



Points East

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

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Messianic Zionism, Settler-Colonialism, and the Lost Jews of Kaifeng

By Mohammad Turki Al-Sudairi

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The Kaifeng Jews of China—numbering at present some five hundred to one thousand in total—are one of the latest communities to garner the interest of right-wing messianic organizations connected to the settler-colonial movement in Israel. Over the last decade, messianic groups have intensified efforts to encourage the community to immigrate (aliyah) to Israel. This endeavor is making some headway. Messianic organizations, including Amichav (My People are Returning), its semi-successor Shavei Israel (Returners to Israel) and, in more supportive/facilitating roles, a number of Christian Zionist groups, see the Kaifeng Jews as “Lost Jews” and as such important assets. “Lost Jews” represent new sources of potential immigration to Israel. This is critical given the perception among such organizations that traditional sources of immigration—the United States, Europe and the former Soviet Union—are either exhausted, or spiritually or ideologically unsuitable. There is also a realization that a conclusive Jewish demographic majority within historical Palestine remains elusive. Encouraging the immigration of “Lost Jews,” a somewhat unconventional solution, partially addresses some of these issues. In addition, by virtue of their demographic utility, “Lost Jews” help further the settlement project in the West Bank (as well as Arab high-density areas within Israel like the Galilee), and undermine recourses to the two-state solution. Finally, messianic organizations espouse a cosmological view that associates the return of “Lost Jews,” including those of Kaifeng, to Israel as part of the “Ingathering of the Exiles” that will hasten the End of Days.

“Lost Jews” refers to that conceptual category of people whose religious/cultural connections to Judaism have supposedly frayed or dissipated altogether. This dissipation is a result of assimilatory pressures from their host societies, persecution, as well as limited interaction with the wider Jewish world. Messianic organizations use this moniker to refer to the Abayudaya of Uganda, Hispanic Jews (Bnei Anousim), the Mizo of Northeastern India (Bnei Menashe), and the Kaifeng Jews of China. Rabbinical and scholarly circles have contested the confessional and ethnic identities of these groups on both legal (halakhic) and historical grounds. However, this contestation has not deterred messianic organizations or their Christian Zionist allies from lobbying for recognition of their Jewishness and hence eligibility for emigration to Israel. Recognition from the rabbinical authorities in Israel is usually attained following a several decades-long and complex process of re-Judaisation wherein a specifically messianic, orthodox and Ashkenazi understanding of the

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The Marshmallow Museum: Holocaust Lite

By Dr. Lotte Lustig Marcus

I. Introduction

I really, really, had recovered from my refugee experience in Shanghai from 1939-1947. After all, 70 years have rolled by. Early on, I had suffered—on and off—from intermittent trauma stemming from the turmoil of exiting Vienna, from the memory of American air raids on Hongkou (where the Japanese military were in charge of our Jewish community). Overall, over the years, I no longer gave Shanghai much thought. It surprised me therefore why the recent Chinese interest in our experience bothered me. I became aware of errors of omissions, distortions, and biases in public pronouncements—very different from the Shanghai I knew. More and more I sense a profound disconnect between my memory and its recreation by today’s Hongkou government officials, its designers and storytellers. This is what I propose to examine here.

II. Background

With the widespread euphoria caused by the victories of World War II, no one took any public notice of us refugee survivors in the 1940’s–1950’s once we left Shanghai and emigrated to the West. Nor were we expecting any different. After all, what was a community of 18,000 in far off China compared to the millions of the displaced in Europe, the half million American soldiers killed, the six million who were gassed. We survivors clamored, strategized, dreamt to leave our interim Shanghai home as soon as we could even as an unknown number of us learned—via mail from the hunting grounds of Europe—of the deaths of close relatives left behind. Thirteen members of my father’s family were killed on the Yugoslavian border, in the camps of Dachau and Theresienstadt. There was grief in a time of euphoria.

Within a few years, the majority of Shanghaianders with no regrets resettled in America, Canada, Australia, Israel (then Palestine). A remnant of refugees returned to Vienna and Berlin.

In 1948, when the Chinese Communists wrestled Shanghai away from the Japanese, an American troop ship brought a few hundred remaining Jews from Shanghai to San Francisco, and then sent them by sealed train across the American continent to New York to provide asylum in (then) Palestine.

Shanghai, the city, didn’t blink an eye. After all, between our arrivals in 1939 to our departure in 1947, the city had doubled in size from 2,000,000 to 4,000,000 with all the strains on resources such a growth caused.

In 1976, David Kranzler, Ph.D., published “Japanese, Nazis & Jews” (the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945),

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<u>Country</u>	<u>Total</u>
United States	146
Canada	32
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England	6
Australia	4
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Cyprus	1
Indonesia	1
Switzerland	1
Taiwan	1
Total:	231

FROM THE EDITOR

Readers will hopefully forgive me for the late arrival of this issue of Points East. I was busy getting married and enjoying a honeymoon in Indonesia. I heartily recommend a visit to Indonesia for its sites, scenery and charming peoples. I also was impressed by the Muslim-Hindu tolerance I observed there. If there is a lesson to be learned from how Indonesians live together, it would seem that moderation in religion, as in all things, is a virtue.

Now to our latest issue: Points East volume 30 leads off with two sure-to-be controversial articles, one by Dr. Lotte Marcus taking the political culture behind the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum to task for airbrushing out the complexities of the World War II experience, and the second by Mohammad Turki Al-Sudairi for an other-side-of-the-mirror critique of the Zionist component of Shavei Israel's (and to a lesser degree the Sino-Judaic Institute's) work in Kaifeng. A future issue will feature his analysis of China's Israel Studies programs. While some readers may take exception to his perspective, I believe it is always worthwhile hearing diverse points of view for what one might learn from them.

To give readers concrete examples of what upsets Dr. Marcus, see the articles "Chinese-Jewish Solidarity during WWII" and "People of Israel Say Thank You to Shanghai" on page 10 of this issue. While I sympathize with Dr. Marcus' complaint, I fear this revisionist history is here to stay because it serves both China and Israel to promote it.

As always, we welcome your comments.

Anson Laytner

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www.sino-judaic.org.

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 Email info@sino-judaic.org to receive the user name and password needed to access the "members only" section.

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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IN THE FIELD

Shavei Israel publishes first ever holiday guide in Chinese

Shavei Israel has expanded its popular Na'aseh Venishma series of booklets on Jewish tradition and law to Chinese. Its first ever booklet for the Jewish community in Kaifeng arrived just in time for the High Holy Days. The latest Na'aseh Venishma booklet, which started with publications in the Kuki and Mizo languages for the Bnei Menashe in India, covers the period from the Hebrew month of Elul through the holiday of Yom Kippur. The 66-page book, which is available also as an eBook, is filled with stories, historical background, liturgical poems, holiday traditions and customs. The booklet was translated into Chinese by Yaakov Wang, a Kaifeng Jew who Shavei Israel helped make aliyah in 2009 and who has said he wants to be the first "Chinese Rabbi" in 200 years, and Eran Barzilay, Shavei Israel's coordinator for the Kaifeng Jewish community.

Video Available

From Wang Linlin via Sonja Muehlberger comes word that the English version of the documentary "Survival in Shanghai," which had been broadcast in Shanghai, is now available in an English version. Wang and a colleague uploaded the three episodes on Youtube as "unlisted," which means you won't be able to find them by searching except for clicking the links below. Episode 01 <https://youtu.be/cQ3SZeFV2OA> Episode 02 <https://youtu.be/OkUy-bE5G3ns> Episode 03 <https://youtu.be/pszFBtXv4qs>

White Horse Café Reopens

The Zum Weissag Rossi Kafe, or White Horse Café, which originally opened in 1939, reopened again in August with a ceremony after being rebuilt.

"A lot of people visited, Jewish people and non-Jewish people," said Ron Klinger, 74, the café co-founder's grandson, who grew up in the café, according to Shanghaiist. "It was like [a] café, bar and nightclub. It was very popular." The café was rebuilt about 100 yards from its original location, and is located next to the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum.

Shanghaiist reported that the city is applying to have the neighborhood included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Registry.

Temporarily the Most Famous Jew in China

Danny Spungen, on his third trip to China was briefly famous when he was captured by camera at the re-opening of the "White Horse Inn" sitting in the courtyard by a statue created by the Shanghai Mint designer Rocky Zhao based on the image from the 2013 Shanghai Ghetto Memory numismatic medal/coin. His picture was featured in eight Chinese newspapers.

In addition to newspapers, Danny was interviewed by ICS TV News and a by a Harbin TV crew for a new documentary of the history of the Jewish people in China coming out in 2016.

First Chinese-Yiddish Song

The FORWARD (<http://forward.com/culture/music/323094/the-first-chinese-yiddish-song/#ixzz3pMr7PgO9>), in an article by Talya Zax (Forward Culture Intern), drew our attention to the first ever Chinese-Yiddish song. Yang Meng, writing a Ph.D. dissertation on Jewish exile in Shanghai, participated in the 2015 Naomi Praver Kadar International Yiddish Summer Program at Tel Aviv University. For that program's closing ceremony she performed a Yiddish rewriting of a classic Chinese song, Liang Hongzi's 1983 "Wishing We Last Forever," which itself is a musical setting of a poem written in 1076 by Su Shi, the famed Chinese poet and essayist. Yang translated the song into Yiddish with the assistance of Yuri Vedenyapin, a Yiddish language instructor based at Harvard.

In Memoriam: Moses Samuels, the Man Who Preserved Jewry in Myanmar

In July 2002, New York Times journalist Seth Mydans...estimated the number of Jews in Myanmar to be around 20. Yet for 35 years, Moses Samuels, who presided over the synagogue and the cemetery, like his father and grandfather before him, made sure the Jewish population and spirit has remained a part of the Burmese cultural fabric. Often only he and his son, Sammy, comprised the Friday evening congregation at Yangon's Musmeah Yeshua synagogue. Samuels died on May 29 after a battle with cancer. He was 65. He is survived by his wife, Nelly, daughters, Dina and Kaznah, and his son, Sammy.

TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

Having read with interest the two articles on Lost Jews by Mr. Fishbane and Ms Maltz, I have some comments. Having met and travelled in China with Rabbi Eliyahu

Avichail, I find Mr. Fishbane's denigration of this fine man most distasteful. Referring to Rabbi Avichail's research as "amateur scholarly research" and his search for lost Jews as "...a series of insane adventures" over thirty years is to say the least, highly offensive. Rabbi Avichail's research was careful and done with honest, detailed precision. His travels in search of lost Jews a wonderful and heartwarming endeavor. He was and I am sure remains a highly ethical, studious Jew who pursued our lost brethren with verve and the best of motives. Meaningless, snide asides, do not meet minimum standards of decency, besides being false.

As for both writers, we can understand that the Bnei Menashe cannot be defined as "seeds of Israel". What is unclear from both articles is where their connection to the Jewish people originates? We understand their contemporary attachment to things Jewish.

What are its origins?

*Yours very truly,
David C. Buxbaum
buxbaum@netvigator.com*

[In North East India, in the land between Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bangladesh, there lives a small group of people who have been practicing a brand of Judaism for more than 27 centuries. They call themselves Bnei Menashe (or Man-maseh) and claim to be descendants of the Tribe of Menashe, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Also known as the Shinlung, the Bnei Menashe relate their history of exile from the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. E. finally ending up in India and Myanmar (Burma). After thousands of years of exile they have rediscovered their roots and are returning to mainstream Judaism and to Israel. For more information see www.bneime-nashe.com.]

To the Editor,

My name is Roman Ravve. I am looking for any information about Valya Ravve from Harbin - our ancestors were related,

but my branch of the tree stayed in Russia (USSR/Ukraine). Valya Ravve was a pianist from Harbin; he moved to Dairen in the midst of 1940's.

In the Postscript to Chinese edition of the "Harbin Files", by Mara Moustafine, is mentioned the book "Valya the Spy", that was published by Shanghai writer - I cannot find this book in internet - do you have any information about this book?

Regards,
Roman Ravve, roman.ravve@gmail.com

To the Editor,

I was born in Shanghai on July 20 1949 to Otto and Ellen Joachimsthal. I would like to find any and all information regarding this event, my parents, the rabbis who were at my berit (circumcision ceremony) and more. Can you be of help?

Thanks
Davis Joachim (né Joachimsthal)
Davisjoachim@hotmail.com

Dear Sirs

I am trying to do some research about a family called Calm or Cahn. His name was Max Calms and his wife Malchen, I think. They arrived in Shanghai in 1944 from Berlin and were 77 at the time.

From what I have managed to find, Max had a sister called Nelly, whose daughter was Hildegard Kohls. She married my uncle Paul Jacob and they were both murdered in Auschwitz in March 1943.

Last year I was trying to trace someone from Hildegards family as I and my only cousin had a Stolperstein laid in front of their last address in Berlin and we wanted someone there as well. We had come to a full stop and didn't know where to turn.

I did find out, through a museum in Australia, that the SS Marine Lynx left Shanghai with three people whose names were Carl Calm, Lottchen Calm and Helga Calm. But I was not able to find out where the boat landed and could go no further with my research.

I wonder if you could help me to trace their descendants, if they had any. At the time I think they were 46, 42 and 21. They may or may not be related to Max Calms, but if they are and they may have [had] children [then] I could contact them.

I can find no trace of Max Calms and wonder if he died in Shanghai as he would have been over 80 had he left on that boat.

Anyway I hope that you can help me or at least guide me to some more information

Thank you in advance
Gaby Jacoby -Owen
gabyowen@hotmail.com

Messianic Zionism

(continued from page 1)

traditions becomes dominant. Messianic organizations often succeeded in this endeavor principally because of their ability to outbid other transnational Jewish organizations espousing alternative or competing visions. Through the monetary/ideational influence they offer and wield (e.g., the promise of emigration, economic opportunities, etc.), and their capacity, they are able to construct a localized infrastructure of religious instruction and propagation.

The refashioning (never "conversion" in the lingo of messianic organizations) of "Lost Jewish" communities along such religious lines is important on two counts. First it bolsters the claims of these communities to Jewishness and makes them, albeit on shaky grounds, eligible under the Israeli Law of Return. Although messianic organizations expend their political capital to push these claims and facilitate immigration, it is easier to convince the rabbinical courts if the applicants/communities in question are seemingly Jewish in practice and form. In the case of the Kaifeng Jews this is particularly important as from the perspective of Jewish law, they fall short of satisfying the bare requirements given that in accordance with Chinese tradition they trace their ancestry patrilineally. Second, by bringing "Lost Jews" back into the fold under an orthodox guise, messianic organizations, which are part and parcel of the National Religious Movement, help assert the normative authenticity and hegemony of their religious interpretations over others.

The Kaifeng community in Henan traces its origins to a group of Persianite/Central Asian Mizrahi Jewish merchants who settled in the capital city of Kaifeng (then Bianliang) of the Northern Song dynasty sometime in the tenth and eleventh centuries. There were probably other Jewish congregations scattered all along China's

maritime coasts and northwest frontiers in conglomerations that came in tandem with other Muslim diasporic communities. The Kaifeng congregation (kehillah) was by far the most pre-eminent (and wealthy) among these given its successful consecration of a major synagogue by 1163 and which remained in use for centuries thereafter. The community supposedly reached its apogee during the Ming period (fourteenth and seventeenth centuries) with a population of nearly five thousand and the attainment of several of its members the highly prestigious jinshi degrees. It later entered an interminable process of decline that came to head in the mid-nineteenth century with the destruction of the synagogue by flooding in 1849 and the disintegration of communal practice. Although subsequent rescue societies emerged by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from both Christian and Jewish quarters in the West to revive the congregation, it was by that juncture – aside from a faint acknowledgement of ancestral origins among various clans claiming no more than a few hundred members - a legacy of the past. This is not to say that there were no residual ethnic conceptions of identity still latent in the community; this is discernable from repeated (and failed) efforts from the 1950s to garner an official recognition of their group – youtai ren - as a self-standing shaoshu minzu (ethnic minority) in the eyes of Beijing.

Following Deng Xiaoping's gaige kaifang (reform and opening), the Jews of Kaifeng began to attract renewed interest from various quarters including local and foreign academics and anthropologists (some of whom later created critical organizations like the American-based Sino-Judaic Institute), visitors on Jewish Heritage Tours, as well as evangelical missionaries interested in their Jewish inheritance. This gradual exposure from outside influences, hand in hand with a budding local interest in the community's religious/cultural past, has helped catalyze the emergence of a new sense of identity and communal spirit among Kaifeng Jews that has become increasingly visible since the 1990s. It should be noted that much of this has taken place within the contours of a restrained political environment in which the Chinese authorities have continued, despite growing economic incentives to do otherwise, to insist there is no Jewish community to speak of. Likewise the Israeli state, following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 and eager not to antag-

onize Beijing, has refused to extend recognition. This meant that most activities and projects associated with highlighting the Jewish legacy of Kaifeng had a rather precarious existence and has been subject to the political whims of the central authorities. These include, for example, the Construction Office (1993) to which was delegated the responsibility of building a Jewish History Museum on the site of the former synagogue. It was closed down in 1996 as part of a wider clamp-down that was connected to growing demands within the Kaifeng Jewish community for emigration. It was in the same year in which three individuals from Kaifeng, claiming the status of *youtai houyi* (Jewish descendants), sought entry into the Israeli embassy and demanded they be allowed to exercise their "right of return to their ancestral homeland."

Notwithstanding these setbacks, there was clearly a space for cautious non-state groups and actors to tap into such aspirations and re-direct them as they saw fit. In 1999, a group of Finnish Christian Zionists—connected to the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem that has assisted some 115,000 Jews to emigrate to Israel from the early 1990s—facilitated the entry of the first Kaifeng family into Israel. The family's head, in fact, was one of the individuals connected to the 1996 incident. This was accomplished in cooperation with Shavei Israel, a "Lost Jews" organization founded in the late 1990s by Michael Freund, an American-Israeli pundit with connections to both the messianic settler movement and the right-wing Netanyahu-linked political establishment in Israel. He had originally worked with Amichav, a pioneering "Lost Jews" organization that had emerged following the 1967 war and which has sought to forward the goals of the Gush Emunim bloc by bringing in "Lost Jews" as settlers.

These connections reveal the ideological stance embraced by Freund, who had advocated early on that the Israeli state take a more creative approach towards solving the "demographic and spiritual crisis of unprecedented proportion" which he sees the Jewish people as facing. This crisis is marked by a shrinking population, wavering commitment to tradition, and a youth exodus that could be solved by turning towards those populations that, while seemingly non-Jewish, appear "sincere in their desire to be Jews". His organization, Shavei Israel, in leveraging its connections with the Rabbinate

and the Likud political establishment, has sought to do just that by weathering institutional opposition to the immigration of recently Judaized "Lost Jews" and ensuring the approval of their fast-track immigration to Israel (including by way of procuring a bogus legal ruling from the Rabbinate in 2005 declaring that they were of the "seed of Israel".) The last decade has seen Shavei Israel successfully bring in thousands of "Lost Jews"—mostly notably the Tibeto-Burmese speaking Bnei Menashe among others—who had been converted over many decades prior by Amichav. Prior to Israel's 2005 Gaza disengagement, some were placed in Gaza, but they have largely settled in Hebron, the West Bank settlements, as well as in the Galilee. The tempo of immigration for these "New Jews" has in fact increased over the past few years under the Netanyahu government, with 2012-2013 seeing some of the highest influxes.

Unsurprisingly, the existence of the Kaifeng Jews was of interest to Shavei Israel, and mention of them does appear in Michael Freund's available English publications as early as 2001. Perhaps out of caution and initial uncertainty about the claims of Jewishness surrounding this community, Shavei Israel maintained a light engagement with Kaifeng, preferring to work, as the 1999 experience indicates, through Christian-Zionist (and Judeo-Christian) affiliated activists/groups. These activists were critical in establishing the first contemporary religious hub for the community—the Yiceleye (Israelite) school—and encouraging more cohesive forms of religious practice. More practically, with the assistance of Shavei Israel, they offered scholarships as well as opportunities for emigration, targeting mainly young Kaifeng Jews. In 2006, the first major batch of Shavei-sponsored immigrants, made up of four women, arrived in Israel with funding from ICEJ's Hong Kong/Taiwan branches. All of these women reportedly underwent official conversion to Orthodox Judaism in Israel. Given the Christian backgrounds of these activists, there was some apprehension among other Jewish organizations operating in Kaifeng that there was a Christianization project taking place at the Yiceleye school under the guise of religious revival. This led to the dispatch in 2004 of several missions to Kaifeng, including one by Shavei Israel headed by Michael Freund, two Orthodox Israeli rabbis and a representative of the Israeli Ministry of Religions Affairs (Eliyahu Birnbaum, who also works for Shavei Israel) to investigate these claims. Although

nothing was proven, this galvanized other Jewish-American organizations – such as the Sino-Judaic Institute and Kulanu – to throw their weight behind a breakaway venture, the Beit HaTikvah (House of Hope) school, that was founded in 2009. The hope underlying it was to promote a more autochthonous understanding of a Sino-Judaic tradition in Kaifeng that did not emphasize the need for emigration, all the while protecting the community from Christian influences.

Interestingly, it appears that while Shavei backed the new school, it continued to maintain its links with "suspect" Christian circles and the popular Yiceleye school. By doing so, Shavei Israel may have pushed other Jewish-American organizations to yield to its vision of encouraging emigration. This was mainly because they feared losing locals to evangelizing Christian groups that were still attracting considerable support due to their ability to offer a way "out" of Kaifeng through the school (ironically, a scenario enabled largely by way of their connections with Shavei Israel). This ultimately allowed the organization to force a merger between the two schools in 2013, ending the schism, and asserting a predominant role in shaping the community's religious and cultural identity.

Through the new synagogue-center, which has emerged as a critical congregational point for the community and is now regularly manned by Israeli/American teachers, Shavei Yisrael has been able to pursue a more pronounced conversion project involving the Judaisation, Ahkenization, and even Israelization of the community as it has done elsewhere. This is done through various means (many of which had already been utilized in the context of the preceding schools) ranging from the provision of regular classes in person or via Skype in multiple subjects, the publication of newsletters and religious material (such as Haggadahs) in Chinese, establishing congregational prayer and observing the Shabbat, to celebrating Passover, Purim, as well as the Israeli National Day (Israeli flags and paraphernalia, as well as the singing of the Hatikvah, are increasingly fixtures of communal life) among many other activities. Inherent to the success of this project of course is the construction of a religious infrastructure that would be manned by local Kaifeng Jews themselves and who could then galvanize, by virtue of their authority and example, the wholesale emigration of the community.

The search for a Chinese Rabbi has therefore been on Shavei's agenda from the very beginning, although finding one had to wait until 2009 when a second group from Kaifeng, this time comprising seven young men who emigrated (this video captures their arrival to Israel). Among them, one Wang Yage (or Yaakov Wang) had repeatedly expressed the desire in multiple media outlets of becoming the "first Chinese Rabbi in 200 years". Brought to Israel on a one-year tourist visas (after procuring permission from the Israeli Ministry of Interior), Shavei Israel arranged for Wang's group to be sent to study at a yeshiva in the Gush Etzion settlement of Efrat in the West Bank for several years, interspersed with some time spent at a kibbutz. This experience prepared them for the conversion process/examinations by the rabbinical court, and indeed by 2013, all of them were recognized as Jews and were bestowed Israeli citizenship. While some, such as Yaakov, will return to Kaifeng (as have others) and participate in the consolidation and promotion of messianic interpretations of Judaism, others have opted to stay in Israel: three from this group for instance have joined the Israeli military's Golani brigade, probably in some intelligence-gathering capacity.

During the past decade, some fifteen or so Kaifeng Jews, through the help of Shavei Israel and other Christian Zionist organizations, have emigrated to their "ancestral homeland." Their stories are often presented as heart-warming re-discoveries of heritage and severed roots, with the settler-colonial dimension—of their utilization as assets in a demographic war—often ignored. This is not to say this is the whole story of what is happening in Kaifeng. There are, for example, other Jewish groups attempting to promote alternative visions of communal religious life there, and there is also some contestation and opposition by the community towards the visions and objectives of messianic organizations. Nonetheless, the settler-colonial dimension casts a shadow upon the narrative of innocuous religious revival. The number of emigrants will probably increase over the coming years and will follow patterns already seen elsewhere with the Bnei Menashi and Hispanic "Lost Jewish" communities. This will partially be the outcome of Shavei Israel's growing dominance over communal discourses, its success in creating a religious infrastructure, and its effective exploitation of economic need on the one hand,

and the Chinese government's perhaps mounting disregard for the loss of a few hundred of its citizens under its *zouchu* (going out) policies on the other.

Mohammed Al-Sudairi is pursuing a PhD in comparative politics at Hong Kong University. He recently earned a double master's degree in international affairs from Peking University and the London School of Economics. He is affiliated with the Gulf Research Center, and has written on a variety of topics including Sino-Middle East relations, Israeli advocacy, the Arab diaspora in China, and Saudi politics. His most recent major work includes a monograph titled *Sino-Israel Relations through the Prism of Advocacy Groups* (University of Durham, 2013). He may be contacted at msudairi@gmail.com.

Marshmallow

(continued from page 1)

which was the first book about us. Thirty years had now gone by. I was 49 years old, settled in California, married, with three children, when I read in print about what had been a closed door to me as a youngster.

I learned from Dr. Kranzler about Shanghai's unpredictable political structures, about its struggling self-help Jewish communities, and about how the Japanese increased their control of Shanghai. I saw for the first time how, politically, our fate was out of our control. The book made a small stir in the immigrant world. From then on, Dr. Kranzler was the go-to person on Shanghai. In the 1970's also, Michael Blumenthal, my fellow Shanghai Jewish School buddy, became President Carter's Secretary of Treasury. He took a much-publicized tour, leading a hoard of journalists through what had been our "ghetto", an event that made it into *Life* magazine. He made them take notice.

Beginning in 1979, thirty-four years after the war, when our post-war immigrant communities had settled, reunions of Shanghai refugees, spearheaded by Tricia Wechsler and others, began in Foster City, California, and spread to our East Coast. With lots of hoopla and self-congratulations, they had the fever of high school reunions. Autobiographical books written by refugees appeared and were sold at our reunions. One commentator said, "This is turning into an industry!" We avoided mention of the European holocaust but we honored Horace Kadoorie and Blumenthal, among oth-

ers. We, the fortunate amongst us, who had adjusted to and were satisfied with American life, became visible to one another (though we never ascertained the numbers of those who, for lack of funds, stayed away from these reunions.)

In 1999 and 2004, fifty and sixty years after our Shanghai stay, two academic and most literate books (Irene Eber with her "Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe"- *Survival, Co-Existence and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*" and Vera Schwarz with her "Bridge Across Time") re-envisioned our story. Both books are superbly written. The authors' credentials are impeccable: both researchers are sinologists, fluent in Chinese and Hebrew, well-versed in Chinese literary culture – a culture which we, as refugees, fully bent on stalking survival, were excluded from. I am grateful for their attempts to link high Jewish culture with high Chinese culture in their writings. They cite not just historical facts, which explain what happened, but larded them with emotional details, which engage readers. We were depicted as immigrants who were not cut from one cloth but were Austrians, Germans, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, secular and religious; who landed, mostly ignored, in an alien world where, before World War II, we were "whites" (Nakojins) before we were Jews.

In 2004, fifty-eight years after the war, I became aware of the Chinese diplomat Dr. Feng Shan Ho's rescue efforts through his daughter's laborious research about this history. It was a game-changer for me. I was thrilled to see the difference one person could make; how a single person's action lit up evil times. My family's survival had hung by a slim thread until Dr. Ho provided us a visa with which to leave Vienna. During this time we were receiving rejection after rejection to our applications to immigrate to Europe, America, and Australia. Our lives were a crashout.

My narrative of the past changed then: In 1945 I would have said my (our) survival was due solely to the Allies' victory. After 2004, I began to say that if not for Dr. Ho, not only could we not have exited Vienna, but also most likely we would have become some of the murdered Jews of World War II. This

changed view branded my soul, raised psycho-philosophical questions about random turn-arounds, and the way we choose to attribute meanings to them.

In 2005 my exile narrative changed once more. It is now sixty years after the war. My Chinese American surgeon, chatting with me after he had performed a cancerous hysterectomy on me in Palo Alto, California casually mentioned that his parents were in Shanghai the same time as we were. His parents were refugees from Nanking. Until then, I had not been aware that hundreds of thousands of refugees were flooding Shanghai in our era. Perhaps, it occurred to me now at this late date, that our Chinese neighbors too had come there as refugees – from Nanking, or had been victims from the 1937 Hongkou door-to-door street fighting against the Japanese. Our Chinese neighbors were not just poor, but were just as powerless and politically oppressed as we were. Both our communities survived the war against the scourges of lack of hygiene, nutrition, disease, inflation, corruption, and air raids. Only when safe, in the US, fifty years later, as a bystander, as an outsider, could I recognize that we refugees and Chinese couldn't have alleviated each other's suffering – much less "have taken up arms against a sea of troubles". To this day, I've never found any personal diaries, mementoes, and scribblings by my fellow Chinese who lived through that era.

III. Revisionist Shanghai: A New Mantle on an Old Cloak

To my total astonishment, in 1997, nearly fifty years after the war, the Shanghai government entered our story with a bang. A new "Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum" opened at the site of the former Ohel Moshe synagogue in Shanghai's Hongkou District, dedicated to publicizing our Jewish refugee history. An ornamental coin was cast by the Shanghai Mint. As reported in a newspaper article under the headline "Thank you Shanghai for holding an umbrella over us," the coin depicts "a little girl standing with a raised head, holding a toy panda, while a Chinese lady, bent over, holds up an umbrella, to shelter the girl from the rain."

From publicity I learn that the little girl depicted on the coin represents the Jewish refugees; that the lady holding the umbrella over her represents the caring



and benevolent Chinese and the panda is a symbol of China! But this wasn't made up out of whole cloth. It seems there is, indeed, a woman named Sara Imas (born in 1950 in Shanghai), still alive, who says that she is the daughter of a refugee father and a Chinese mother. She still lives in Shanghai and told the media that a Chinese lady did hold an umbrella for her in a storm. She writes:

Thousands of Jewish refugees found shelters in this piece of land here in Shanghai. My father was one of them. I am so grateful for China and for Shanghai, where it upheld a life umbrella, sheltered us from the storm, helped us to survive at the hardest times. Please allow me here as one of the Jewish refugees' descendants, to pay the sincerest respect to our Chinese siblings who provided us with foods and shared their compassion once.

A single one-time occurrence becomes mythologized, becomes a public relations coup.

The Chinese coin designer, Rocky Zhao, in collaboration with Danny Spungen of the Spungen Family Foundation, an avid coin collector, designed the picture on the coin, according to an article in the November 2013 edition of Points East. Minted in China, the coin is being advertised as "the new limited edition series of Shanghai Memory Silver and Gold Medals (with a small mezuzah scroll in a wood box) to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Hongkou Ghetto." "The silver medal (1 oz.) has a limited mintage of 5,773 pieces representing the current year in the Jewish calendar and costs \$188 each. The 1 oz. gold medal is limited to 570 medals and costs \$3,636 and the 5 oz. medal is limited to 36 pieces. It costs \$32,000 each".

It now appears that the image on this coin will soon be put to other uses. In addi-

tion to celebrating the Hongkou ghetto, the image will be put on a stamp, then a postcard with a stamp, and THEN, as a climax, it will be turned into a large sculpture for the newly constructed Weisse Roessler Kafe (White Horse Inn) at a new site across the street from the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum to celebrate – with "the World Jewish Congress" – "the liberation of Shanghai by the Chinese"!

The Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum, at 62 Changyang Road (formerly Ward Road), was initially financed by Hongkou District government money. The curator of the museum was a Hongkou District government Foreign Affairs Bureau deputy. Built on the former Ohel Rachel Jewish Synagogue, it has two stand-alone exhibition halls and a courtyard, which were constructed after nearby apartment housing was demolished and their occupants relocated. Across the street there is the aforementioned third building under construction -- a coffee house that is fashioned after our refugee Weisse Roessler Kafe (White Horse Inn). The museum has printed a booklet ("Jewish Refugees- Shanghai 2015") to which I shall return and quote from below.

The museum has become a tourist destination and the Curator is now the CEO of a "cultural enterprise" where the facts of our Jewish refugee life are interlaced with hyperbolic language: "Noah's Arc" stands for Lloyd Triestino's expensive ocean liners, voyages that were paid for literally with our last Austrian schillings; "safe haven" denotes Shanghai's lack of visa restrictions – a haven, indeed, but not "safe". The Museum's entrance fee has risen from 20RMB (\$3.33) to 60 RMB (\$10) –unaffordable to the average Chinese citizen. Even so, if the museum remained local for Jewish tourists visiting China, or the coins had only been turned into stamps, I wouldn't be writing. But not only is the museum's writing grandiose, so are its plans. The museum has already taken its "Jews in Shanghai" exhibition to Germany, Israel, New York, Chicago, Houston, and Washington DC among other US cities. This year, the museum is exhibiting in Australia, Europe and, next year, the United Nations in New York! Our 18,000 refugees story, once so insignificant, in a new dress-up, is going global

As if that were not enough, I unexpectedly learned of yet another tour – it's called "Jews in Shanghai – Love Without Boundaries" (!!!). It was displayed for two

weeks in May 2015 at ICC, one of the large convention centers in Jerusalem, Israel (Google: Jews in Shanghai Exhibit Jerusalem). According to news reports, it was “co-organized by the Chinese Jewish Cultural Foundation, the Shanghai Jewish (Refugees) Museum and ICC-Jerusalem.” The sponsor of this event was Yafo Capital, Huangpu District, and a financial services corporation in Shanghai, which was represented by Benjamin Peng, its financial director.

The exhibit consisted of 40 large oil paintings, 20 smaller “traditional Chinese paintings”, and 10 photographs. What the public sees are day-to-day Shanghai ghetto scenes in which Jews and Chinese interact “happily” and “harmoniously”. It is not clear who actually did finance the paintings themselves, or whether this exhibit was solely intended for Israel. I have, however, examined 32 postcards of some of the oil paintings from the exhibit and I have also examined the Jewish Refugee Shanghai (JRS) 2015 booklet.

What is most striking is that a careful examination of both reveals similarities in both content and tone. The thrust is to depict our refugee life as surrounded on all sides by well dressed and smiling Chinese citizens who are there to help us - whether as a nurse or as a rickshaw driver or as a host who invites us to a traditional Chinese New Year’s dinner. On page 26 of the JRS booklet we read, “Throughout this period in Shanghai, local Chinese and Jewish refugees remained friendly to one another”. And on page 19 we learn that “through teamwork, global support, and friendship between the Jewish and the Chinese people they shared in each other’s happiness as well as each other’s woe.” Here’s a sampling of the text of several of the postcards: “The neighbors gave lots of help to them. Under the guide of the Shanghainese, Jewish refugees learned Chinese food cooking” and “There’s a harmonious sight where neighbors had to cook in a common area” and “The Heime had beds for 200 refugees. The living conditions in the Heime were not easy. Yet the scent of freedom in the air accompanied by the warm sunshine poured into the crowded refugee dormitory, children were laughing innocently and young Jewish teenagers were playing their chess pieces innocently” and “The Chinese people accepted the Jewish refugees with a warm and charitable heart as many charitable Shanghai residents and organizations came forth with

loaded food and supplies distributed to 7 refugee camps.”

My heart sank. There was no way that I could see myself or my fellow Shanghai-landers in these pictures. Nevertheless, I plowed on and found four factual inaccuracies in both the booklet and postcards. Here they are:

Error #1. Numbers of refugees: The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum’s website lists the number of refugees as 30,000. The generally accepted number of refugees is 18,000 but even that is not fully verifiable.

Correction: The fact is that once we refugees left the boat, we were not registered or counted. We do not have recorded the number of people who died and who were buried in Shanghai (my father being one of them) or how many refugees left the city before the war. Irene Eber writes, “A recent letter from Claus Hirsch informs me that the Joint has a partial list of names of people who were about to leave Shanghai. In addition I compiled a list of names of people who had ship reservations after 1945. But this list, too, is not complete because some people took places to Hong Kong and left from there. In other words, all the various lists are incomplete.”

Error #2. Factual Error: On page 19 of the JRS booklet it states, “ALL but the most fortunate families moved into the shelter (Heime) which were temporarily renovated for them” and “As many charitable Shanghai residents and organizations came forth with food to feed the refugees...”

Correction: There were 7 Heime in all and at least 2,000 to 4,000 lived in them as indigents (that’s a lot less than ALL). This left 16,000 - 14,000 families living elsewhere. The Heime’s population grew after the Japanese take-over and was never stable. The booklet doesn’t correlate numbers of people and years. Sadly, there has been no research on the day-to day life in the Heime.

We know that when Laura Margolis (of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) arrived in 1940 she found and transported a steam boiler to bring hot water to at least one camp. With that she was able to create a soup kitchen that provided at least one meal a day. People were malnourished and sick. Additionally, depression and listlessness were common.

No Chinese organization “renovated” the Heime. Nor were we ever fed by any Chinese charitable organization. No Chinese

philanthropist or organizer sat on any of our committees. The one and only true Chinese rescuer was Dr. Feng Shan Ho about whom I have written elsewhere. The image of charitable residents feeding refugees is an epic transgression—as is the postcard of a painting of some Chinese women are pushing food through to Jews standing behind barbed wire!

Error #3. Pictorial Error: On page 24 of the JRS booklet and also on postcard “Walled in by barricades,” the Jews are depicted standing behind barbed wire or outside a wooden fence that supposedly surrounded our ghetto.

Correction: The Hongkou ghetto, or “designated area for stateless refugees” was open. There was neither a barbed wire nor a wooden fence around it. Jewish “Pao Chia” (recruited) volunteers checked passes issued by Kano Ghoya, the Japanese overseer of the ghetto. At some stations, but not all, there were Japanese soldiers with guns next to the volunteers. I don’t know how many refugees were punished for any transgressions. More research is needed. (This is an aside: Ghoya’s self-designation as “King of the Jews” is mentioned in all refugee literature, but I have never seen a serious biography of him.)

This is how Michael Werner Blumenthal described conditions in Shanghai in a talk in November 2005:

The Japanese military presided over a city unlike any other in the world, largely lawless, with open vice, much poverty, cruelty and injustice. Chinese and foreigners lived largely separate lives without any close contacts or real understanding of each other. All but the more educated communicated in something called Pidgin English, an odd vernacular of colonial times that has almost disappeared. Shanghai’s infrastructure was abominable, the drinking water unsafe, sewers dangerous, public transport hopelessly deficient and the streets dirty, narrow and choked with rickshaws and carts. Disease was widespread and medical care spotty. Political assassinations were common, petty crime pervasive, corruption widespread, and the police unreliable. Many people died in the streets and nobody cared.

Error #4. Factual Error: On page 24 of the JRS booklet, it states that “After Japan declared war on the UK and US, organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee cut off all donations to the city”.

Correction: That is not true. Laura Margolis, social worker for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, brilliantly managed to convince the Japanese to allow in funds from US via neutral Switzerland or borrowed money from local philanthropists against payback after the war. It varied from US\$30,000 to \$100,000 per month. This was crucial to the survival of the refugees as a community. Many of us had depleted all our resources, especially after Pearl Harbor.

IV. Emotional Tone: What really riles me!

It is not just that the factual errors are bothersome. Errors are correctable. What is most upsetting is that the emotional tone in both pictures and texts is repetitively, insistently, whitewashed and ultimately false. The Chinese history revisionists banalize and trivialize the daily realities of life of both Jews and Chinese under war conditions. Their simplified tales dull our imagination. Individual histories that contain the litany of the daily uncertainties of life under war conditions cannot be denied. Instead, the versions presently created by the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum and depicted in the postcard paintings are deliberately saccharine. It's a marshmallow version, a Holocaust lite version. But to what end?

That's when, a sentence on page 29 in the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum booklet jumped out at me: “AFTER CHINA OPENED UP TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN THE LATE 1970'S and established diplomatic relations with Israel, former Shanghailanders came back to visit more frequently, often with their children and grandchildren.”

True. I learned from Michael Werner Blumenthal that it was in the late 1970's, under Deng Xiaoping's Four Modernizations that ex-Shanghailanders returned to visit their old homes. They have not only been welcomed, but wined and dined: one participant reported to me that Chinese government hosts even prepared kosher dinners for

them! What a turnabout! Jewish refugees, once uncertain of their day-to-day Shanghai future, are invited “home”, and now paid attention to, are indeed grateful. For many of them this IS the end of the story.

V. A Glaring Oversight: Historically, what is left out also counts

This then is the booklet's glaring historical oversight: “AFTER CHINA OPENED UP TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN THE LATE 1970's is the only sentence that refers obliquely to China's own history since World War II. In the museum's booklet, in the coin, in the texts and the paintings in the Israel exhibit, there is a total omission of China's political past. It is not just during our refugee years but also through the 70 years from 1945 to 2015--the same years in which I stumbled through my own changing narrative. What is held up for any audience to see is that our Jewish survival was played out, over and over again, like a stuck phonograph record, against stable, prosperous, benevolent Chinese citizens.

Before I continue, let me say: China HAS in the last 50 years become a model of distinguished achievements in modernization – in engineering, science, architecture, agriculture, resource management, medical advancement – it is astounding. Only recently, Dr. Blumenthal told me “Lotte, you wouldn't recognize the Shanghai of today – it is clean, it is efficient, the roads are not crowded....”

In 1971, China joined the United Nations, and, under Deng Xiaoping, it did open up to the outside world. But it did so after colossal political somersaults and at tremendous human cost, which are never mentioned in the booklet or depicted in the postcards. First the war with Japan, then an arduous civil war leading to a Communist victory in 1949 with a heavy toll of lives and the Taiwan-mainland schism. There was the godlike myth of Chairman Mao Zedong (hiding behind the banalities of his little Red Book) who with his twin, Zhou En Lai, orchestrated the deaths of millions beginning with the Long March; starvation following the policy of the Great Leap Forward; the Anti-rightist Campaign; fomenting the excesses of the Cultural Revolution; and ending in 1989 with the Tiananmen Square incident, with its unparalleled suppression of free speech.

Yet to date, no one in government has taken responsibility for what is China's own

genocide -- not an industrialized holocaust as in Germany-- but the mass killings of millions, nor has anyone apologized to its own people (in the way the Germans have done after World War II, and the way Pope Francis is doing today). China, in spite of its great progress, is not yet accountable. When Chinese lawyers raise civil rights questions, questioners are apt to disappear (NYTimes 7/11/15). The Hong Kong protesters are not heard. And, on a miniscule scale, a current Shanghai Jewish newspaper (catering to 2,000 Jews in Shanghai's staggering 23.9 million people), featuring Jewish social and holiday events, writes, “Only foreigners are allowed to attend certain events”. Whether government-funded or under a new “business” model – the only party in power dictates both to the SJRM and the Israeli Exhibit.

It's what makes the revisionist history of Shanghai refugees, a minor event, so troublesome. The woman who holds the umbrella over the child is whitewashing China's history, wants both us outsiders and its own public not to remember its own travesties. The kind lady is a puppet hanging from an authoritarian string. China's benign image on coin, on stamp, on a statue is simple propaganda. Our history is used to whitewash China's own. The more our marshmallow history will be repeated, the more our history becomes sentimentalized, the more the millions of Chinese murdered in their upheavals are denied.

As a lucky survivor of Shanghai's tough days for both Jews and Chinese and as one who lost thirteen close relatives in the European holocaust, I don't want our community to be used to deny past evils. I don't want our Chinese neighbors not to be acknowledged from 1939 to the present. Their voices need to be heard as a background to the booklets, the postcards, and the exhibits that flow into the larger world from the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum.

Lotte Marcus, Ph.D., was born in Vienna in 1927. In 1938, at 10 3/4 years of age, she and her parents emigrated to Shanghai. She came to the USA in 1947 and received her doctorate in psychology in 1988. She has counseled immigrants and refugees from Russia, East Germany, Guatemala and Mexico. She is the former president and cofounder of Monterey, California's Multiple Sclerosis Quality of Life Project. She is currently researching and writing about the deep wounds related to the Holocaust.

Lotte Marcus can be contacted at Lottedoc@prodigy.net.

Chinese-Jewish Solidarity during WWII

By Yang Zhiwang, Xinhua May 12, 2015
Excerpted from *The Shanghai Jewish Light*,
May 14, 2015

"During the Second World War, the Chinese people were wonderful to us, I will never forget them! Never!" said Ruth Zimmermann, a Jewish refugee during the WWII, in a shaking voice. Zimmermann, 85, was visiting a painting exhibition, which opened Sunday in the International Convention Center in Jerusalem marking the history of Jews seeking shelter in Shanghai...

Zimmermann recalled that although Hongkou was then a poor section of the city, Chinese people, poor or rich, were all very nice to Jewish refugees, and that a Chinese gentleman whose surname was Wu assisted her family and her father a lot.

"Mr. Wu helped us unbelievable! He (my father) got himself on feet because of Mr. Wu," she said. Zimmermann, who now lives in the northern Israeli city of Ramat Hasharon, wrote a book on Jewish refugees in Shanghai five years ago when she was 80 years old.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat said that he was deeply honored that the exhibition was being held in the heart of Jerusalem... Barkat hoped that the rest of the world can learn from the Chinese people, help people in their toughest times and together build a safer and better world.

In his speech, Minister Councilor of the Chinese Embassy in Israel Lu Kun said both the Chinese people and Jewish people had experienced great suffering during the WWII and commemorating what happened 70 years ago reflected the common aspiration of the two peoples to seek a lasting peace.

The 16-day painting exhibition, titled "Love Without Boundaries," is sponsored by the Shanghai Chinese-Jewish Cultural Foundation, Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and the Jerusalem International Convention Center.

On display are 40 pieces of oil paintings, 20 pieces of traditional Chinese paintings and 10 photos, which illustrated how Jews fled to Shanghai during the Second World War as well as different scenes of their life in Shanghai.

Many of the paintings are created on the basis of true stories, with one dedicated on Dr. He Feng Shan, Chinese consul general in Vienna from 1938 to 1940, who risked his life to issue thousands of visas to Jewish refugees. Another painting, titled "Learning Painting in the Alley," is based on the story of Peter Max,

a U.S. artist, who learned drawing from a Chinese girl in a small alley of Shanghai during his childhood.

People of Israel Say Thank You to Shanghai

Excerpted from the *Shanghai Daily*, 27 August 2015

http://www.china.org.cn/china/para/2015-08/27/content_36429548.htm

The people of Israel yesterday (26 August) said a joint thank you to Shanghai for the protection the city provided during World War II.

In the 60-second-long video, aptly titled "Thank You Shanghai" and shot in several Israeli cities, lots of people expressed their gratitude.

The film was released yesterday by the Israeli consulate and shown at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. It will also be shown at other places in the city.

Some of the people on the film hold up signs that say "Thank You" in three languages: Chinese, Hebrew and English.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also in the film, saying: "We are eternally grateful and we will never forget, thank you..." "When cities across the globe closed their doors to Jews fleeing genocide, Shanghai showed hospitality."

"This film is a token of appreciation to Shanghai and to the Chinese people from the people of Israel," Arnon Perlman [Israel's consul general in Shanghai] told Shanghai Daily.

"We created this film in the hope that many people in China and around the world will see it and feel our deepest wishes of gratitude to them," he said, adding that he hopes it will "strengthen the friendship between our two nations."

Perlman and his team began making the film late last year. It took four months to finish. "The film is far better than me and my colleagues thought it would be," he said.

Other Israelis seen in the video include Yona Yahav, the mayor of Haifa — which is twinned with Shanghai — Nobel Prize laureate Robert Aumann, and magician Hezi Din.

Perlman said the final version of the film was created from four hours of footage. Copies will be sent to all consulates in Shanghai and embassies in China, he said.

BOOK NOOK

Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews: A Collection of Biographical Reflections

By Dr. Maisie J. Meyer,
(Blacksmith Books)

Reviewed by Annemarie Evans
Published in the *South China Morning Post*, 13 August 2015

<http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1849171/26-family-stories-tell-history-shanghai-jewish-community>

An initial flick through Maisie Meyer's book provides some very familiar names - the Kadoories, the Sassoons, all descendants of Baghdad's Jewish community, who made their way to Shanghai and other parts of Asia to escape prejudice and pogroms back home. This is a collection of 26 biographical accounts taken from Jewish families who first came to the Treaty Port of Shanghai in the mid-19th century.

Meyer interviewed a number of the 20th-century descendants herself, some of whom have since died. She also uses diary accounts and archives to provide a real family insight into Sephardic Jewish traditions, celebrations, marriages, food and worship. Some of the earlier photos show women in Baghdadi dress with bells on little chains adorning their ankles. Meyer has written the interviews well and edited other accounts in such a way that the voice and individual character of the teller come through, even though I was confused at times whether we were in Shanghai or Hong Kong.

Some of the titbits and anecdotes are delightful. One describes a mother as huge but "surprisingly agile" on the tennis court. Then there are the two uncles who traded in a cat's testicles to make perfume. The fun, as children, of heading to Wing On and Sincere, not for the shopping but to go up the new invention there - the escalator.

These accounts take the reader back to the civil war in China and the Japanese occupation. Besides the interviews, more information comes from archives, including those created here in the Hong Kong Heritage Project by Michael Kadoorie about his family and the employees of the Kadoorie businesses. There are also reports from the En-

glish-language Zionist periodical Israel's Messenger.

Fifty black-and-white photos also illustrate life in Shanghai - family get-togethers, outings and for the upper crust, balls and socials where the hostess didn't need to lift a finger. Some accounts show how certain families lived like princes with many servants and home schooling. Others were less fortunate but, while not always getting on, they were a community.

There's also some lovely colour. Israel's Messenger reports how, in 1931, a gang of Belorussians plotted to kidnap Arthur Sopher, who was rumoured to be in line to inherit after the very rich Silas Hardoon died that year. But one of the kidnapers tipped off police.

It's an education in Sephardi Judaism, the rituals and the celebrations that at times were difficult to carry out under the Japanese occupation, when food was scarce and Jews were forced to wear red armbands and their houses and furniture became the property of Emperor Hirohito.

While many of the well-known families made their fortunes in the treaty port and some lived very privileged lives, there was always an inherent racism underlying community ties. Fortunes were made, lost and remade. They also found some of the Jewish traditions of their Russian and eastern European counterparts quite curious, though there are many accounts of generosity and philanthropy shown towards traumatised European Jews who had been fortunate enough to make it out of Nazi Germany's concentration camps and onto ships to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Leah Jacob Garrick describes the civil war and Japanese occupation as times of starvation: "I recall walking to school, sidestepping packages of straw in which dead Chinese babies were wrapped and collected daily. I once saw a Chinese man gnawing the bark of a tree in hunger."

The accounts show how life changed forever under occupation and the later Communist revolution, when some moved to Hong Kong. These are subjective, oral accounts of the lives of this vibrant community, but Meyer provides plenty of historical background and timelines to give it context.

[The book, published by Blacksmith Books is available now on Amazon or direct from the publisher.]

Of Note

The Lost Torah of Shanghai

by Linda Frank

According to the Amazon description: "As Israel braves Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles, a Torah from Iraq disappears in China. Can the "Jewish Miss Marple" find the historic religious scroll in time for a momentous diplomatic breakthrough?"

This is Frank's second Lily Kovner mystery. The first, *After the Auction*, is described as a "kind of fusion of a Jewish whodunit, a Holocaust memoir and an international treasure hunt."

The author has noted: "After the Auction, my first novel, encompasses several subjects that I've researched over the years: Nazi art looting, the Kindertransport, the smuggling of refugees and military equipment into Israel before the establishment of the state, Jews who escaped the Nazis by going to Shanghai. Working on *The Lost Torah of Shanghai*, novel #2, revisits in more depth Jewish history from Iraq to India and China, a diaspora that diverges from my own family's past. But it synchronizes with the path of our present, due to my son's work and marriage in China and the travel, connections, and friendships that have resulted from my vested interest in that road previously less followed."

The Shanghai Collection: Help Needed to Identify Photos

The William H. Hannon Library, located at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, recently launched the Werner von Boltenste Shanghai Photograph and Negatives Collection, which contains, most notably, images of Jewish Holocaust refugees and other Jewish communities already living in Shanghai in the 1930s-1940s. From daily work life weddings to soccer games in ghettos, these images capture a wide range of the Jewish experience as well as show the deep imprint Jewish culture has

had on Shanghai's history.

Currently, the Hannon Library is seeking more information about this rich collection. Inquiries so far have resulted in numerous replies from across the United States, Australia, France, Germany, Shanghai, Great Britain, and Hong Kong. Such quick responses help to illustrate what is already known about this collection; it has tremendous historical, cultural and, likely for people who were there, personal value.

How to Participate

To participate in this project or just to see the collection visit dh.lmu.edu/shanghai-collection-crowdsourcing.

The photographs themselves have been uploaded by the library and are available here: <http://digitalcollections.lmu.edu/cdm/search/collection/sjrc>.

The Library is looking for all kinds of information. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Anything that gives context and backstory
- Names
- Specifics about events/activities
- Experiences in a particular place or at a particular event
- Locations (If you can, let the Library know if based on a 1935 map or a modern map.)

If you are a Flickr member, sign in and then you will be able to comment in the comments box, which is just below the image. If you are not a Flickr member but would like to be, you will need to create an account by acquiring a Yahoo email address. Otherwise, you may click the "email" link and send your information via email but please make sure to provide the web address (URL) for each image so the Library is able to trace the info back to the exact image you are describing.

For more information, please contact Melanie Hubbard, Digital Scholarship Librarian at melanie.hubbard@lmu.edu.

Chinese National Institute for Jewish Studies Established



Representatives from eight Chinese universities gathered in Nanjing October 28 and formally announced the establishment of the **Chinese National Institute for Jewish Studies (CNIJS)**. The Institute was formed following the suggestion of Madam Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of China, who serves as Chinese Chairman of the Sino-Israel Joint Innovation Committee, officially established in January 2015 between China and Israel under the leadership of China Ministry of Education.

Professor Xu Xin, Director of the Diane and Guilford Glazer Institute for Jewish and Israel Studies of Nanjing University, was elected its first President. Professor Qianhong Zhang, Vice President of Zhengzhou University and Director of Institute for Jewish and Israel Studies of Henan University, and Professor Youde Fu, Director of the Center for Judaism and Interreligious Studies of Shandong University, were elected its Vice Presidents. Professor Lihong Song, Deputy Director of the Diane and Guilford Glazer Institute for Jewish and Israel Studies was appointed Secretary General. The Secretariat of the CNIJS will be located at Nanjing University.

The grand ceremony was held at Nanjing University. Ms. Zhu Li, an official from China Ministry of Education, came to mark the

event. Professor Yang Zhong, Vice Party Secretary of Nanjing University, congratulated the official establishment of the CNIJS on behalf of Nanjing University.

The founding member universities are Nanjing University, Peking University, Shandong University, Henan University, Beijing International Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University, Sichuan International Studies University, and University of International Business and Economics, all of which are within Chinese higher education circles and had established an institute or a center for Jewish or Israel studies before 2014.

At its first convention, the CNIJS sets up the following goals for the Institute:



- Set up a National Teaching Steering Committee, affiliating a "Hebrew Teaching Subcommittee," a "Jewish Culture Teaching Subcommittee" led by Shandong University, a "Israel Studies Teaching Subcommittee," a "Holocaust and Anti-Semitism Teaching Subcommittee." All of these committees offer discussion and give teaching techniques, formulate teaching syllabi and course outlines, as well as provide teaching references for other potential institutes of Jewish studies.

- Strengthen the academic links between member institutions, establish cross-university research teams, make collaborative innovations, conduct cooperative research and apply for joint academic subjects.

Share teaching and research faculties and encourage professors to teach or deliver lectures in other member universities.

- Enhance cooperation with research institutions in Israel or other countries, co-host international academic symposiums with them, and invite or hire international high-level experts to conduct lecture tours among member institutions or serve as visiting scholars.

- Increase the interaction between students of member institutions, integrate the existing Jewish-Israel studies research paper competitions of member schools, set up "CNIJS Outstanding Student Paper Award," and encourage students to apply for master programs at member universities.

- Co-form a Chinese Academic Delegation of Jewish-Israel Studies to visit crucial Jewish Studies institutions in Israel and America, and strive to establish connections with International Associations for Jewish Studies and Associations for Israel Studies.

- Set up publication funds and sponsor the publication of monographs and translation on Jewish-Israel studies.

- Increase the proportion of Jewish-Israel studies students that can receive China-Israel government scholarships.

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Why Jews Should Not Visit China

By Rafael Medoff

Excerpted from <http://www.jta.org/2015/09/22/news-opinion/opinion/op-ed-why-jews-should-not-visit-china-regardless-of-what-israel-does>, 22 September 2015

Should American Jews provide tourist dollars to a regime that massacres dissidents, facilitates genocide and finances Israel's enemies? A spate of upcoming Jewish tours of China has raised anew an old and troubling question about the conflict between tourism and human rights.

"Sukkos 2015: Beijing, China!" beckons an advertisement from Chabad of Beijing, which hopes to convince American Jewish tourists to spend the upcoming holiday in the Chinese capital, enjoying daily kosher meals and outings to a kung fu exhibition, the Great Wall and Tiananmen Square.

The Association of Reform Zionists of America, or ARZA, is also promoting a visit to Tiananmen Square in its upcoming 12-day China trip. As is the American Jewish Congress' International Travel Program, which features a brochure promising participants that they will get to "Share in a special Shehechyanu with Challah and wine in Beijing."

The Hebrew word "shehechyanu," which is the centerpiece of a blessing recited on special occasions, means "Who has given us life." Here it provides a bit of unintended irony, as it precedes the brochure's reference to the site where pro-democracy protesters were massacred by government forces in 1989.

But Rabbi Arnold Belzer, who is leading the American Jewish Congress tour, will not be mentioning the massacre when he leads Jewish tourists through the square next year.

"I wouldn't want to bother them with a topic that might take away from the tour experience for which they have paid," Belzer told me.

Chabad won't be talking about it on its trip either. "We're guests in this country," said Dini Freundlich, who runs the Beijing Chabad with her husband, Shimon. "And we have to respect the government's wishes." Besides, she added, "It's not fully clear what happened there."

According to human rights activists, the only thing unclear about the 1989 killings is whether the body count was in the hundreds or thousands.

Tourism has never been considered off-limits by American Jewish advocacy groups. Anti-Nazi boycotters in the 1930s opposed American tourism to Germany. Soviet Jewry activists in the 1970s urged Americans to refrain from visiting the USSR. After Mexico supported the U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism in 1975, thousands of Jews canceled their plans to vacation there.

In the case of China, American Jewish tourists are providing support to a regime that engages in profoundly objectionable policies, of which Tiananmen Square is the most memorable example.

Beijing plays a crucial role in propping up the Sudanese government of Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who was indicted in 2009 by the International Criminal Court for allegedly organizing the Darfur genocide. China is Sudan's single largest trading partner, importing Sudanese oil and providing Khartoum with weapons in violation of a U.N. arms embargo.

The Chinese likewise have a significant relationship with Iran, importing Iranian oil and providing Tehran with military aid, including assistance for the country's nuclear program and help in the development of advanced missiles and combat aircraft. According to media reports, Beijing has now agreed to give Iran 24 of its J-10 jet fighters.

American Jews should also be concerned that Chinese rockets appear to have made their way into the arsenals of Hezbollah and Hamas... It would be a tragic irony if any victims helped by Chabad in the southern Israeli city of Sderot were harmed by Chinese-made rockets while Chabad of Beijing is bringing Jewish tourist dollars to the regime that manufactured those rockets.

Jewish tours to China typically cost around \$5,000 per person, a minuscule number for an economy with a GDP that tops \$10 trillion. It also pales compared to the trade that Israel, for its own reasons, conducts with China. But to justify American Jewish tourism to an oppressive country on the grounds that Israel does it too is to say that two wrongs make a right, which is not exactly a time-honored Jewish principle.

Moreover Israel, as a sovereign state, faces circumstances very different from those of American Jews. Israelis can argue that in order to function in this world, they sometimes have no choice but to build relations with regimes whose policies are far from democratic or peaceful.

American Jews, by contrast, do have a choice. They have the luxury of choosing among many countries in which they can enjoyably spend their tourist dollars — countries that are not linked to the genocide of black Africans or the manufacture of rockets that may have been used in attacks on Israel.

Dr. Rafael Medoff is founding director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies and author of 15 books on Jewish history, the Holocaust and Zionism.

Why Jews Should Visit China

By Jack Gottlieb

Excerpted from *The Times of Israel*, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/china-genocide-boycotts-and-jewish-heritage-tourism/> 2 November 2015

... I was taken aback by the recent call by Raphael Medoff, head of the Wyman Institute, for Jews to boycott China, in an article entitled "Why Jews Should Not Visit China, Regardless of what Israel Does." In it, he castigates Jewish organizations for conducting Jewish heritage tours to China, which he accuses of being deeply involved with the 'Darfur Genocide.' Well, I would like to show here that China is unfairly being singled out by Medoff, that Jewish heritage preservation in China will be severely jeopardized by an unwarranted boycott, and that, in fact, a Jewish heritage trip to China can be a positive multicultural experience.

In his article, Medoff cites a clear precedent of previous Jewish boycotts, namely against Germany during World War II and against Russia during the Cold War. Yet a striking difference exists between the behavior of those countries and that of China. Those were boycotts against countries with governmentally-directed policies of genocide of Jews (Germany) or discrimination towards Jews (Russia). Not only does none of that exist in China, but the exact opposite is true. According to the Anti-Defamation League's Anti-Semitic index, China has a relatively positive attitude towards Jews

in general and, judging by recent Chinese investments in the Israeli economy (especially agritech), great respect for Israel in particular.

So if it's not about some overt act by China against Jews, then what compels Medoff to call for this boycott? For him, it's a matter of conscience "Jewish values" (Tikun Olam) and therefore, it is unconscionable to help China be a 'genocide facilitator' in Darfur. The issue of weapons supply to Darfur is messy, to say the least. While it is true that China supplies rockets to Darfur, it is not the only country guilty of supplying this war zone with weapons. Russia and Belorussia do it as well. And guess what? So does Israel! These are convenient omissions as there are no calls to boycott Russia or Belorussia, and certainly no calls exist to 'punish' Israel for its involvement. That being said, I strongly believe it is far from a good idea for Diaspora Jews to protest an offense that China commits, while Israel is guilty of doing the same.

A further testament to China's questionable moral character is, according to Medoff, the specter of the Tiananmen Square massacres. There is no question that what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989 was a horrible tragedy. It also goes without saying that China might never be democratic, nor ever evolve into an open society. Nevertheless, it is clear that current day China is far different than the China of Tiananmen Square. More importantly, it smacks of desperation when you reach back 25 years into any country's past in order to hold it accountable by today's standards for the actions of a previous generation. At what point do you forgive and forget? Another nice Jewish value, by the way.

According to Medoff, China "finances the enemies of Israel." It is true that China does business with countries who are openly hostile to Israel's existence, such as Iran. Yet, regardless of that fact, the official policy of Israel is to engage China in every possible way — politically, economically, and socially (especially in the field of tourism). A boycott by Jews on China, as Medoff points out, will have a negligible impact on China's economy. What he fails to mention is that any form of Chinese boycott on Israel could impact Israel's economy, as China becomes an important trading partner of Israel — to the tune of \$10

billion in trade between Israel and China since the beginning of 2015.

Short-shrifted as well by Medoff is the current policy of nearly every major Jewish organization, such as the World Jewish Congress to develop good relations with China. That is why these organizations are organizing Jewish heritage tours in the first place. Cultural heritage trips expose Jews to Chinese culture and vice versa, minimizing prejudices on both sides. These tours are the most effective method to help understand the Jewish contributions to the Chinese narrative which, in turn, helps us understand its overall contribution to our universal cultural heritage. I applaud Jewish organizations such as the Association of Reform Zionists of America, the American Jewish Committee, and Chabad for promoting this cross-cultural initiative. They should be commended, not condemned for following Israel's lead: China needs to be engaged, not boycotted.

It is no coincidence that there is currently an upsurge of Jewish heritage tours to China. According to the data collected by my organization, the World Jewish Heritage Fund (WJH), China represents an emerging market for Jewish heritage tourism. China is one of many countries that are finally beginning to leverage previously underutilized Jewish heritage assets in order to stimulate the cultural heritage tourism sector of their economy. This development represents a worldwide phenomena taking place in such desperate places as Portugal, Cuba, Belorussia, Egypt and even Iran. However, these new markets are sometimes taking root in countries that are fundamentally undemocratic, virulently anti-Semitic and/or deeply repressive. Trying to establish a 'Jewish values' litmus test before one visits an individual country is going to be a very difficult task, at best. And it has to be carefully weighed against the competing 'Jewish value' of indirectly aiding and abetting the deterioration of Jewish heritage sites via boycott.

Medoff's boycott call hopes to fulfill the mission of the Wyman Institute to teach "moral and historical lessons" about the Holocaust and to prevent these atrocities from happening in current day Darfur. As the son of Holocaust survivors myself, the whole issue of genocide and the lessons that can be learned resonates deeply within me

whenever it is raised in the media. Unfortunately, as shown above, the lesson here is too vague and too far removed from the source to be of any value. As such, there is little didactic value of tying to connect a boycott of Jewish heritage sites in China to the killings in Darfur. In fact, I would argue the opposite. This is a missed opportunity! There is a great lesson to be taught about the Holocaust when you tell the story of the Shanghai Jewish Quarter, and an even bigger story to be told when you tell the story of the Jews in China...

Boycotts are a slippery slope. A call for a boycott by Jews of a country, must be done with extreme caution, especially in this day and age of rampant boycotts against Israel. Nary a month goes by without a country, religious organization, trade union, college campus, or city council taking some kind of a vote against Israel. Repercussions on the various stakeholders such as Jewish organizations, Jewish heritage sites and the state of Israel (reverse boycotts) must be taken into consideration. As we saw with the recent bans coming out of Iceland, a thin line exists between boycotting goods originating from the West Bank and those of Israel itself. As we saw with the ban of Matisyahu by a Spanish music festival, an even thinner line exists between boycotting the goods of the Jews in Israel and those of the Jews in the Diaspora.

In effect, a boycott against Jewish heritage tours is a boycott against the Jewish heritage sites themselves. In this case, that of China, these sites and tours happen to be in a country where there are few Jews or Jewish organizations to voice opposition to such an ill-founded idea. It's certainly a safe target, no local Jews to object. That is why I founded WJH and why I wrote this article. WJH defends these voiceless heritage sites which become collateral damage to misguided ideas. That is also why I recently defended Spain which unjustly was falsely accused of neglecting their Jewish heritage sites. As it has been so aptly proven in Spain, only tourism can give stakeholders — city, provincial and federal- the necessary incentives to make the needed investment to preserve these sites. As I have written elsewhere, Jewish heritage tourism is the only sustainable model of Jewish heritage conservation.

In short, the punishment here does not fit the crime. Medoff, himself, in his writ-

ings has cautioned about the excesses of Holocaust and Hitler analogies. It's trendy to compare every disaster to the Holocaust, every madmen to Hitler. The end result of these bad analogies serves only to trivialize the horror of the Holocaust and the madness of Hitler. Unfortunately, Medoff's stand against China does not stake a claim here to any moral high ground. Rather, it is just another one of those excesses he has so vigorously railed against, and consequently, just another one of those trivializations.

Jack Gottlieb, founder and president of the World Jewish Heritage Fund, is an American businessman highly involved in philanthropic causes, who spends most of his time in Israel these days. He may be reached at www.worldjewish-heritage.com.

The Jewish Community of Singapore

By Ayelet Mamo Shay
Excerpted from *YNetNews.com*, 20
April, 2015

...A serious crisis took place in Singapore after World War II, and few Jews remained in the country: Only 150 out of several thousands, most of them Iraqi Jews from Baghdad, who lead the community to this very day. Since then, the community has grown significantly and numbers some 1,500 men and women today (including the Israelis and Jews who arrive for a short relocation period for business purposes).

The community is mostly Orthodox, wealthy and very inviting. Slowly, over the years, the community grew and expanded thanks to people who arrived from all over the world, including several thousand Israelis who are sent to Singapore every year by their workplaces on missions or special projects.

The few Jews who remained in Singapore after the war stood out. For example, David Marshall, who was a successful Jewish lawyer and served as Singapore's first chief minister from 1955 to 1956. To this very day, on the anniversary of his death, many residents from a wide spectrum of the country's different religions pay their respects to him.

In 1965, when Singapore gained its independence and split from Malaysia, Israel was one of the few countries which helped the new republic. Singapore's residents are still grateful to Israel to this very day, and the Israelis are very popular in the country.

The community is led by Rabbi Mordechai Abergel. I met with him in his modest office after a comprehensive security check at the entrance to the community building. He has been serving as the community rabbi since 1994...The rabbi is very involved in everything taking place in his community, and keeps it united by holding joint Shabbat meals and communal events during the Jewish holidays. The highlight of the year is the Lag B'Omer bonfire, which brings together 700 people.

Rabbi Abergel also serves as the community's slaughterer. He slaughters the poultry himself in a bid to keep the prices low and reasonable for kashrut-observing consumers...The rabbi is also an authorized mohel but prefers not to take any chances, so most new parents privately book a mohel from Israel for their son's circumcision ritual.

There are two active synagogues in Singapore, Chesed-El and Maghain Aboth. The latter, which was built in the early 20th century, is located in the community compound on Waterloo Street, which also includes a ritual bath for men and a ritual bath for women, a kosher store which offers a variety of products from Israel and around the world, and a banquet hall which holds weddings, bar mitzvah, anniversaries and workshops.

The compound also includes a kosher restaurant under Rabbi Abergel's supervision, which serves breakfast, lunch and dinner and offers Shabbat meals and catering services, and even a conference room for business people. Due to its many activities and the rapid growth in the number of community members, the government has approved the construction of another floor for the building.

The community also has a retirement home. Some 150 students from the Jewish community study in the Jewish school named after Manasseh Meyer, one of Singapore's rich Jewish resi-

dents. The Israelis prefer the international school. A new and spacious building is being constructed these days for some 500 students, from the age of preschool to high school. Its construction is expected to be completed in the coming months.

Several years ago, Rabbi Abergel and the Israeli Embassy in Singapore introduced the Sunday School, which is open to Israeli and Jewish students from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm. The curriculum focuses on Hebrew and Torah studies, Jewish holidays and tradition.

Local residents told me that the schools creates a feeling of "home" and serves as a bridge between secular and religious Jews and between the Israelis and the local Jews. The school's students may complete their studies until the matriculation exams period, according to the Israeli education system.

Rabbi Abergel finds it very important to maintain good relations with the non-Jewish population...One of Singapore's advantages, he says, is the strength and dominance of the government. For example, the government won't let anyone change a thing in the David Elias building, which was sold a long time ago and no longer belongs to Singapore's Jews.

The rabbi is definitely busy, but he has many "little angels" who help him. One of them is Rabbi Netanel Rivni, who arrived in the community in 2006 and has been serving as Rabbi Abergel's right hand. Rabbi Rivni is in charge of a group of six yeshiva students and two Bnei Akiva emissaries, and together they organize many activities for the entire community. They are also responsible for preparing the bat and bar mitzvah kids for their big day.

With such a courteous and helpful Jewish community, anyone arriving in Singapore for pleasure, business or relocation will never feel alone. "Good things come in small packages," my mother told me. Singapore's small Jewish community definitely fits this definition.

Ayelet Mamo Shay is a researcher of small Jewish communities around the world and author of the book "Relocation darling, relocation!"

Did you know?

The Chinese Jewish community of Kaifeng came from Persia and its books contain some passages and colophons in Judeo-Persian. There are [also] Judeo-Persian documents from the Cairo Geniza and the recently discovered Afghan genizah; Judeo-Persian [was also used by] Jewish communities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in earlier and more recent periods.

The earliest Judeo-Persian texts—actually the earliest witness to New (i.e. not Old or Middle) Persian of any kind—are three short inscriptions on rock at Tang-e Azaq (Afghanistan, Herat province) dated 752/3 CE and a contemporaneous or slightly later letter (on paper) found by Aurel Stein near the Buddhist Temple of Dandān Ōiliq in Khotan (in Chinese Turkestan).

Harbin Synagogue Complex Renovation Update

By Erica Lyons

Excerpted from <http://cdn.timesofisrael.com>, 22 June 2013

The Harbin Municipal Government has announced its decision to reconstruct and renovate the Harbin Main Synagogue. This is despite the fact that today there is but one Jew who calls Harbin home, Dan Ben-Canaan, a professor of research and writing methodology at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies who relocated there in 2002, long after Jewish communal life ceased to exist and the last Jewish resident had gone...At its height it was also home to over 23,000 Jews...

The new planned renovation will restore the Main Synagogue to its original state. Completed in 1909, it is now also referred to as the “Old Synagogue” after the “New Synagogue” was built in 1921. It was damaged by a fire in 1931, and rebuilt shortly after, but without its previous grand entrance.

Recently the structure has housed a “zero-star” guesthouse, a coffee shop, small businesses and a preschool. The interior is dilapidated and no longer bears even the slightest resemblance to the house of worship it once was.

The announced renovation, to both the interior and the exterior of the

Main Synagogue, also includes plans to renovate the adjacent Jewish Secondary School as well as two other buildings and a large square that

With only one Jew remaining in an urban population of over ten million, this decision is still about numbers and dollars (Yuan) and the Harbin Municipal Government sees this as an investment. It has already invested over 80 million RMB (Yuan) for the project (some \$13 million) and approximately 40 million RMB has already been allocated to relocate the Korean School which has been housed in the former Jewish Middle School, nearby residents as well as local businesses.

Ben-Canaan, appointed as a member of and advisor to the Old Jewish Synagogue Renovation Project of the Harbin City Command Leadership Team, stated, “I welcome the Harbin government plans and this project with great enthusiasm. The restoration, reconstruction and renovation of the synagogue and the other buildings, as well as the new large square between them, will recreate a very large Jewish block here and will reinforce the unique and important historical Jewish existence in Harbin and its contribution to the development of the city.”

This massive Harbin historic renovation plan of its Jewish section actually started in 2004 with the renovation and reconstruction by the Harbin Municipal Government of the New Synagogue, which was gutted and transformed into a museum of the Jewish history and culture of Harbin.

This is all now part of a larger plan.

As Ben-Canaan explains, “For the past several years the Harbin government has been looking for ways that will

enhance the development of the city as a unique tourist destination.”...

A walk through the city is talking a walk through its history, especially along Zhong Yang Dajie (Central Pedestrian Street) where the street has been transformed into an “outdoors architectural museum” complete with well-informed, trilingual signage detailing the history of specific buildings, including their dates of construction and featuring architectural components and original use. Along the way it was discovered that an overwhelming number of the buildings in the initial city development scheme are evidence of Harbin’s strong Jewish past.

The newest phase of this plan to develop Harbin into an attraction for cultural heritage tourists is, however, facing a major obstacle: There is only a scintilla of information on the Main Synagogue’s pre-1931 design.

This lack of information, likely in part as a result of the 1931 fire, has made the search for the original construction and design blueprints thus far unsuccessful.

There is a suspicion that some clues and information likely lay sealed in the Harbin Jewish Archives which were closed by the Chinese government in the 1980s and remain so today despite numerous efforts to open them. There are a handful of available existing photographs of the original exterior, but only two of the original interior.

Ben-Canaan, also the founder and Chair of the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center of at Heilongjiang University, stressed that at this juncture the successful collection of any available information is critical, including architectural drawings, pictures of the interior (of the different halls and communal rooms), diaries, letters, memorabilia or other relevant data...

