said Borensztajn. Felix Tikotin was one of seven children raised in Germany. He wanted to be an artist, but was influenced by his bourgeois parents to become an architect instead...

He became one of the world's foremost collectors of Japanese art, starting at the age of 18, and continued to collect after fighting with the German army in World War I.

Asian art was all the rage in 1920s Berlin, said Borensztajn. His grandfather spent time with a group of German artists and eventually made the first of his many trips to Japan, where he traveled the country and purchased more art for his budding collection...

Tikotin's first Berlin exhibit of his collection opened at midnight, a typical event for artsy Berlin.

He fled with his family to Amsterdam from Germany before World War II, and Tikotin and his wife hid their two daughters with a Dutch family for the duration of the war. After the war, a prolonged tax argument with the Dutch government convinced him to donate his entire collection to Israel, where his eldest daughter was already living.

"He thought he should do something for the new country," said his grandson. "He really loved Israel."

With his daughter living in Jerusalem, Tikotin first thought of the nascent Israel Museum, but it was "kind of a mess" at the time, said Borensztajn. "It was full of spiderwebs."

When he traveled to Haifa during his first trip to Israel in 1956, he found a city full of fellow German Jews and old friends. He liked that. Tikotin met the city's mayor, a socialist who thought it would be good for the workers to have culture in their city, said Borensztajn.

They placed the museum in the Kisch House, a colonial home on Haifa's Mount Carmel, and Tikotin imported a Japanese professor to set up the museum.

"It was a strange place to have a Japanese art museum," said Borensztajn. "Nobody in Israel knew anything about Japanese art."

With Tikotin's collection, the museum became the largest of its kind in the Middle East, recently celebrating its 50th year.

For Borensztajn, the film, a four-year project, was an opportunity to learn more about his iconoclast grandfather, and the series of tragedies and successes that formed his life.

Tikotin's youngest daughter and wife committed suicide, both victims of manic depression, and Tikotin himself was banned from his museum, after a series of "severe conflicts" with the institution's former director, said Borensztajn. He spent the last thirty years of his life in Switzerland.

Tikotin ended up amassing another collection of Japanese art in his later years, which he sold to a Japanese museum toward the end of his life...

The film just won the "Hearts, Minds and Souls" Grand Prize at the Rhode Island International Film Festival 2014, [is being screened in October at the Haifa International Film Festival] and...in Spain, Bali and Switzerland, and in November in China at the GZDOC Guangzhou International Document Film Festival.

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中國-猶太學院

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

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