



Points East

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

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Jews With Asian Heritage Pose Identity Challenge

By Taly Krupkin

Excerpted from the *B'chol Lashon* January 2016 newsletter. Reprinted from *Forward*, 13 December 2015 and originally published here: <http://forward.com/news/326875/jews-with-asian-heritage-pose-growing-challenge-to-american-jewry/>

Since their wedding in May 2012, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan have become the unofficial representatives of Jewish- and Asian-American couples in the United States.

Earlier this month they were prominently featured around the world hugging their firstborn daughter Max. Previous stories revolved around Hannukah celebrations at the couple's home and around the fact that Zuckerberg was studying Chinese.

The phenomenon of mixed Jewish- and Asian-American couples has become more common over the past two decades, bringing with it media attention to the identity crisis facing their offspring. Even within the intellectual and multicultural greenhouse of the West Coast, these children are not always welcomed by the Jewish community.

There are no updated official statistics on the incidence of such marriages. News of relationships between Jewish and Asian celebrities provokes opinion editorials on assimilation in Jewish media, with claims even made that Jewish males have developed a "deviant penchant" for Asian women.

On the other hand, a dating app called "coffee and bagel," popular among young educated people in New York, lets users state the preferred race of a potential partner. It recently published data provided by app users which ostensibly belies the claim that Jewish men look for Asian women.

In the meantime, American media continue to cover the phenomenon. When a book by Amy Chua, who wrote the bestseller "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," raised a furor in the U.S., the *New York Times* defined Chua and her husband Jed Rubenfeld as "the kind of Asian-Jewish academic power couple that populates many university towns."

Helen Kim and her husband Noah Leavitt from the Sociology Department at Whitman College are leading researchers of relations between Jews and Asian Americans. Ahead of the publication of their new book, called "JewAsian - Race, Religion and Identity for America's Newest Jews," Kim told *Haaretz* that the children of such mixed couples aren't always welcomed by their communities of origin, even in major cities.

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The Issue of the Jewishness of the Chinese Jewish Magistrates

By Jordan Paper

Prolegomena¹

By the 15th century, the centuries-old Jewish synagogue community in Kaifeng produced graduates of the civil service examinations at the highest level far out of proportion to their relatively small numbers. Passing these examinations was essential to being appointed to government administrative positions and some from the community became district magistrates. There were a series of three major examinations – at the district, provincial and national levels – and but one in a thousand reached the highest level. Yet this was the one and only route in traditional China to both prestige and wealth.

The magistrate was the sole official for a district – a city and its surrounding territory (large cities might have assistant magistrates). As the representative of the Emperor, he was entirely responsible for carrying out fiscal responsibilities and maintaining harmony in all regards. He was revenue collector, superintendent of higher education, chief of police, prosecutor, judge of the civil and criminal courts, and priest of the government temples. Given the latter responsibility, the question arises as to whether a Jewish magistrate could remain true to traditional Jewish principles and practices broadly interpreted.

Before proceeding, a digression on the very different understandings of deity between monotheistic and non-monotheistic (polytheistic) cultures is necessary. In the last iteration of imperial temples or altars in the Chinese capital of Beijing, the emperor made offerings on behalf of all people to Sky, Earth, Sun, Moon, the soil on which China stood and grew crops, sacred mountains and rivers, the imperial clan ancestors, and the dead of his immediate family. Aside from the ancestors, of course, none of these numinous entities were anthropomorphized. The powers they have are the same powers that modern Westerners attribute to cosmic and natural entities. Sun, for example, provides warmth and is essential for the crops to grow – no more, no less. The offerings signified profound respect and symbolic reciprocity for receiving life and the necessities for life.

On the popular level, for the last twelve hundred years, most Chinese shen ("deities") are dead human beings who have demonstrated their ability to assist living humans, similar to saints in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity. These deities are understood to have abilities limited to particular types of problems and there are regional variations; hence, there are a number of them. Moreover, they are far from omnipotent even in their specialization; they may or may not be effective when called upon. Requests are made for pragmatic concerns: health, wealth, passing examinations, male progeny, successful business deals, etc.

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FROM THE EDITOR

I'm going to kick-off Volume 31 of Points East by breaking silence on the situation that has been unfolding in Kaifeng for the past nine months or so. As readers of this journal and/or members of the Sino-Judaic Institute, you have the right to know. Also, since the crisis seems to have passed, I don't think any harm will come from beginning a conversation about it now.

The crisis began after a Kaifeng Jewish woman sought political asylum in the United States on the basis of political persecution. This provoked a strong response from the authorities in Kaifeng. Our representative there became persona non grata and our program was closed down. Shavei Israel's program was likewise suspended. Jewish tours to Kaifeng were forbidden and the Kaifeng Jews themselves were kept under close scrutiny.

The situation now appears to be improving once again. In this issue of Points East, we have a short article on Shavei Israel's new man in Kaifeng, a self-taught Chinese-speaking young Israeli named Tuvia Gering. The organization is also fundraising for the eventual aliyah of 5 young Jewish women from Kaifeng to Israel. SJI, on the other hand, is still deliberating on what to do next in Kaifeng. At heart we remain more of an academic than an activist organization and tend to move with the tortoise-like speed known to academia.

It would seem to me—and this is only my opinion—that while educational work in Kaifeng is essential to the survival of the Jewish community there, we also need to work on the provincial and national levels to secure some sort of recognition for the unique status of the Kaifeng Jews. They are not an official minority by Chinese standards, nor should they be. But neither are they completely Han Chinese as previous governmental documents maintain. What needs to be negotiated between the Jewish community and its government, with or without our input, is an arrangement that will allow the community to live and learn without harassment and resolve the still festering issue of their identity as more-or-less indigenous Jews in China.

Once clarified, the community would be able to flourish without fear (and individuals could make aliyah if they so desired) and the Kaifeng municipality finally would be able to put into place the various plans to make it a genuine tourist destination for both foreign Jewish and domestic Chinese visitors, which in turn would do something to improve the local economy and the lives of the people there. It would be a win-win situation.

Anson Laytner

P.S. I was surprised that our two lead articles in the last issue didn't provoke more response from you, our readers. We welcome your comments, whether or not meant for publication.

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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A legal landmark for Israel-China trade

By *Adi Weitzhandler*, Reprinted from the *Times of Israel*, 10 December 2015

Will Israeli courts enforce the judgments of their Chinese counterparts? An Israeli court recently ruled on exactly that question and the result may have very important consequences for business relations between the two countries.

The Tel Aviv District Court, which is Israel's highest level trial court, was asked to enforce a judgment issued during late 2009 by a Chinese court in Jiangsu Province ordering an Israeli citizen to pay close to two million dollars to a number of Chinese plaintiffs. Obtaining the judgment, however, is only half the battle; the plaintiffs will not have achieved anything if they are not able to collect the money awarded to them. If the defendant had sufficient assets in China to pay the judgment, the plaintiffs would have been free to avail themselves of China's domestic enforcement procedures and we wouldn't be discussing this case today. However, since that wasn't the case, the plaintiffs launched an action in an Israeli court to enforce the Chinese court's ruling.

When asked to enforce a foreign judgment, the Israeli court does not retry the dispute or consider whether the foreign court reached the same decision that the Israeli court would have reached and, in fact, the Israeli court does not deal with the merits of the original dispute at all. Rather, the Israeli court limits its review into whether the primarily procedural conditions set out in Israeli legislation have been met.

One such condition is reciprocity; meaning that a court in the relevant foreign jurisdiction would also enforce a judgment issued by an Israeli court. In this case, the Israeli defendant's primary argument against enforcing the judgment against him was, in fact, that a Chinese court would not enforce a judgment of an Israeli court and this question was the primary focus of the Israeli Court's judgment.

The Court adopted a lenient view regarding the demand of reciprocity and cited Israel Supreme Court precedent holding that respecting the judgments of foreign courts advance important values including protecting the rights of litigants, legal efficiency and certainty and the encouragement of international collaboration with other legal systems. It was also determined that the burden to prove the absence of reciprocity is imposed on the party claim-

ing against it.

The Israeli Court cited the Chinese Civil Procedural Law which provides that Chinese courts will recognize a foreign judgment if either an international treaty between China and the foreign country exists or according to the principles of reciprocity. Therefore, the Tel Aviv Court concluded that, even in the absence of a treaty, there is a reasonable potential that the Chinese courts will enforce an Israeli court's judgment.

The Court found that the absence of any example of a Chinese court enforcing an Israeli judgment didn't mean that there isn't reciprocity and emphasized that where both sides demand reciprocity one side has to go first if judgments are to be enforced and therefore Israel should do so.

This is a very important precedent and both Israeli and Chinese business leaders should take note of it. If, in the past, Israelis might have been tempted to ignore legal proceedings commenced against them in China, they now do so at their own risk. And while there's far less certainty that a Chinese court will enforce an Israeli judgment, Chinese business persons also need to take note of the fact that Israel has proved that it will enforce Chinese judgments so now China's own reciprocity condition has been met. This judgment is a significant milestone in Sino-Israeli relations and shows Israel's growing respect for China's legal system and we see it as another tie in the strong collaboration between the two countries.

Adi Weitzhandler, Adv., an associate at the Tel Aviv law firm Gross, Kleinhendler, Hodak, Halevy Greenberg & Co.'s China Desk, has extensive experience in the Chinese market. She is conversationally fluent in Chinese and studied at the Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China.

This article was co-authored by David Hoda, Adv. and Eli Barasch, Adv. Mr. Hoda heads the law firm and Mr. Barasch heads the firm's China Desk. His practice has focused primarily on China-Israel cross border transactions since 2004.

A New Shavei Israel Emissary in Kaifeng

By *Brian Blum*, Excerpted from the *Shavei Israel website*, 11 May 2015

Tuvia Gering had never been to China. Growing up, he never met anyone from China. He wasn't even a particular fan

of Chinese food. But beginning in his last year of high school, Gering became fascinated with the Chinese language. Using just video lessons he found on the Internet, he taught himself Chinese and five years later, Gering – who now understands and speaks Chinese at a high level – is finally on his way to the Land of the Red Dragon. He will spend six months in China as *Shavei Israel's* latest emissary to the Jewish community in Kaifeng.

Formally, Gering will be studying Chinese at the city's Henan University. But much of his time will be devoted to teaching the Kaifeng Jews about their heritage. Gering says his emphasis will be different than previous *Shavei Israel* teachers in China, who focused on experiential learning such as workshops in challah baking or how to blow a *shofar*.

"I want to focus on the core of Jewish education – questions about faith and philosophy, history and Zionism and the Holocaust," the 22-year-old Gering explains. The Jews of Kaifeng "are trying to figure out why it's important to be Jewish. We want them to at least have a stronger Jewish identity."

That's Gering's plan for the community as a whole. But there are several individuals in Kaifeng with whom Gering will be working especially closely – five women hoping to make aliyah Israel soon. "The idea with them is to teach as much Hebrew as possible before then. Because if you want to live in Israel, there's no other option than to speak Hebrew," Gering emphasizes...

It was during a trip three years ago to visit his grandparents at Sde Elyahu that Gering met two of the Chinese Jewish men who were studying Hebrew at the *ulpan* in the very same kibbutz. "I met them by accident," Gering recalls. "Someone in the kibbutz dining hall said – hey you're studying Chinese and there are some Chinese guys here on kibbutz."

Gering and the two Chinese men, Gideon Fan and Yonatan Xue, became good friends. "Now we're practically neighbors," Gering says: Fan and Xue, who are currently finishing up their Israeli army service, live only about 20 minutes walk from Gering's family in Jerusalem. They often join the Gerings for Shabbat meals. "We're like their adopted family," Gering says...

Gering was initially recruited for the Kaifeng position earlier this year at an IDF course graduation ceremony for Xue,

which both Gering and *Shavei Israel* staff attended. Gering was already familiar with *Shavei Israel* and the match was quickly sealed. Xue, Fan and Gering will be reunited in Kaifeng later this year when the two Chinese men are released from the army. "We hope to do some traveling in Yunan province in the south of China. It's supposed to be one of the prettiest places in the world," Gering says...

Identity Challenge

(continued from page 1)

"When we talk about our work, the response is that the Jewish community is becoming a racially more diverse community, and very welcoming. But I think the kids that we have interviewed would really challenge that. Even those little comments, like, 'ha, funny, you don't look Jewish,' that some people might take as minor, over time they add up and become a challenge to identity. Just because it's seemingly a diverse population doesn't mean that the Jewish American population has fully grappled with what it means, and that the kids will feel totally accepted. I think there is still the assumption that Jews are from Poland."

Since 2010, Kim and Leavitt have held in-depth interviews with 68 couples with children and with 39 people aged 18-25 from families of Jews who married Asians (mostly Japanese- and Chinese-Americans). From testimonies collected by the researchers it appears that when they grow older the children embrace both identities, showing pride in their mixed origins.

One interviewee, a son to a Filipina mother and Jewish father, said he was exposed to comments such as Judaism is transmitted through the mother, but he didn't mind. "People just say that I'm not Jewish, it doesn't count if it's on my father's side, it's only valid through the mother, or if I really wanted to be Jewish I'd have to go through the Orthodox conversion ceremony - that sort of thing ... I still identify strongly with [Jewish identity], that half my family is Jewish and it doesn't really matter which half, that it's considered a part of myself and that it's a part of me."

The external appearance of children with racially mixed parents had no bearing on their self-definition.

All respondents in the survey said that they feel that their identity is multi-racial, defining themselves as both Jewish and Asian, rather than "half-Jewish" and "half-Asian." The respondents were active in Jewish communities and familiar with and observed American Jewish customs. Many said that they wanted to raise their children as Jews. Some of the respondents are meticulous about attending synagogue and observing religious law, mainly as part of the Reform movement in the U.S.

Last year, Angela Warnick Buchdahl, whose background is similar to that of other participants in the survey, became the leading rabbi at the Reform Central Synagogue in New York.

"You know, the first time I told my parents I wanted to be a rabbi, I think it really blew their minds a little," she says. "My mother, obviously, as a Korean Buddhist, I think it was outside her world. And for my father, who was not a particularly religious Reform Jew, they found it both surprising. But they've come around and feel extremely proud. And I think that I do earn the name 'pioneer' for being the first Asian-American rabbi or cantor."

While younger survey participants define themselves as both Jewish and Asian, the interviews exposed a gap in the depth of their identities. Adolescents had a deeper Jewish background and took greater care to observe Jewish rituals than those coming from the Asian side of the family. "Even for the kids who grew up in the Bay Area, it was much more typical to say, 'we are doing Shabbat at home' than to do something on the Asian holidays. But they had Jewish and Asian friends, on a personal level," Kim says.

Kim and Leavitt also discovered that young Asiatic Jews are less familiar with Asian culture - which may be surprising given that they grew up in the San Francisco area with its large community of immigrants from the Far East. The parents of those interviewed explained the difficulty of imparting an Asian heritage by saying that they themselves were second- or third-generation Americans.

"The grandparents may speak Chinese, but as second-generation Asian Americans they might not be as confident or

know what to do in terms of transmitting that identity to a kid. They might eat kimchi and dim sum, and it's easy to go to an Asian restaurant, but they may not know what to do in terms of language transmission or other types of cultural transmission. It is consistent with other research with other biracial couples. Even for Asian Americans marrying other Asian Americans, there is a whole range of what is done for cultural transmission," they say.

Kim has her own hypothesis for the difficulty of imparting an Asian heritage in the U.S. "It's something that I struggled with personally. I grew up as a somewhat typical second-generation Korean American - my parents didn't teach me Korean, I didn't grow up in an ethnic enclave and I didn't really know what to do, even though I wanted to. For me it's much easier to transmit the Jewish part. One day I told my mother about it, and she said that Jews have a text that no matter where they are they can always go to, but there is no text about how to transmit a Korean identity."

A further element studied in the survey was whether expressions of anti-Semitism around the world made young people who don't look Jewish hide their Jewishness in order to adapt to various social situations. Interviews held by Kim and Leavitt showed that this was not the case.

"What was interesting is that they really felt that they have an insider's perspective on the inner dynamic of social situations, and when someone would say something racist, or anti-Semitic, they felt compelled to speak up against these instances, even if they were passing," says Kim.

One of the major recommendations that children of these mixed marriages have for couples who wonder how to raise their offspring is not to give priority to any one identity. "Their advice was always expose their kids to all aspects of who they are. Don't preference one identity, make sure that you expose them to everything: being Jewish, being Korean, being Asian. Make sure to do the hard work even in times when they might want to shy away from these identities. In the long run there will be a payoff, because it not only gives them a sense of where they came from, but a sense of pride," summarizes Kim.

News from the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum

Excerpted from the *B'chol Lashon January 2016* newsletter. Originally published here: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/letter-from-shanghai-city-s-jewish-heritage-blends-glamour-and-compass>

Zhou Jian, the head of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, said it was renovated in 2007 and gets up to 1,000 visitors a day.

"When we opened the museum, most of the people were Jews from all over the world who had some connections with Shanghai, families or friends.

"Very few Chinese visited here because there was not much publicity about it and people didn't know about it.

"Now there are more Chinese people than foreigners, because we have collected a lot of documents, pictures, artifacts and stories and we have a team to manage it."

Mr. Wang is visiting from Gansu. "I've read a fair bit about it, so I thought I'd come and have a look. I'm curious to see how the Jews in Shanghai lived," he says.

An Israeli family, the Levys, visiting the museum said they hadn't known China had taken in Jews. "Of course we have to come here to have a look. And we have some family friends who used to live in Shanghai," said one of the Levy brothers...

Earlier this month, the Shanghai Jewish Memorial Park in Qingpu district in the suburbs was set up, cofounded by the Shanghai Jewish community, the Shanghai Centre of Jewish Studies and Fu Shou Yuan International.

The Bataclan's Sino-Judaic Connection

Compiled from articles by Vivian Eden, *Haaretz*, 15 November 2015 and Ilana Sichel, *Jewniverse*, 16 November 2015.

The Bataclan, the stately Paris theater that was the site of one of the recent massacres by ISIS (Da'esh), takes its name from a China-themed operetta written and composed by two 19th-century Jews.

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880) was the son of a synagogue cantor, who came from Germany to study at the Paris Conservatoire when he was 14. The libretto was written by Ludovic Halévy, son of a Parisian Jew who converted to Christianity in order to marry. (Though with a name like Halévy we can't imagine he made a very convincing Christian.)

"Ba-Ta-Clan," first performed in Paris in 1855, is a wacky show in one act – a chinoiserie musicale with stretches of gibberish and of fake Italian mocking grand opera. The plot involves three apparently Chinese characters with silly names who reveal to one another that they are really French and have been compelled to pretend they are Mandarins, and a fourth character, supposedly the emperor, who also turns out to be French, a bumpkin with ambitions to rule – in mockery of Napoleon III.

"Ba-Ta-Clan" was Offenbach's first major hit. It was also performed in German in Vienna 1860 as "Tschin Tschin" and, "billed as an "extravaganza" as "Ching Chow Hi" in English in London in 1865 and on Broadway in 1870.

The Bataclan music hall opened in Paris in 1864 and was named after the popular operetta. It was designed with a chinoiserie theme as a café, theater and dance hall. Over the years, surviving a fire and with various renovations, it has served as a vaudeville theater, a cinema and in its latest incarnation as a venue for rock concerts. For nearly 40 years, until this past September when it was sold, it was owned by a Jewish family that now lives in Israel.

Survivors of Shanghai Ghetto reunite after 70 years

By Susan Jacobson

Excerpted from the *Orlando Sentinel*, 5 August 2015

The last time Bella Tresser and Chaya Small saw each other was nearly 70 years ago in Shanghai, where their families had taken refuge during the Holocaust.

On Wednesday (August 5th), the former schoolmates reunited at Tresser's home in Orlando, grateful that luck and the courage of one man allowed them to live long lives and find each other again.

"It was a total miracle that this happened," said Small, who lives in Chicago. "I get very emotional about it."

Tresser and Small were young children

when their families fled Poland as the Nazis invaded in 1939. They were among about 20,000 European Jews who settled in Shanghai in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Most eventually were forced into the Shanghai Ghetto, officially known as the Restricted Sector for Stateless Refugees...

The women have only snippets of memory from that time, but they never forgot their friendship....Tresser, 80 and Small, 81, lost track of each other after they immigrated to the U.S. shortly after World War II. Tresser lived in New York City, where in 1956 she married Mel Tresser, who was about to graduate from medical school. They settled in Orlando in 1962 and raised three children.

Small also lived in New York, where she married Michael Small before moving to Chicago in the mid-1950s. The couple raised a family in Rogers Park, where she still lives. Small, a rabbi and lawyer, died in 2011.

The women reconnected in 2013 after the Chicago Tribune wrote an article about a reunion in Illinois of Shanghai Ghetto survivors. A friend sent the newspaper to Tresser, who didn't recognize her friend's married name.

Then she saw a picture of Small on her ID card from her time in China. A Google search led to a two-hour initial phone conversation. They have been talking and exchanging email and pictures ever since, but bouts of ill health prevented them from getting together until now. Small flew to Orlando this week and is staying with her friend.

In a way, the two women are strangers. In another, they are bound by a shared past and a piece of history unknown to many people.

"We still have that same feeling for each other," Tresser said as the women sat on a sofa, their arms around each other.

When Small saw Tresser's home, she was delighted to discover that the two have similar taste in home decor and share a love of Chinese collectibles...Both have returned to Shanghai to revisit their past.

Small and Tresser are eager to tell the story of diplomat Chiune Sugihara, who records show helped about 2,000 Jews escape the Nazis in 1940 in defiance of orders from his superiors...



For both women, the wonders of living into their ninth decade and resuming a once-lost relationship are their victory over an evil almost beyond comprehension.

Small already is looking forward to a visit she hopes Tresser and her husband will make to Chicago.

"We're not going to lose each other now that we found each other," Tresser said.

Susan Jacobson may be reached at sjacobson@orlandosentinel.com, [Twitter@osnighthawk](https://twitter.com/osnighthawk) or 407-540-5981.

Photos of WWII refugees saved by Japanese official are ID'd

By Chris Carola and AP investigative researcher Randy Herschaft
Excerpted from *Associated Press*, 12 December 2015

Early in World War II, a Japanese tourism official helped rescue Europeans seeking haven from the Nazis. Now, 75 years after seven of those refugees gave Tatsuo Osako photographs of themselves to show their gratitude, a team of Internet sleuths has identified four of the people in the black-and-white snapshots.

The months spent by researchers delving into WWII archives and poring over passenger manifests turned up stories of narrow escapes, long journeys by train and ship, and previously unknown details — and helped shed new light on the role of the Japanese in helping Jews and others flee Europe...

Osako, who died in 2003, was a tourism bureau clerk based in the Japanese port city of Tsuruga who assisted Jewish and other Europeans refugees making the voyage from Russia's Pacific port of Vladivostok to Japan in the period before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. As the ship's escort and clerk,

he distributed money provided by Jewish agencies.

To thank him for his kindness, a man and six women he helped in 1940-41 gave him portraits of themselves.

They began their harrowing journeys to the Far East after WWII began with Germany's invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. The man and four of the women eventually made it to the United States. He and three of the women were Jewish. The other woman was a gentile.

The fate of the other two women remains unknown, as does their religion, although the researchers say it's very likely they were Jewish.

Descendants of the three refugees who had children were tracked down with the help of Kiyotaka Fukushima, of Chiba, Japan, and Mark Halpern, a retired business executive and Jewish genealogy buff from West Chester, Pennsylvania. Some of those descendants met this week in the New York area with the late Osako's former colleague, Akira Kitade, who wrote a 2012 book about Osako and the seven photographs.

Using data supplied by the International Tracing Service in Germany and found online in databases and archives, the author and the two researchers succeeded this year in identifying four of the seven people in the photographs.

Sonia Reed had been identified in 2014 after a Canadian relative saw her photo on the website of Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial. It had posted the refugees' photos after Kitade sought help from the Israeli embassy in Tokyo.

According to Halpern, the refugees identified this year are:
— Antonina Babb, a Polish Jew who died in Santa Monica, California, in 1994.
— Nissim Segaloff, a Bulgarian Jew who later changed his name to Nicholas Sargent and lived in New York City; the place and date of his death remain unknown.
— Vera Kronberg, a Norwegian gentile who died in Rochelle Park, New Jersey, in 2001.
— A Jewish woman who died in the U.S. in 2005. The researchers are withholding her name at her family's request.

Information written on the back of those four snapshots, including partial or full

names, helped identify the subjects of the photos and track down their families, Halpern said.

One of the photos of the two unidentified women has a message "avec tous mes sentiments", or "with all my affections" in French, and the name Marie written on the back, but otherwise clues to their identities remain scant, Halpern said. The researchers plan to continue trying to identify the two women and have asked Yad Vashem to publicize their photos.

Kitade, who is now 71, said in an email to *The Associated Press* that he wanted "Japanese people and people of the Jewish communities in the world to know about the important roles played by those ordinary Japanese citizens."

Kitade said Osako was a kind person who was struck by the refugees' plight and took particular interest in their well-being during the voyages. Kitade met this week with the children of Reed, Kronberg and the woman who died in 2005...

The extraordinary story of the Bangladesh Jews

By Shalva Weil, Originally published *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 September 2015 <http://www.thejc.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-features/145162/the-extraordinary-story-bangladesh-jews>

A piece on Jews in Bangladesh may raise some eyebrows. Bangladesh is officially a parliamentary democracy, but 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. There are no diplomatic relations with Israel, and Bangladesh has discouraged Jews from remaining there, wiping out remembrance of almost everything Jewish, including the synagogue. Yet once it was different, and East Pakistan - today Bangladesh - boasted a thriving, if small, Jewish community.

The East Bengal Jewish community was established by Shalom Cohen (1762-1836), the founder of the Calcutta (today Kolkata) Jewish community in West Bengal, who migrated from Surat to India in 1798.

Cohen came to Dacca (today Dhaka) to trade in cloths, silks and muslins, and established business with Jewish employees in the capital. In 1817, Moses Duek, a businessman married to Cohen's eldest daughter, Lunah, left Calcutta to reside for five years in Dacca, during which time he established a prayer hall there.

Throughout the 19th century and first part of the 20th, Baghdadi Jews continued to run businesses in Dacca, but most resided in Calcutta. They traded textiles, pearls and opium, on which they became rich.

At the time of Partition of Bengal and India in 1947, there were some 4,000 Jews in West Bengal, primarily in Calcutta but only about 135 Jews were actually residing in East Bengal. East Bengal later became East Pakistan, a part of the new nation of Pakistan, but separated geographically from it by 1,600 kilometers of Indian territory.

Ironically, a Jewish architect from Philadelphia, Louis Kahn, designed the most important building in East Pakistan, the Jatiyo Sangsad Bhaban, the National Assembly building. Ranked as the world's largest legislative complex, this National Assembly was begun in 1961 and was only completed in 1982, eight years after Kahn's death.

In 1971, the Bangladesh Liberation War took place. Interestingly, it was another famous Jew, Lieutenant General J F R Jacob, who liberated East Pakistan during this war. General Jacob, as he is known, was formerly governor of the Punjab and Goa; today he resides in New Delhi. He was born into a Baghdadi Jewish family in Calcutta, and never hid his Jewish ancestry. On the contrary, when I first reached India in the late 1970s, Lt General Jacob was an active member of the well-known New Delhi prayer hall, the Judah Hyam Synagogue, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in January 2007. He reached the highest ranks in India, which traditionally promoted co-existence and lived in harmony with its Indian Jewish minority. His finest hour was in 1971 when, as Chief of Staff of the Indian Army's Eastern Command, he defeated Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistani War in two weeks, and successfully liberated East Pakistan. As fighting raged, he flew to Dhaka and negotiated

with Pakistan's military commander an unconditional surrender of 90,000 Pakistani soldiers to the Indian Army. This public surrender, enacted under the auspices of the United Nations, is the only one in history. East Pakistan then became the independent state of Bangladesh.

There is no synagogue today in Bangladesh, although a few expatriates do meet up on the eve of the Jewish New Year and on the Day of Atonement. A posting on Trip Advisor by a tourist asking where the synagogue is in Dhaka for Yom Kippur received no serious response and a few months later, the blog was closed by the Trip Advisor staff "due to inactivity". On a blog relating to the Jews of Bangladesh, one blogger writing from Brooklyn, New York, told that he was of mixed ancestry, his father being Yemenite Jewish and his mother Bangladeshi; he himself went through a full Orthodox conversion. Other people have written into the same blog saying they do business with Bangladesh, visit there, and a few even stay for a while. As one person wrote: "The only Jews you will find in Bangladesh are those merchants with extensive business reasons to stay in Bangladesh."

Joseph Edward of Ontario, Canada, wrote to me the history of his family and gave me permission to quote him. Joseph was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and moved to Canada in 1986. In Chittagong, there is a Second World War British and Commonwealth cemetery, the War Cemetery. There one can find the grave of an RAF sergeant from England with the Star of David on it. Joseph Edward's father, Rahamim David Barook and his older brother Ezra Barook, were born in Calcutta, and moved to what was then East Pakistan. They adopted the surname Edward; his brother Ezra was known as Eddy Edward. Rahamim David Edward (formerly Barook), Joseph's father, worked in the shipping industry, and married a Catholic of Portuguese descent, who was a school teacher. His uncle married a tribal Chakma king's daughter from the Chittagong Hill Tracts. She died during childbirth and Joseph Edward's uncle gave his son up to a Muslim family for adoption.

Joseph Edward's great-grandfather, Ezra Barook or Hacham Reuben (pictured

left), came from a distinguished Rabbinic family from Baghdad; he was buried in the cemetery in Calcutta in 1900. In recent years, Joseph Edward has been in contact with Jewish cousins living in Arad and Beersheba, Israel. Other members of the family live in Sydney, Australia, in the UK and in Toronto, Canada.

Not all the Jews in Bangladesh were of "Baghdadi" origin. Members of the Bene Israel community from Bombay (today Mumbai) also resided there in the 1960s. One of these was Mr George Reuben, my neighbour in Lod, Israel, when I was carrying out fieldwork in the 1970s, who lived in Dhaka with his wife, Dina, and three children, when he worked as sales manager with Pakistan Oxygen Ltd.

Another family who lived in Bangladesh were the Cohen brothers, whose ancestors came from Iran and Iraq and settled in Bangladesh. Mordy went to school in Rajshahi, where his father ran a general store that sold liquor. Mordy was one of the pioneers of Bangladeshi television, established in 1964, but he was forced out of Bangladesh after the Six Day War, and moved to Calcutta in 1968, where he is one of the remaining Jews there. Mordy Cohen and his wife, Aline, returned to Dhaka in December 2014, as guests of the state-run Dhaka Television, which celebrated its Golden Jubilee.

While the Jews in West Bengal managed to create a full community, the Jews of East Bengal largely lived there for commercial reasons. They were never numerous. Nevertheless, documentation of the Jews of Bangladesh provides an unusual insight into an extinct community in a Muslim country.

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The Issue

(continued from page 1)

But the deities do not issue commands to be obeyed, and they do not punish. They are not conceived of as all powerful but as potentially effective in meeting requests or answering enquiries regarding their specialties. These deities are not understood to be organized into a hierarchy, save in the Daoist and Buddhist churches, which are adjunct to normative Chinese religion, where a deity or semi-deity is understood to be superior to all.²

The early Israelite concept of God was also not monotheistic; this God was a tribal god, and it was understood that other peoples had other gods. But the impact of living in the capitals of the Assyrian and Persian empires acquainted the Israelites with the notion of an absolute monarch, a king of kings, omnipotent throughout his reign. And this concept was attached to their understanding of God who takes on the characteristics of a potentate, who is to be feared and obeyed without question. Just as worshiping another king was not just disloyalty but treason, so to there is but a single god and one shall have no other gods or suffer dire consequences. This was no longer a god of the Israelites alone, but understood to be an omnipotent, omniscient singularity who created the cosmos and all within it, the sole deity for all people, not just the Jewish people. Over time, especially through some of the Prophets, qualities such as mercy enlarged this understanding. Hence, applying the English word "God" equally to the polytheistic Chinese and monotheistic Western theological models has inevitably led to confusion and misunderstanding.

It is not only the respective concepts of the numinous that are confused due to translation, but so are the activities with regard to them, particularly those acts for which the terms "worship," "sacrifice" and "prayer" are used. Chinese do not "worship" the spirits housed in temples in the sense of great devotion; they pay respect. They do not even demonstrate the deep respect given to superiors (in traditional times), parents and ancestors, such as the koutou (kowtow). Save for the birthday of Kongzi (Confucius) where an elaborate state ritual including dances by schoolchildren takes place in the wen miao (see below), as well as Daoist and Buddhist rituals in their own temples, there are no regular ceremonies, let alone worship services, in local temples. People go to them when a need is felt or when one wishes to offer thanks for benefits received. (There are temples at pilgrimage sites and periodic local renew-

al ceremonies for which there are special rituals.)

Often the offerings made before shen in temples are translated as "sacrifices." But sacrifice in the Western religious sense tends to be understood as a "blood" sacrifice, a ritually slaughtered animal. While meat is offered to spirits as part of a meal (except in Buddhist temples), it is not essential, save in certain formal rituals. Nowadays in urban areas, with people working at nine to five jobs, the offering is often simply some fruit or a package of cookies purchased on the way to the temple. This is hardly a "sacrifice" in most Westerners' conception of the religious act.

Finally, there is the matter of "prayer." In Judaism, davening or praying takes time; Sabbath morning prayers can take a couple of hours. Praying primarily involves praising God. The term "praying" tends to be used to describe Chinese making requests of divinities. But these requests are usually made by a simple statement: "Please help me pass the university entrance exam," for example. There is no praise, although there will often be post facto thanks for benefits received. Hence, this is not what the word "praying" brings to mind to most Jews and Christians.

The Jews that moved to Kaifeng over a thousand years ago probably brought with them a more nuanced understanding of God present in Baghdad at the time they left Persia. Saadia Gaon, head of one of the two rabbinic academies there in the 10th century, and the author of a major theological treatise,³ understood God to be utterly non-anthropomorphic, as did Jewish mystics, having none of the attributes of humans.

Over the centuries, the Chinese Jews, influenced by the Chinese literary language, modified this understanding in accord with the Chinese terms they used to translate the Hebrew names of God: Dao and Tian. Arising out of Nothingness, a Somethingness arbitrarily called the Dao (the "way") is the primordial amorphous substance from which all that exists is created. Thus, Dao as God is an indescribable existential potential; it is existence in and of itself. Since it is existence before differentiation into that which exists, it is ineffable and prayers cannot be addressed to it. Tian as a term for God was understood in part as the chain of being of all Jews from Abraham, Jacob and Isaac to the most recently deceased. In a sense, it is the essence of Judaism itself. To Tian, prayers could be addressed, save that the Chinese Jews would have prayed and said the blessings in He-

brew with traditional Jewish wording.⁴ Thus, the above is only relevant when the Chinese Jews discussed God with non-Jews in China or wrote calligraphic theological statements in literary Chinese, following Chinese aesthetics, to decorate their synagogue.⁵

The Conundrum

In my previous work on this topic,⁶ I thought I had dealt with the issues involved with the Chinese Jews serving as magistrates, including diet when away from the synagogue community (Chinese officials were not allowed to serve in their home areas) and their duties with regard to the wen miao ("Civil Temple"), sometimes called the Temple to the First Teacher, and invariably called the "Confucian Temple" in Western writings. The wen miao was a large complex that served as the center for higher education, was the locus for the first of the civil service examinations, was a clubhouse for the literati – those who passed at least the first of the examinations – and was a temple for offerings to Kongzi (Confucius) and other important personages in the development of Chinese political philosophy and education. Kongzi is understood as a sage, not a shen.

The Jews in Kaifeng told the Jesuits who interviewed them in the early 18th century that they did not worship shen. Since Kongzi is not a shen, for a Chinese magistrate to take part in rituals in the wen miao would be no different than an American Jew today taking part in civic events held in the Jefferson or Lincoln Memorials in Washington, D.C., buildings in the form of Greco-Roman temples housing a large image of a renowned dead president.

A year after my book on the theology of the Chinese Jews was published, on visiting the small city of Pingyao in north-central China, a UNESCO Heritage site due to its being relatively unchanged since the late 19th century, I found the only extant nearly complete yamen (district government headquarters and magistrate's residence) in China. It contained several complete temples within it and that led me study the magistrate's religious duties, of which a major aspect was serving as the priest in what almost always in English is called the "City God Temple." As a modern Ashkenazi, I immediately realized that I had a serious conundrum in my study of the Chinese Jews: How could a Jewish magistrate fulfill his priestly obligations in these various temples and remain true

to Jewish understandings of proper religious behavior?

By the time that Chinese Jews began serving as magistrates, it is not only the magistrate that was appointed by the central government to administer a district, so was the inhabitant of the *chenghuang miao* (Walls and Moats Temple – walls and moats” meaning a “city”), invariably translated as the “City God Temple.” As the magistrate lived in the yamen, so the “City God” lived in the *chenghuang miao*. The two worked in partnership: the magistrate administered the yang realm, the realm of living humans, the material world, and the “City God” administered the yin realm, the realm of the dead, the spiritual world. When the magistrate first arrived at the district he was to administer, he fasted and spent a night in the *chenghuang miao*. He made offerings there twice a lunar month and on several other occasions. He also made offerings at the several temples within the yamen, and he was responsible for the rituals that took place in the wen miao. On analyzing the time spent in carrying out these religious activities, it would have taken between a third and a quarter of the magistrate’s time. In other words, the magistrate was as much a priest as he was a judge.

A Jew cannot worship another god, yet there were Chinese Jewish magistrates. Since there were far more Muslim magistrates than Jewish ones, I hoped to find out how this was dealt with in Islam. In the spring of 2014, in Beijing, I approached scholars of Islam in China, and received the response that no one had hitherto raised this question. On speaking to learned Muslims at the Great Mosque in Xian, the response was that Muslim magistrates could not make such offerings, an answer probably influenced by modern Saudi Salafism, which does not allow the common Muslim practice, especially among Sufis, of praying at tombs of holy persons, that is now spreading among Chinese Muslims. It was the same response I received from some Ashkenazi rabbis. But after I left Beijing, one of the Chinese scholars at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing found an obscure work that mentioned the activities in these regards of Muslim officials in the Yuan period (13th - 14th centuries).

In this text, one finds inscriptions on stelae commemorating Muslim officials making offerings in times of drought –

normal offerings would not be the cause of memorializing the event on a stone monument. In the first of these, the offering is made at the temple to the land of the area, incorrectly translated as a deity. In the second, the offering is made at a temple to a water spirit, most relevant with regard to a drought:

...In the summer of ... [1338], there was a severe drought and all the crops withered...Master Hsün [of a noted Muslim family], together with his fellow officials, bathed and went on a vegetarian diet. The party offered incense and paper money and prayed [made a request]....⁷

...In...[1326], Maho-mo [a Muslim name] ... came to serve as prefect [magistrate]. In the autumn of the following year...there was a drought. He made a sacrifice [offering] and rain actually fell....⁸

From these stelae we learn the Muslim magistrates did make offerings to relevant spiritual entities. Thus, there can be little doubt that the Jewish magistrates did so as well.

Part of the solution to the conundrum is the matter of translation into Western languages. This is a frequent source of major misunderstandings with regard to Chinese Religion.⁹ For example, Tian is almost always translated as “Heaven” and the binomial term Tiandi as “Heaven and earth.” Tian means “sky” in the usual sense of that which is above earth and includes the clouds as well as sun, moon and stars. Tian as found in the compound Tiandi means “Sky-Earth,” the male and female procreative powers from whose pairing all material things are born. (The first differentiation of the unformed Dao is its bifurcation into Tian and Di, who provide the substance of all that exists, and simultaneously, Yin and Yang, the female and male principles and energies that provide the life-force of all the living.) The English word “Heaven” does not usually include clouds and weather, and the translation of “Heaven and earth” denies the equality of male and female cosmic entities – they are not deities in the usual understanding of god, as they are not anthropomorphic and have no human attributes. In English, the opposite of Heaven is not Earth, it is Hell.¹⁰

I point this out because a major aspect of the conundrum is the matter of translation and the imputation of “God” to every sort of Chinese spiritual entity, especially those that are not shen (deities/spirits, most often functioning as saints in Christianity).

The Chinese term translated as “City God,” at least in pre-modern times from the late Ming dynasty on when Chinese Jews began to serve as magistrates, is *Chenghuang yeh*, meaning “The Honorable [Protector of] Walls and Moats [City].” The same honorific is applied to the district magistrate, a living person. It is exactly the same as addressing a modern mayor in the West as the “Honorable So-and-so.” In other words, in traditional times, the *Chenghuang yeh* is not a *shen*. He is an honored exemplary dead official but not a deity or a saintly spirit. Indeed, the human rather than spiritual nature of the *Chenghuang yeh* is emphasized in a life-size diorama at the rear of the *Chenghuang miao* in Zhengzhou (not far from Kaifeng) where he is shown lying on a Chinese style bed with a coverlet over him fondly looking at his wife who is sitting on the edge of the bed.

This understanding is confused in modern times. At the end of the imperial government in the early 20th century, the *chenghuang miao* lost its governmental function and being reserved for official use, and people began to use it as a local temple for all and sundry purposes. Thus, today one can see people making offerings and praying to the *Chenghuang yeh* as *Chenghuang zunshen* (Venerable Deity of the City) at cities all across China. Hence, the translation of “City God” in modern times is more apropos, although City *Shen* would be more precise. But at the time the Chinese Jews served as magistrates this transformation had yet to take place.

Similarly, the two complete temples (complete in the sense that they each had a performance stage facing the building housing the plaques and, in more recent times, images) in the Pingyao yamen housed entities that are not deities in the sense of Judaism or Islam. One is the temple to the Marquis of Zan Hou (or Xiao He). Xiao He (died BCE 193) was the prime minister of the first emperor of the Han dynasty, the first successful Chinese dynasty, which he helped to establish. He is renowned for his exemplary administration; thus, he was a role model for the magistrate. This temple complex included wings dedicated to other noted officials of the distant past. The second temple is to Houtu, the Lord of Earth as the spiritual power of the locale itself. Both would have required full ritual offerings.

In summary, the facts of the matter are that first Chinese Jews did serve as district magistrates. Their priestly functions were no more optional than their judicial

or revenue collection ones. Second, we have Chinese historical material denoting that Chinese Muslim magistrates did make offerings at non-Muslim temples; therefore, we can assume that Chinese Jewish magistrates did so as well. Third, the spirits housed in these temples are not *shen*, rather they are dead exemplary officials or the very locale in and of itself.

The Solution

Given these factors, in order to understand how Chinese Jews could serve as magistrates, the following series of questions arises: First, in the history and scope of Judaism were and are prayers made at the tombs of dead persons? Second, if they were, were prayers made at the tombs of non-Jewish dead persons? Finally, were and are prayers especially made at sacred places?

My first thought in these regards was my memory of watching Jewish petitioners placing prayer slips on and about the gravestone of the renowned Rabbi Loew in the old Jewish cemetery in Prague, as well as watching Muslims praying at the tombs of revered Sufi imams in central Turkey. This seemed to me a possible precedent for the priestly activities of Jewish and Muslim magistrates. Rationalist Ashkenazi rabbis to whom I spoke in this regard were adamant that this was rare in Judaism and contrary to proper Jewish religious behavior. The Chinese Muslim imams I spoke to said that it was impossible for Muslims to pray at tombs or their equivalent of non-Muslim revered persons. Further research determined that both perspectives are inaccurate with regard to both the past and the present.

While praying at the graves or tombs of dead persons is relatively uncommon in modern Ashkenazi (northern and central European) Judaism, at least in North America (until recently), it is quite common in Mizrahi ("eastern") Judaism. The background of the Chinese Jews, who probably left for China from Basra (the port for Baghdad), is Mizrahi. Pilgrimage sites for praying at the graves of revered rabbis are to be found all over the Mizrahi world from Morocco to Persia. Even today, although Jews have left most of that area to concentrate in Israel, the website of the Israeli Ministry of Tourism lists twenty-seven pilgrimage sites, including a number of tombs of Patriarchs and Matriarchs, as well as half dozen graves of dead rabbis. A recent grave of Rabbi Israel Abuhazera attracts over 600,000 pilgrims a year, over 100,000 in a single day

on the anniversary of his death.¹¹

These are not just contemporary phenomena; reverencing dead persons can be found at the very roots of Judaism. In the Tanach (Bible), we find in First Samuel 28 that King Saul, after the recent death of his advisor Samuel, felt the need to consult with him. He sought out and went to a "female medium" in order to do so. When the medium is possessed by Samuel, or as it is put, when Samuel appears, Saul prostrates himself before him – clearly an act of profound respect. Samuel then speaks to him, implicitly through the mouth of the medium. This is classic mediumism as is common, for example, in China,¹² rather than the spiritualist mediumism beginning in 19th century America familiar to Americans. Hence, the Chinese Jews would readily have seen the relationship between the biblical story and what they observed in temples around them.

A second religious foundation for the practice of praying at the graves of ancestors and revered rabbis will be found in the Babylonian Talmud – the Mas. Ta'anith 16a:

Why do they go to the cemetery? — With regard to this there is a difference of opinion between R. Levi b. Hama and R. Hanina. One says: [To signify thereby], We are as the dead before Thee; and the other says: In order that the dead should intercede for mercy on our behalf.¹³

This Talmudic passage is understood by some rabbis as referring to the graves of ancestors.¹⁴

It is not only those living in Baghdad and its environs that prayed at tombs, but the practice was found in medieval Europe as well. In arguments concerning prayers to "ushers of mercy," with explicit references to the above Talmud passage, we find definite statements of praying for intercession at the graves of revered dead Jews, and, to be noted, prayers are made on behalf of others, as did the Chinese magistrates:

...Judah b. Yaqar of twelfth-century France maintains that the expression "ushers of mercy" does not refer to angels at all, but rather to the generation's most righteous Jews, upon whom it is incumbent to pray on behalf of their contemporaries.¹⁵

A contemporary interpretation can be

found on a Chabad (Lubavitch) website written in colloquial English:

... the Torah tells us not to "beseech the dead." It's listed along with all the other "abominations" practiced by the people that lived in Canaan before we came there. And yet, we have an ancient and popular custom to visit the graves of righteous people and pray there...The Torah tells us that Caleb, one of the twelve spies that Moses sent to spy out the Land of Canaan, made a personal detour to Hebron. What was his interest in Hebron? The Talmud (Sotah 34b) tells that he wished to pray at the cave where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Leah are buried. He prayed there for mercy on his soul and he was saved from the fateful decision of the other spies. The Talmud also states that it is customary to visit a cemetery on a fast day (Taanit 16a). Why? Typical of the Talmud ... two opinions are provided: Some say that this is simply to remind those who are fasting of their own mortality...But others say that this is in order to connect to ask the souls of the righteous who are buried there that they intercede on our behalf. In fact, the Zohar states that if it were not for the intercession of those souls who reside in that afterworld, our world would not endure for a moment. [The text then goes on to argue that intercession is not really intercession.]¹⁶

And it is within the Lubavitch tradition that we can find a contemporary North American example in Queens, New York. Every year thousands travel to the grave of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (died 1994) where an *ohel* (structure over the grave of a revered rabbi) has been constructed. There it is customary, indeed expected, for people to leave written prayer-requests, including, it is to be noted, for others:

Before entering the *Ohel*, it is customary to write a letter to the Rebbe. When referring to one's own self or mentioning someone else's name in the letter, one should use the name and mother's name (e.g. Isaac the son of Sarah)... It is customary to verbally read one's letter (albeit quietly), then tear it up and place it in the enclosed area.¹⁷

While the Jews in Kaifeng may not have

been aware of the specifics of the Talmud,¹⁸ the justification for these practices would long have spread through the Jewish communities in Baghdad and elsewhere before the first Jewish residents of Kaifeng left Basra over a thousand years ago. They would have observed that the essence of Chinese Religion¹⁹ is making offerings and praying at plaques with ancestor's names, which served as the model for all other religious rituals. As they assimilated to Chinese culture, they added name plaques to the Patriarchs and their ancestors in wings of the synagogue, while maintaining the full panoply of standard rabbinic religious practices. The two most powerful Jewish clans, the one that produced most of the rabbis and the one that produced most of the civil service graduates, had clan temples on the periphery of the synagogue grounds. In the homes were name plaques to the immediate deceased of the family before which were placed incense bowls. In the Chinese understanding, these name plaques were as much a means to commemorate the dead as the graves themselves, which the Chinese also visited for making offerings.

As Jews traditionally visit the graves of their parents once a year, so do Chinese at the Qingming festival. In visiting graves of parents or of revered rabbis, many Jews today place small stones on the headstone in commemoration of their visit and prayers are placed on the grave and headstones – stone plaques. In China, the name plaque in the home and the clan temple, as well as in the wen miao and other government temples, parallels the headstone at the grave. Hence, ritual offerings to demonstrate respect made by the magistrate before name plaques in these temples were equivalent to making them at the grave.

Given the above Talmud passage, it is clear that the Chinese Jews paid respect to their ancestors as did their Chinese neighbors; they also ritually demonstrated respect to the Patriarchs, as well as Moses and Ezra. Indeed, since the Chinese Jews understood God to be non-anthropomorphic without any human attributes, even more so than did Saadia Gaon and Maimonides, God would not be able to “hear” prayers, only the ancestors and other revered figures of the Jewish past would be able to conduct them to the divine.²⁰ This answers the first question.

As to the second question, Jews made pilgrimages not only to the graves and tombs of revered rabbis but also to those of revered Muslim imams:

In Palestine as elsewhere, Jews and Muslims venerated holy persons at some of the same holy places out of devotion and religious conviction. Muslim and Jewish keepers served together at shrines in Iraq. Indeed Muslims suggested to Jewish travellers that they visit holy places in Galilee and elsewhere. In Damascus, Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians visited the tomb of a medieval Muslim saint to make supplication there.²¹

If Jews were comfortable praying at the tombs of their Muslim neighbors' venerated dead in their original homeland, surely they would have been as comfortable doing the same at government temples to venerated non-family dead (highly respected former officials) as part of their official duties on behalf of those they administered, so long as these dead were not labeled *shen*.

Finally, what about Jewish magistrates making offerings at the temple to the Lord of Earth, meaning in this context, the spirit of the place in which the district was located? For many centuries in the past and continuing today, large numbers of Jews can be seen every day praying and making supplication at the “Wailing Wall” in Jerusalem. This ancient wall is not a remnant wall of the last Temple as many think, but a retaining wall of the mound on which the last Temple is assumed to have been located (a number of archeologists today would disagree). Hence, they are praying at a sacred structure, sacred because it has been imbued for millennia as the holiest place in Judaism. It is perceived as where, before the Temple was destroyed, the Israelite priests connected, through offerings and prayer, with God. In China, as in many traditions around the world, the center of where one locates oneself is sacred. Thus the residents of each district understood their place to be special, to be sacred. And so it was natural to entreat the spirit of the place itself to assist those who resided on it. Hence, there is a temple in the yamen compound at Pingyao to the Lord of the Earth.²²

Some revered Jewish rabbis, many of whom were noted for magical powers in their lifetime, as was Rabbi Loew referred to above, were apparently considered particularly effective with regard to prayers for rain:

Rabbi Jacob of Paris, who also visited their [Hillel and Shammai in Meron] tombs in the thirteenth century, commented that Jews prayed there and sang hymns and said that their prayers for rain were answered. During the fifteenth century an anonymous Jewish pilgrim from Crete commented that Jews visited the tomb of Shim'on bar Yohai in Meron, where they prayed for rainfall and their supplications would be fulfilled.²³

It is to be noted that the stelae inscriptions mentioned above concerning Muslim magistrates making offerings at Chinese temples was that the requests were for rain. Certainly, Jewish magistrates would do the same at times of drought, as this would be part of their official duties and a compassionate carrying out of the expectations of those to whom they ministered.

Conclusion

With regard to the priestly responsibilities of the Chinese magistrate in traditional times, there was no worship, sacrifice or praying in the normative Western sense of these words, as discussed at the beginning of this paper. For a Jewish magistrate, the activities did not take place before a deity, let alone a God in the Jewish sense, but to exemplary officials and philosophers of the past. Offerings of incense and food would be made as a sign of respect on behalf of the people of the district he administered. But the literati, who would include the magistrates, tended to understand that this type of ritual primarily benefited the persons carrying out the ritual rather than any spiritual entity by reinforcing humility and the sense of community in the one making the offering. Finally, the requests for assistance when needed would not be prayers similar to Jewish practices. For example, they might simply state: “The crops are dying due to drought; the people are hungry; please assist as best you can the coming of rain.”

Thus, the priestly duties of a district magistrate would not have appeared problematic to Chinese Jewish magistrates. These duties were in line with paying respect with incense to their family and clan ancestors, as well as the Patriarchs and other founding figures of Judaism. Making offerings as a sign of respect on behalf of the community they administered at the name-plaques²⁴ of eminent dead officials, especially the one chosen by the government to partner with the magistrate, as well as before the name-plaque of the spirit of the place they administered, again would not be problematic. It would

be little different from their ancestors having prayed at the tombs of revered Muslim saints and at the most sacred place in Jerusalem. Consequently, becoming a magistrate did not negate their Jewishness from a Chinese Jewish perspective given established precedent regarding prayer in Judaism and the synthesis with Chinese practices in demonstrating respect to worthy dead.

Notes

¹ I am grateful to Rabbi Moshe Bernstein, Rabbi Aviva Goldberg and Rabbi Anson Laytner for invaluable suggestions. Of course, all opinions expressed in this paper are mine alone.

² For further discussion on this topic, see Jordan Paper, *The Deities are Many: A Polytheistic Theology* (State University of New York Press, 2005.)

³ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. by Samuel Rosenblatt (Yale University Press, 1948).

⁴ Rabbi Moshe Bernstein points out that *Shamayim*, the Hebrew for *Tian*, is also used in the Torah as a euphemism for God. It refers to the transcendent aspect of the Godhead while *eretz* refers to the immanent aspect. (Personal Correspondence.)

⁵ For more on this topic, see Jordan Paper, *The Theology of the Chinese Jews, 1000-1850* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012).

⁶ Paper 2012.

⁷ Ch'en Yüan, *Western and Central Asians in China Under the Mongols*, trans. and annotated by Ch'in Hsing-hai and L. Carrington Goodrich (Monumenta Serica Monograph XV [1966]): 257. Unfortunately, there are exceedingly few copies of the Chinese text in North America, and I was unable to read the original. Goodrich was an excellent sinologist, but not being trained in religious studies, typically uses religious terminology without precision.

⁸ Ch'en: 258.

⁹ For the meaning of Chinese Religion and the concept in Chinese, see Jordan Paper, "A New Approach to Understanding Chinese Religion," *Studies in Chinese Religions* (Taiwan) 1 (2013): 1-33, esp., 3-4.

¹⁰ For an expanded discussion of *Tian* and *Di*, see Jordan Paper, *The Spirits are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion* (State University of New

York Press, 1995): chap. 8.

¹¹ http://www.goisrael.ca/Tourism_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Jewish%20Themes/Jewish_Sites/Pages/Baba%20Sali%20jew.aspx (4 September 2014). Another relatively recent pilgrimage site, the grave of Rabbi Chayim Chouri, is analyzed in Alex Weingrod, *The Saint of Beersheba* (State University of New York Press, 1990).

¹² Jordan paper, "The Role of Possession Trance in Chinese Culture and Religion: A Comparative Overview from the Neolithic to the Present," in Philip Clart & Paul Crow, eds., *Monumenta Serica Monograph LX* (2009): 327-48.

¹³ <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Taanith.pdf> (4 September 2014).

¹⁴ Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of the Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford University Press, 2002): 215.

¹⁵ David Malkiel, "Between Worldliness and Traditionalism: Eighteenth-Century Jews Debate Intercessory Prayer," *Jewish Studies*, an Internet Journal 2 (2003), 169-98: 177 [www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/2-2003/Malkiel.pdf].

¹⁶ www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/562222/jewish/Is-it-okay-to-ask-a-deceased-tzaddik-to-pray-on-my-behalf.htm.

¹⁷ www.ohelchabad.org/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/78447/jewish/Conduct.htm.

¹⁸ Question has been raised as to whether or not they had a copy, although it is more likely that there was a copy in one of the Chinese seaport synagogues.

¹⁹ See Paper 1995: chap. 2.

²⁰ See Paper 2012.

²¹ Meri: 3.

²² This concept has multiple manifestations. In southeastern China, there is a shrine to the Lord of the Earth beside graves. In this case, the Lord of the Earth is the very earth on which the grave is sited and the Lord of the Underworld where the earth soul of the dead person buried there resides.

²³ Meri: 64.

²⁴ If one visits these temples today, one will see images of these officials, as well as the Lord of the Earth, behind the nameplaques. But these life-size images only came into use in more recent times, when they began to serve as non-government temples and thus replicated the use of images in local, Buddhist and Daoist temples.

BOOK NOOK

Book Excerpt: from *The Image of Jews in Contemporary China: An Identity Without a People*, edited by James Ross & Song Lihong, Academic Studies Press, 2016

Excerpted and reprinted from "China's Search for the Secrets of Jewish Success" in *Tabletmag.com*, 25 January 2016

By James Ross

During my first trip to China in the summer of 1985, I visited English Corner in People's Park in Shanghai one Sunday afternoon. It's one of the places where young Chinese people used to practice their English with visiting foreigners. Officials from the university where I was teaching in Shanghai escorted me there, and a big crowd quickly gathered to talk with me—a tall, curly-haired foreigner—and pushed closer to shower me with questions.

Some of the questions seemed strange to me ("Do all Americans have AIDS?") but most were routine, such as, "Where are you from? How do you like China? Are you married? Do you like Chinese girls?" After two months in China, none of this was surprising to me except for one additional question: "What is your religion?"

I was taken aback at first—it's not a question I often hear when I travel abroad—but after a brief pause I answered, "I am Jewish." The young questioner gave me a thumbs up and said, "Jews are the best."

I got a similar question—and similar response—everywhere I traveled in China later that summer: Kunming, Chengdu, Nanjing, Suzhou, and Guangzhou. My unscientific survey suggested that the Chinese liked and admired Jews, although they didn't seem to know much about them. I knew that there had been Jewish communities in Shanghai and other Chinese cities until shortly after WWII but that there was little evidence of their presence after the Communist takeover in 1949. There were a handful of Jewish tourists

and visiting faculty at the time of my first visit. But I was curious about how average Chinese people had developed an image, seemingly a positive one, of Jews.

I visited China several times after that summer, but it wasn't until 2008, when I was selected as a Fulbright lecturer at Nanjing University, that I had a chance to explore the popular Chinese image of Jews. By then, there were many Jewish visitors and business people from the United States and Israel. And economic reforms were transforming the country. Making and spending money seemed at least as important as Communist ideology.

When I first arrived to teach in Nanjing in the fall of 2008, I was joined by Yan Li, a history graduate student from my home university who had been staying with her family in Beijing. Yan and I visited bookstores throughout the city. We started at a small bookstore that featured books about evangelical Christianity. Yan asked the young woman who worked there if they had books about Jews, but the clerk had trouble answering the question. She didn't know what Yan meant by "Jew."

At larger bookstores, we found entire sections devoted to books about Jews. Most of the books focused on finance, such as *16 Reasons for Jews Getting Wealthy* by Chu Ke; *The Secret of Talmud: The Jewish Code of Wealth* by Jiao Yiyang; and *Secret of Jewish Success: Ten Commandments of Jewish Success* by Li Huizhen. Yan helped me translate the books and we found they were filled with misunderstandings and stereotypes. And books purporting to be based on the Talmud were mostly pithy sayings about wealth with little or no connection to actual Talmudic passages.

Some of the misunderstandings are almost comical. One of the best-selling books is *What's Behind Jewish Success* by Tian Zaiwei and Sha Wen. "It is said that Jews are distinguished by their noses," the authors write. "All Jews have hooknoses. This is not accurate. Despite hook-nosed Jews in cartoons, only Jews in Russia and the Near East have hook-

noses in real life." They also write that "to save time, Jews never beat about the bush in negotiations as Chinese often do." Jews control the diamond market, the authors also write, since diamonds are "valuable and easy to carry which is ideal for Jews who are always drifting."

The most prominent author and editor of Chinese books about Jews is He Xiongfei, who identifies himself as a literary critic, orator, Jewish studies expert, and visiting professor at Nankai University. He is director of Xiongfei Limited in Hainan and has edited a number of book series on intellectual, literary, and cultural studies. His most popular series is titled "Revelations on the Jews Superior Intelligence," launched in 1995. His books include *Jewish Wisdom of Family Education: The Cultural Code of the Most Intelligent and Wealthy Nation in the World* (2005); *Secrets of Jewish Success: The Golden Rule of a Miraculous Nation* (2004); and *Uncovering the Enigma of Jewish Success in the World* (2002). He also has edited *Collection of Jewish Strategies* (1995); *Jewish Life of Money* (2002); *Jewish Magnates of Ideas* (1995); *Legend of World Famous Jewish Celebrities* (1996); *Riddle of Jews* (1997); and *Jewish Bigwigs' Skills of Making Money* (1996). His most recent publications are cartoon books for children about Jewish wisdom and the Talmud.

In the best-seller *The Spirit of Jewish Culture* (the English title on the cover is *Whats [sic] Behind Jewish Cleverness*) by Sai Ni Ya, one of He Xiongfei's pseudonyms, he writes that Jews "are the most intelligent, mysterious, and the wealthiest people in the world. In a sense, not knowing about Jews equals not knowing the world! When Jews sneeze at home, all the banks in the world would catch a cold one by one. Five Jews together can control the gold market of the humankind; the antagonism between the East and the West, in a sense, can be said to be that between two Jews—Jesus and Marx." The book continues with a series of lessons. Lesson 1 tries to define "who is a Jew." It starts by discussing maternal descent then states:

Yet the chief criterion is whether one's

religion is Judaism. In the Jewish perspective, Judaism and Jews are integrated—Jews are the materialization of Judaism and Judaism is the spiritual kernel of Jews. Thus Jews have identified themselves with Judaism: those who believe in Judaism are Jewish, and Jews all believe in Judaism. This outlook that unifies religion and ethnicity is closely related to their unique history and experiences. It is not because of religious radicalism.

These oversimplifications are typical of He Xiongfei's work. Other lessons focus on Jewish rituals, such as circumcision, and great Jewish figures in philosophy, finance, science, art, and politics. (He mistakenly identifies a number of people as Jews, such as the Rockefellers.) Another lesson discusses anti-Semitism:

[T]his hatred toward Jews has gone deep into most non-Jewish people's consciousness with no sensible reason and has been passed down from generation to generation. Jews have become the object of persistent and conventional worldwide hatred and genocide. Orthodox Jews are charged with ethnic chauvinism; Jews being assimilated are accused of being the Fifth Column of contaminating non-Jewish people by way of assimilation; rich Jews are regarded as the vampire of the nation; poor Jews are looked down upon as the burden of society...

The main reason for this hatred is their "Jewishness," he writes. Their belief in one god is "so conceited as to be disrespectful of gods of other religions. Their 'Jewishness' is also embodied in their strict adherence to the 613 doctrines, which has made them an eccentric community that is hard to coexist with and merge into other cultures." There is also a brief lesson on the Torah and chapter on Jewish humor.

He Xiongfei was a Buddhist who eventually turned to Christianity through his study of Jewish culture. In an interview with *Christian Times*, he discussed his feelings toward Judaism:

Though I have long since studied the Jewish culture, I always have a feeling that I am a spectator rather than a practitioner. Through my study I know the progenitor of Jewish culture is God. If you do not believe in Him, all of the study are in vain, so I think it is imperative to accept God if I want to study the Jewish culture, otherwise I will remain a spectator for good.

He also developed new ideas and patterns for his "Project of Jewish Education." With projects like "Bar Mitzvah: Training Camp of Jewish Wisdom," he hopes to help more Chinese children get an opportunity not merely to learn Jewish wisdom but also to know God. The interviewer referred to He Xiongfei as "the doyen of Jewish education in China."

Another popular book is *The 101 Business Secrets in Jews' Notebook* by Zhu Xin Yue. It suggests that the Jews' systematic experience and knowledge are part of their secret for creating wealth. In addition, Jews are born with the ability to make money.

There is a classic saying that 'the world's money is in the pocket of Americans while the Americans' money is in the pocket of Jews.'...For smart Jews, everything has its own value, and everything can be regained except priceless wisdom...The most important point is Jews' attitude toward money. In their view, money is the gift for God rather than something shameful. You can get respect, high social status with enough money.

Other popular book titles include *The Secret of Talmud: The Jewish Code of Wealth* by Jiao Yiyang; *Secret of Jewish Success: Ten Commandments of Jewish Success* by Li Huizhen; *Stranger from Mars: Nobel Prize and Jews* by Yang Jianye; *Voice of Wisdom: Speeches of Jewish Celebrities* by Yu Xin; and *Jewish Conspiracy of Destroying the World* by Zhang Daquan.

Most of the Chinese authors who write about Jews really don't know much about them. They use the success of Jews, especially in business and education, to promote values the Chinese traditionally cherish, such as hard work and knowledge or, in China's burgeoning market economy, get-

ting rich. Perhaps the Chinese are fascinated by the characteristics they see in Jews that correspond to their own concepts and outlooks.

Some of the books available in China have been translated from English, including Jack Rosen's *Jews: The Secrets to their Success*. Many other books about Jews that are popular in China have been translated from Japanese. Japan, like China, has had a long fascination with the Jews and also has virtually no Jewish population. Best-selling books blame international Jewish cartels and conspiracies for Japan's economic problems. Masami Uno, a leading Japanese anti-Semite, has sold more than one million copies of two books, *If You Understand the Jews, You Will Understand the World* and *If You Understand Jews, You Will Understand Japan*.

Best-selling Chinese books have been filled with outrageous claims about Jews for decades. Most of the claims create a positive attitude about Jews, but they also perpetuate stereotypes and misunderstandings about how Jews make money and raise their children.

In recent years, however, much of China's popular discussion on Jews and Judaism has appeared on blogs. In a July 2012 blog titled "Jewish Education," Wang War writes that the "Jewish nation is the world's smartest, richest and most mysterious nation." He cites Marx, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and Mendelssohn as "Jewish gurus," notes the high number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners, and praises Jewish success at business. "Seventy percent of world trade is controlled by the Jews," he writes, and Jews account for 25 percent of the 400 richest Americans. "It is said that most of the world's wealth is in the pockets of the Jews," writes Wang.

One of the main sources of Jews' success, according to Wang, is education. Learning and education are "spiritual beliefs," he writes, and part of the "national spirit." In Israel, Wang writes, pregnant women are always singing, playing the piano, and reading from mathematics textbooks. He also writes about the myth that Jewish mothers place a drop of honey on the

Bible and have their young children lick it off so they learn the Bible is sweet. In "How to Train Children to Study Jewish," another blogger writes that "in every Jewish family, shortly after birth, the mother would read 'the Bible' (Hebrew Bible) to him. And after reading each paragraph, let the child lick honey. When a child is slightly bigger, the mother will present the 'Bible' with little drops of honey on top, then have the child lick honey off." (A similar myth is repeated in evangelical Christian websites.)

Wang also writes about the respect Jews have for teachers: "In the Jewish community, teachers are even more important than the father. If both father and teacher are sent to jail and only one person can be rescued, then the child will decide to rescue the teacher, because teachers impart knowledge in the Jewish community."

A similar blog, "How to Train Children to Study Jewish," repeats these myths. The author, who is not identified, writes that "in ancient times, many Jewish cemeteries were often stocked with a variety of books, because the Jews believe that in the dead of night, dead people will come out reading, which of course is impossible. But it has a certain symbolic significance: even at the end of life there is a never-ending quest for knowledge." (This is apparently based on a misunderstanding of the Jewish custom of burying damaged prayer books and sacred documents.)

The blog also notes: "The Jews are indeed a great race and account for America's 200 most influential celebrities, Jews account more than half of the 100 Nobel laureates; one-third of the professors at prestigious universities in the United States; one quarter of the nation's lawyers; 60 percent of the nation's leading writers of literature, drama, and music; and one half of the world's richest entrepreneurs and one-third of the millionaires in the United States."

Although many of the blogs are exaggerated or false in their praise of the Jews, some seem openly anti-Semitic. One recent blog suggests the Germans traditionally hated Jews because they believed the Jews killed

Jesus but in Hitler's time they despised Jews because of their prosperity. Another blogger wrote that Germans believed Communism was the beginning of a Jewish conspiracy to conquer Germany and the rest of the world.

Stereotypes about Jewish wisdom are common topics in Chinese blogs. Blogger Zhou Biao speculated in October 2009 as to why so many Jews have won Nobel Prizes in science and literature. (The Jewish Virtual Library notes that 193 of the 855 Nobel Prize honors have been Jewish [about 22 percent] since the prize was first awarded in 1901. Jews make up less than 0.2 percent of the world's population.) Zhou Biao suggested that "misfortune" is probably the reason. He notes that Jews [actually, ancient Hebrews] were slaves in Assyria and Babylon and that their cities were destroyed by the Roman Empire and they were driven out.

"Later in the Middle Ages," Zhou Biao wrote, "they had to survive in the Islamic world and Europe ruled by Christianity where their legal and political status were very low, many rights were deprived of, even sometimes they might suffer expulsion and genocide. Faced with the difficult situation which lasted for at least two thousand years, they were forced to develop a unique lifestyle."

He then discussed Medieval Europe and how Jews did not have the right to own land and that "forced them to turn to more knowledgeable and skillful industries, such as the handicraft industry, financial industry and so on..." Jews used their savings, he wrote, to develop the lending industry and, "because of their instability and high risk, the decent middle class despised them."

In the capitalist era, Zhou Biao wrote, "the inferior position of the Jews can quickly turn into a huge advantage." He compared this with unemployed and educated youths in China who succeeded under Chinese economic reforms in the late twentieth century. "The Jews are the pioneers of business and they have done business for two thousand years," he wrote.

Zhou Biao argues that Jews did not have financial support from states or other organizations but succeeded because they were "far from power, casting off the control and keeping tolerance and independence."

Another blogger, Liu Kai, discussed the "unique family education" of the Jews in his posting. For the Jews, he writes, "their property is not money but books since books are carriers of knowledge... [E]very Jewish child likes reading. When they grow up, parents put books everywhere to make sure that their children could reach them anytime."

In his blog post "Why are Jews so clever?" Gao Feng suggests that diet and "fetal education" are keys to Jewish success. He notes that "all Jews firmly believe when meat and fish are mixed together, it will do harm to their body."

Stereotypes and misinformation about Jews remain widespread in China. But they seem to have inspired admiration for Jews, rather than anti-Semitism. Despite the lack of a significant Jewish presence in China, Jews remain a model for success.

James Ross is an associate professor of journalism and Jewish Studies at Northeastern University in Boston. He is co-editor of *The Image of Jews in Contemporary China*.

Nightfall over Shanghai by Daniel Kalla

Reviewed by Dr. Bev Friend

Nightfall over Shanghai, Daniel Kalla's third and final installment of his trilogy on the harrowing history of Jewish refugees in wartime

Shanghai has been well worth the wait.

We return to the lives of dedicated Dr. Franz Adler, a secular Austrian Jew; his wife Soon Yi (Sunny), his teen-aged daughter Hannah, and the devastating world their friends and neighbors are

forced to endure. Now, against amazing odds, the doctor ministers to the maimed and burned in understaffed, under-supplied, miserable refugee and military hospitals. He is often separated from his vulnerable family, whose daily life is equally as grim and tenuous

The three books can stand separately, but it is very gratifying to move through one to the other, watching lives unfold as the characters triumph over adversity. The tale is now complete.

The first novel, *The Far Side of the Sky*, opened with "Kristelnacht" in 1938 and set the background for what followed. The second, *Rising Sun, Falling Shadow*, took place in 1943 when the Jews were under full control of the hostile Japanese and the impetus of Nazi moves to exterminate them. Now, the culminating book, *Night over Shanghai*, lingers in the darkness before the dawn, moving from 1944 to the war's end and a bit beyond.

As the time-line tightens, so does the narrative, moving between horror and release as the history of these people ebbs and flows. Readers move between despair and hope—back and forth and back again. The story is always exciting—and always moving. It is impossible not to care about and agonize over these people, and impossible to put the book down.

Kalla captures the angst of these terrible times in cliff-hanger moments, shaping fiction to mirror the reality of those days as his characters interact with sadistic real villains—most especially the self-proclaimed, "King of the Jews," the Japanese madman, Ghoya.

Throughout, the promise of Zionism shines through the "night"—in the hopes and gradually realized dreams of those who suffer so terribly. For all the horror, there is a sigh of relief at the series' end.

All three books are available from Amazon in hard cover, paperback and kindle editions.

Recommended.

中國-猶太學院

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The Sino-Judaic Institute is a non-denominational, non-profit, and non-political organization, founded on June 27, 1985, in Palo Alto, California, by an international group of scholars and lay persons, to promote friendship and understanding between the Chinese and Jewish peoples and to encourage and develop their cooperation in matters of mutual historical and cultural interest. Its objectives are:

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