



Crisis in Kaifeng

Mea Culpa

By Anson Laytner

Mea culpa. It is all my fault. I deliberately chose to break the institutional silence that everyone from Shavei Israel to the Sino-Judaic Institute to China-Judaic Studies Association even to the Kaifeng Jewish community had been observing for close to a year.

I did it because Elinor Fuks, a well-intentioned reporter from Mako, an Israeli online journal, asked me for information about how Pesach is being observed in Kaifeng so that she could include them in an article about Jewish communities around the world. Knowing what the community was going through, I chose to tell her the truth and disregard the wishes of the Kaifeng community.

Freed from my silence, on 28 April I wrote a blog for The Times of Israel that broke the news to the English-reading world that the Jewish community in Kaifeng was in trouble with certain Chinese authorities. On 3 May, writing in The Forward, Sam Kastenbaum elaborated on my article reaching a still wider audience, and on 11 May, Dave Gordon, writing in Ami Magazine, broadened the information still further.

Earlier, through Barnaby Yeh, Kaifeng representatives had let us know that they wanted us not to raise their situation publicly or through our channels with Chinese officials but rather to keep quiet and join them in waiting for the situation to pass. That was a year ago. A year later, nothing had changed; if anything, conditions seemed to be getting worse. After receiving a distressing report from Barnaby, I decide to speak up.

I hope I made the right decision. Only time will tell.

It is hard to believe how radically different the situation in Kaifeng is today from a year before.

A year ago, in April 2015, about 50 members of the nascent Jewish community of Kaifeng, China gathered in a hotel banquet room for a Passover seder. Barnaby Yeh, a Jewish Chinese American representing SJI, led the seder in Hebrew and Chinese. Even a local city official attended. The unique event received worldwide attention after it was covered by The New York Times (6 April 2015). Shavei Israel also ran a well-attended seder of its own.

But by Pesach 2016, Barnaby Yeh was persona non grata in Kaifeng; the Jewish center had been shuttered; foreign Jewish tour groups are not permitted there; the Sino-Judaic Institute's educational program has been suspended; security forces are

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Open Letter to SJI

By Some Kaifeng Jews via Barnaby Yeh

Around the time when You Qing appeared in an immigration court in New York, there were concurrently some police visits and crackdowns in Kaifeng, which targeted myself and those who were associated with me. I was in Israel at the time, so I avoided the full brunt. Nevertheless, it was deduced (largely from the oddly specific targets and non-targets) that the family of You Qing had been making reports to the police. In Chinese society, where there is no rule of law, police only seek individuals either on a whim or if someone informs them.

At the same time, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer's tour group was barred from entering Kaifeng. This was the point when news of this incident reached Western ears. As more parties heard of this news, they either leaped to assumptions or demanded explanations. Many were ready to swing the hammer of persecution prematurely without knowledge of facts on the ground. In response, major players in the community of Jewish descendants gathered together and drafted this letter clarifying the situation, including pointing out the real culprits and reaffirming the community's loyalty to the Chinese government.

You Qing goes by Sarah Liwei on Facebook. She arrived in the US on a tourist visa and has overstayed since, and presumably been granted asylum by the immigration court. Her last whereabouts were in Flushing, NY, and it is rumored that her son, Sun Youtian, has also immigrated, legal or otherwise. Her niece, You Yeheng, is also here illegally with her husband, Zhu He. This family has caused irreparable harm to the community of descendants of Kaifeng Jews and must be held accountable.

If any of you has any whereabouts of You Qing and/or her family please inform us, as well as Immigration and Customs Enforcement at the Department of Homeland Security.

Barnaby Yeh

The Letter

It has been clearly investigated that it was Kaifeng Jews Li Xiurong "Aviv", You Yong "Yoel", You Qing "Sarah", and Peng Wenxia "Neta" (being one family) [hereafter the You Family] who informed to the Kaifeng City Police Department.

1. The main information given out to police was that not only Barnaby Yeh was proselytizing in Kaifeng, but also that Li Bo, Li Suisheng, Li Wei, Li Xin, Bai Xiaojuan, Gao Chao, Jin Guangzhong, Shi Mingxia, and Ai Zhenshui are the organizers of Kaifeng Jewry, having organized Passover celebrations and learning

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FROM THE EDITOR

Letters from the Kaifeng Jewish community to Western Jews have been few and far between, but this issue features a fiery denunciation by some community members of one of their own along with a plea for us to be more discerning in how we use our money there.

It’s sad that this is what we have to hear from them, particularly at this time of crisis, but it points to problems endemic to the Kaifeng Jewish community. Anyone who has spent time there will hear allegations of financial chicanery, conversion to either Christianity or Islam, and other assorted misdeeds leveled against those who have assumed leadership positions—which is not to dismiss the allegations, merely to note a pattern. From the time of Moses on, it has been a thankless task to be a Jewish leader, and apparently all the more so in Kaifeng.

In an attempt to make lemonade from the lemons we’ve been handed, I suggest that we take encouragement from the fact that they actually have taken collective action instead of just complaining endlessly to visitors. Now the descendants need to take responsibility for their future by organizing themselves effectively as a community in order to recreate a native Chinese Judaism and then to convince the authorities to recognize it and them. What they need is a Jewishly knowledgeable person from the community who is able to meld this factionalized community into a single unit, a kehillah. At this point, one of the Kaifeng men that Shavei Israel took to Israel could fulfill this role, assuming the people would let him lead without impediment. But is there, in fact, such a man willing to step up?

The Chinese authorities have made it clear that what had been the status quo no longer applies. We cannot continue the intermittent paternalistic century-long effort to “save” the Kaifeng Jews and they need to act independently, collectively and proactively. The golden rule of liberation is: “Do for yourselves what no one else can do for you.” And as Hillel said: “If not now, when?”

Anson Laytner

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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Taiwan	1
Total:	222

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I have read the excellent article by Jordan Paper, "The Issue of the Jewishness of the Chinese Jewish Magistrates" in the March 2016 issue of Points East.

I was astounded, however, at one statement in said article namely: "This ancient wall [the Wailing 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)."

While all agree that the Wailing Wall is a retaining wall, no one, including no reputable archeologist, suggests that the Temple was not located on the Temple Mount. We would like to see where the author obtained his information from?

Yours very truly,

David C. Buxbaum

Dr. Paper responds: My major source is the following. I personally find the arguments persuasive, although, of course, it is controversial: www.askelm.com/temple/t001211.htm.

In the Field

● Xu Seen

Bev Friend writes about the travels of the indefatigable Xu Xin.

Even before he headed for the US, Xu Xin zipped over to Israel from May 31 to June 2. While there, he met with Dr. Zahan, Vice President of Bar Ilan University; Prof. Rein, Vice President of Tel Aviv University; and members of the Council of Higher Education of Israel. The purpose was to sign the agreement for what is informally known as Seven plus Seven (signifying seven institutions of higher education both in Israel and in China) and more formally known as The Chinese National Institute for Jewish Studies.

Xu left Israel June 2 to be in New York June 4 to attend the American Jewish Committee (AJC) Global Forum where he joined 2,700 delegates from 70 countries to exchange ideas and celebrate the 110th anniversary of the organization. Following this, he headed to Los Angeles to attend a Nanjing University Alumni of North America meeting.

Then, he headed for Chicago.

On the evening of June 11, he arrived in Chicago and began two days filled with family activities with Bev Friend and family. He also met with Steve Hoch-

stadt, professor of history at Illinois College and author of many scholarly works including *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich*, and *Death and Love in the Holocaust*, as well as being Treasurer of the Sino Judaic Institute; and Danny Spungen, compiler of the Spungen Holocaust Postal Collection and originator of the Jews of China Shanghai Memorial Medal. That evening, Xu gave a talk on the new liaison with Israel, what currently is happening in Kaifeng, and the future of Judaic Studies in China. Among the guests were longtime friend, colleague, and China travel coordinator Ken Lubowich and Rabbi Neil Brief—who led the first American tour to Kaifeng about 30 years ago.

On Tuesday, Xu dashed back to Los Angeles where he met with AJC members as well as with John Fishel, manager of the Diane and Guilford Foundation, which funds the Judaic and Israeli Institute at Nanjing University.

● Mazal tov, Kehilat Shanghai!

Dan Krassenstein, of Kehilat Shanghai, writes that the Shanghai Hongkou District Foreign Affairs Office has again granted permission for the Reform Jewish community (Kehilat Shanghai) to use the synagogue for its Rosh HaShanah morning service. Last year, at that same service, the community dedicated its new Torah, which had been donated by a Liberal/Reform synagogue in Brazil.

● Shanghai Jewish Refugees Exhibit in Prague

Danny Spungen informs us that an exhibit featuring Jewish refugees in Shanghai has opened at the Jewish Museum in Prague.

The exhibit is told mainly through the photographs of American photojournalist Arthur Rothstein, who took 22 photos of the Hongkew Ghetto in April 1946. In addition to these photos, there are artifacts and footage of the Jews 1941 arrival in Shanghai. The VHA is utilized in reels that play clips of testimony of refugees who escaped to Shanghai.

The "Stranded in Shanghai" curators hope that by including the testimony of the refugees themselves, they will allow the protagonists to tell their own story, rather than simply telling it through Rothstein, an outsider. The exhibit will be on display until September 11. For more information go to: <http://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/program-and-education/exhibits/852/>.

Israeli-Chinese University R&D Centers Blossom in China

By David Shamah, Excerpted from *The Times of Israel*, 6 April 2016

For the second time in a week, an Israeli university has announced a major new project with a Chinese institution of higher learning.

On Tuesday, the University of Haifa said it would establish a joint laboratory building on the campus of East China Normal University (ECNU), the largest university in Shanghai. The lab will specialize in research in ecology, big data, biomedicine, and neurobiology. The building will be funded entirely by the Chinese government, the University of Haifa said.

The deal was similar to one announced last week by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, which said it was establishing a joint center for entrepreneurship and innovation with Jilin University (JLU), the biggest university in China...

Neither can take credit for being the first Israeli institution to open an R&D center in China. In December, the Technion laid the cornerstone for its new research center in the southern Chinese city of Shantou. The Guangdong Technion Israel Institute of Technology (GTIIT) will be located on a 330,000 square meter campus and is to be paid for by the richest man in China, Li Ka Shing, who donated \$130 million for the project. And in 2014, Tel Aviv University said that it would establish the XIN Research Center with Beijing's Tsinghua University, to research early stage and mature technologies in biotech, solar energy, water, and environmental technologies.

Over the past five years or so, business relations between Israel and China have blossomed. "The Chinese – investors and governments alike – are realizing that a tech economy, like the one Israel has, is their best growth option, and in the coming years, this is going to be good news for both Israelis and Chinese," according to Andrew Zhang, a consultant who has engineered numerous deals between some of China's biggest banks and tech firms and Israeli start-ups.

Chinese leaders realize that "the era of rapid growth based on industrial production and government infrastructure spending has come to an end, and right now there is nothing to replace it. The only viable replacement for these growth vehicles is high-tech, and that is one reason China is very interested in Israel," said Zhang. He added that officials there have figured out that it's more efficient to bring Israeli R&D to China than to schlep out to Israel – hence the spate of university-level research centers announced in recent months...

Mea Culpa

(continued from page 1)

keeping a vigilant eye on community members; and we had second-hand reports that the authorities had removed all commemorative signage regarding the old Jewish neighborhood.

After my article appeared in *The Times of Israel*, I was contacted by Mark Ellison, a Jew from Hong Kong who had visited Kaifeng in March 2016. He confirmed what Barnaby Yeh had reported: that the street sign marking the old Jewish quarter is now only in Chinese and transliteration, the English translation has been removed; that markers commemorating the Jewish area had been removed; that the “Jewish well” abutting the site of the synagogue has been filled in and built over; that the Municipal Museum is now refusing access to the famous stelae stored on its third floor and its small permanent exhibit on the Jews in Kaifeng has now been dismantled; and that the Kaifeng Guildhall (Shan Shan Gan), which has an exhibit on the various communities of Kaifeng, has removed all traces of its presentation on the Kaifeng Jews, which included a brief history of the Jewish community in Chinese and a photo of one of the tablets. Taken together with what we knew already, it was clear that a major suppression of Jewish identity was taking place in Kaifeng. Both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *South China Morning Post* tried to speak with some Kaifeng Jews but none was willing to go on the record. They

were all too intimidated to speak out.

What has been happening in Kaifeng, Ellison noted, “is in distinct contrast to Shanghai and Harbin, where Jewish museums have been established, and Jewish heritage is an important tourism angle.” China also has long touted its treatment of Jews, both those Western communities to the east and the one in Kaifeng. This clearly is no longer the case in Kaifeng where, apparently, some authorities in China want all traces of Jewish identity obliterated, regardless of any economic advantage that could be derived from tourism.

What led to this drastic change?

In my *Times of Israel* blog, I identified three possible reasons for the crackdown.

The first possibility was the seder itself, or rather the international attention that it drew. Since the opening-up of China in the 1980s, Jewish life in Kaifeng has operated best when it has gone unnoticed. This is because Chinese officials at various levels are divided about how to handle the tiny community. On the one hand, some in the local government want to encourage a revival of the Jewish community in order to stimulate tourism and improve the local economy. On the other hand, the United Front, which operates locally, provincially and nationally, adheres to a 1953 central government directive that regards the Chinese Jews now as part of the Han nationality. According to this rationale, the foreign

media attention drew the ire of the latter group, which then moved to suppress continued expressions of Jewish communal cultural life. However, since we are not privy to the thinking of the United Front, this remains only a theory. There have been dozens of articles written in newspapers all over the world about the Kaifeng Jews without precipitating such a harsh reaction. Why is this story different from all other stories?

A second factor to consider was the immigration of 5 Kaifeng women to Israel in March of this year, accompanied by significant media coverage in the Israel and the Diaspora. This too could have enflamed those authorities in China who prefer to see Jewish identity in Kaifeng wither, who might fear that the immigration of these women, the first group brought to Israel by the organization *Shavei Israel* in 7 years, would perpetuate a renewed sense of Jewish identity among the Kaifeng Jews even if only to seek a better life in Israel. However, it should be noted that the suppression of Jewish life in Kaifeng began well before this event and, although it may have contributed to the continued crackdown, it should also be pointed out that back in October 2009, 7 men from the community came to live in Israel without any reprisals back in Kaifeng.

But the third and most plausible explanation for the crackdown is that the authorities were reacting to a claim for political asylum, on grounds of religious persecution, filed by a Kaifeng Jewish woman in an American court. [See related article “page 1” in this issue.] In this scenario, the authorities were rightfully infuriated by this specious charge and decided to punish the entire community for the action of this one individual, thinking that it had been a serious miscalculation to continue with the more open policy that had been allowed to flourish. Hers was a deed that may have provided the United Front with the opening it needed to return to the pre-1980 status quo, one that denied the existence of a Jewish presence in Kaifeng, past or present.

Whatever the actual reason for the current suppression of Jewish cultural life in Kaifeng, I felt it was time to break the silence about it. There are those who rightly point out that what is occurring in Kaifeng is probably part of the government’s overall crackdown on religions and dissent. Furthermore, the crackdown against SJI and *Shavei Israel* may be part



The former exhibit on the Kaifeng Jews at the Shan Shan Gan. Photo by Mark Ellison.

of the national government's moves to limit Western influences. It recently passed a law to restrict the work of foreign organizations and their local partners. More than 7,000 foreign non-governmental groups may be affected. Perhaps ours have the distinction of being restricted before the law even came into being.

But there is no justification whatsoever for the government's action against the entire community because of one woman's action based on her personal situation. I am sure that her motivation to move to America was simply in order to better her life and she chose a means that best would guarantee a favorable outcome (which it did), even if it was duplicitous. But instead of closing things down, the authorities should have allowed the Jewish community to thrive even more in order to prove to the world that there is no religious persecution in Kaifeng.

It is a sad irony that, whatever the precipitating cause for the crackdown, the situation in Kaifeng now justifies her asylum application after the fact. How many times have the hopes of the Kaifeng Jews been raised up only to have them smacked down? Perhaps it is time for a mass aliyah of Kaifeng Jews to Israel as Shavei Israel has long proposed?

But when it comes to making a mea culpa, SJI and Shavei Israel also have to admit culpability. Both our organizations acted inappropriately. First of all, it should be noted that Judaism is not a legal, i.e. recognized, official religion in China. It is fine for foreign Jews to practice it; not fine for Chinese citizens to do so. Second, the Chinese national government does not consider the Kaifeng descendants to be Jews in any way, only to be of Jewish ancestry, as per the 1953 document. Consequently, these "Han" Chinese were trying to practice an "illegal" religion. Our organizations disagreed on the principle that, given the history of the Kaifeng Jews since the early 20th century, those descendants who still maintained a sense of Jewish identity should have to opportunity to learn about their heritage and then decide if they wanted to pursue a more active Jewish life or remain content with being Han Chinese of Jewish descent. So we set about to educate some of them and help them organize as a community. Where we believed we were simply educating a group of Jewish descendants to

live both individually and collectively as Jews, some Chinese authorities saw yet another foreign organization working with Han Chinese citizens to promote an illegal religion. In their eyes, we were guilty of the crime of proselytizing.

What we did was wrong. Rather than working in Kaifeng under the radar (to the extent that this is possible to do in China), we ought to have sought out the appropriate authorities, clarified perspectives and plans, and gotten approval in advance. Instead, we took the easy way in.

But guilt, like hindsight, is 20/20 and casting blame does no good. The powers that be have instituted the first official suppression of Jewish life in Chinese history. This is sad beyond words. We can only hope that it is short-lived and an aberration.

What can be done? It is still not too late for SJI and Shavei Israel to make the case to Chinese authorities that we are not trying to convert Chinese people to Judaism; that we are simply trying to provide Jewish educational and cultural opportunities to interested Jewish descendants in Kaifeng. It is still not too late for us to bring young Jewish descendants to Israel or elsewhere to study so that they can return and educate their own people without our help. And it is still not too late for the Kaifeng Jewish descendants to set aside their differences, show some independence and initiative, and take steps to determine their own future.

But it definitely was time, in my opinion, to speak up about the situation in Kaifeng. Some, including members of the Kaifeng community, argue that the best strategy is simply to wait for things to change in China. It is true that sooner or later all things do come to pass but sometimes one has to disregard the actual wishes of the group involved to effect more immediate results. I recognize that the Kaifeng Jewish descendants are fearful of more repression but I spoke up because sometimes an external perspective is a better one in the long-term, their immediate fears notwithstanding. After waiting for more than a year, I felt it was time to shine a light on the situation there because their very survival as Jews is at stake, because it is always good to shine a light on injustice and the denial of hu-

man rights, and because I honestly believe that the Jewish communal revival in Kaifeng is too fragile just to wait out the current crisis.

And it is also time for the Chinese national government to step in and stop this repression. It is time for us to come to an understanding about this tiny group and not let our differences taint good Jewish-Chinese relations. Ideally, China should enable the Kaifeng Jewish descendants to continue to learn about their Jewish heritage even as they continue to live as Han Chinese—or it should let them leave to go live as Jews in Israel. Ideally, China should herald the fact that it has never persecuted its Jewish community much as it celebrates its having served as a refuge for European Jews fleeing the Nazis. Ideally it should promote the historic Jewish presence in Kaifeng just as it does those in Shanghai and Harbin. Only good would come from such a decision. It would be an act of kindness for the Kaifeng Jews, economically beneficial for all of Kaifeng and good for China as a whole in so many ways.

Malaysia's Anti-Semitic Attitudes

By Jon Emont

Excerpted from *Tablet Magazine*,
8 February 2016
www.tabletmag.com

Malaysia is in political and economic crisis as it has been, now, for many months, due to a huge and still unresolved corruption scandal featuring a mysterious \$700 million that was transferred into a bank account belonging to the country's Prime Minister Najib Razak. The money arrived just before a hotly contested 2013 national election, which saw Najib's United Malay National Organization (UMNO) triumph by a whisker. Where this money came from is anyone's guess. The Wall Street Journal, which first uncovered the scandal, reported that it came from the 1MDB, a Malaysian state development fund, which is now many billions of dollars in debt. Malaysia's Attorneys General Office, in a recent report, insisted that the money wasn't looted from a state institution and that the \$700 million was actually a gift from the Saudi royal family.

But this, needless to say, isn't a very good

explanation. Even assuming the money did come from the Saudi royal family, why would the prime minister be receiving such a princely sum from foreign royalty on the eve of an election campaign? It's hard to imagine someone dispatching \$700 million without expecting anything in return. (The Attorneys General Report did not explain why the Saudi royal family would be motivated to make such a generous donation.) But as Aziz Kaprawi, division head of the United Malay Party Leader and deputy head of the Transportation Ministry, explained, the prince did expect something in return. "If we had lost [the 2013 election], [rival political party] DAP would be in power. DAP with its Jewish funding would control this country. Based on that, our Muslim friends in the Middle East could see the Jewish threat through DAP." According to this account, the mysterious Arab prince had sent \$700 million to the prime minister's bank account for a cause that any average Malaysian might be expected to understand, even sympathize with: to protect Malaysia from the Jews.

As this bit of Malaysian current events trivia suggests, blaming Jews for all manner of machinations, crimes, and failures is a normal part of Malaysian politics, even though very few of the country's citizens have ever laid eyes on a Jew. While Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country of 30 million, nestled just south of Thailand, had a minuscule Jewish population that mostly emigrated decades ago, it still has a very active history of selecting leaders who make anti-Semitic remarks. Mahathir Mohamed, Malaysia's prime minister from 1981 to 2003, gained international notoriety (as well as, in some circles, approbation) for his 2003 speech at the Organization of the Islamic Conference, where he suggested that while Jews and Muslims were natural enemies, "1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews." He also noted that, "The Europeans killed 6 million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule the world by proxy."

Malaysian leaders' anti-Semitism has trickled down. A 2014 ADL survey found that more than 60 percent of Malaysians exhibited anti-Semitic beliefs, making Malaysia the most anti-Semitic country surveyed in Asia outside of the Middle East. Michael Salberg, the Director of International Affairs at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) said, "There is a decades long tradition of political leaders in Malaysia defaulting to anti-Semitic tropes to explain all kinds of social, political, and economic circumstances. It is classical scapegoating, deflect-

ing responsibility to an unseen hand."

The Penang Jewish Cemetery, established in 1805, is the oldest Jewish cemetery in South East Asia. Tucked behind gray decaying buildings in Georgetown, Penang's capital, this small, nearly immaculate plot is tended by a Hindu Indian caretaker, Rajim, who brushes fallen coconuts from the graves. He is about 70 years old, plump, with a slight hunch, dressed in a sarong. He also sports an impressive white handlebar mustache that moves up and down as he guides me through the cemetery's history in a local patois of Malay and English. Members of his family have been caretakers of the Jewish graves for generations, he explains, as he shows me the oldest grave, of a Shoshana Levi, interred on July 9, 1835.

There are about 110 graves here, marking the lives of the Jewish British colonialists and Middle Eastern Jewish traders who had settled in Penang over the centuries. Shuffling slowly along, Rajim takes me to the gravestone of Mordechai David Mordechai, buried in 2011. When Mordechai died he was, to the best of anyone's knowledge, the last Jew on the island—quite possibly the last practicing Jew in Malaysia, though in Kuala Lumpur, the capital down south, there are doubtless some foreign Jewish expat workers (and at least one Jewish-American journalist).

Anti-Jewish prejudice in Malaysia did not develop in response to the tiny population of Jews who lived here but instead was tuned to the frequencies of a Muslim world that saw the rise of Israel—and the subjugation of the Palestinians—as their religion's great humiliation. According to Daniel Chirot, Professor of International Studies at the University of Washington, since the Iraq War, global anti-Semitic discourse has focused on the ways that Jews use political proxies to fulfill their geopolitical goals: This idea is present in the claim that Jews are using rival political parties as proxies to dismantle the Muslim Malaysian state.

But Malaysian anti-Semitism cannot simply be explained by the influence of globalized Islam on the country's politics. For one, only 60 percent of the country is Muslim. Indonesia, Malaysia's neighbor, has a population that is 90 percent Muslim, but anti-Semitic beliefs are much less prevalent, according to the ADL survey, and mainstream Indonesian politicians do not have the same history of blaming their country's problems on the Jews. Michael

Salberg of the ADL agreed that the issue was not simply one of Muslim anti-Semitism and instead is deeply rooted in Malaysian society.

Malaysian hasbara [public relations/propaganda] makes the country out as a racial paradise. In "Malaysia: Truly Asia" the Malaysian Tourism Ministry's campaign to woo visitors to Malaysia, advertisements promise visitors a "multi-cultural harmony," as images of Buddhist temples and indigenous tribes flash past. "The wonders of Asia in one exciting destination," the campaign promises. Najib Razak, the country's embattled prime minister, promotes Malaysia as a country enjoying exemplary racial harmony. But Malaysia is not actually a racial paradise, and the corruption scandal enveloping the country has only thrown this into sharper relief.

Najib's political party, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) has ruled since independence, on a platform that guarantees affirmative action benefits to the Malay Muslim majority, whom the country's constitution refers to as "sons of the soil." Roughly 50 percent of Malaysia is Malay Muslim, roughly 20 percent is Chinese, another 7 percent is Indian, with indigenous and other minorities making up the rest: "Sons of the soil"—i.e., the Malay Muslim majority or plurality—receive free state education, preferential access to government jobs and a wide range of benefits from the state that are denied to the country's ethnic minorities. This system of affirming the majority reduces non-Malay Malaysians to permanent second-class status, regardless of how many generations their families have lived in Malaysia.

Though formal state privileges accrue only to the Malay majority, the country's ethnic Chinese dominate many sectors of the Malaysian economy. Ethnic Chinese, many of whom came to Malaysia as traders, continue to maintain extensive business networks with the Chinese mainland and are criticized by Malay nationalists for exploiting the country's wealth for themselves. As a result, violence has periodically erupted against ethnic Chinese traders throughout Malaysia's modern history, most notably in 1969, when 150 ethnic Chinese were murdered in race riots.

There are strong similarities between the prejudice that the Jewish "entrepreneurial minority" faced in Europe and the one faced by ethnic Chinese throughout South East Asia. In both cas-

es, heightened senses of nationalism in host countries in the 20th century led to systematic persecution of the “entrepreneurial minority” based on accusations that the minority was abusing its host country’s generosity and exploiting locals for its community’s own benefits. (The parallels are explored in a fascinating book of essays co-edited by Chirot: *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of South East Asia and Central Europe.*) In contrast to prejudice against the Chinese, prejudice against ethnic-Indian citizens of Malaysia takes the form of stereotypes that they cause crime and drink too much.

After the Wall Street Journal reported the appearance of \$700 million in the prime minister’s bank account, the Bersih (Clean) protest movement was jump-started in major cities throughout Malaysia. At its peak a hundred thousand yellow-shirted Bersih protesters rallied for days in Kuala Lumpur, calling for Prime Minister Najib to step down and for Malaysia’s culture of corruption to be ended. But the protesters were drawn largely from the country’s Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities, denying the protests the broad base they would need to force Najib to step down. Even the surprise appearance of Mahathir Mohamed, who served as prime minister for 22 years, in support of the protesters, has not permanently dented Najib’s standing.

Instead, Najib counterattacked. He shifted the issue from his own alleged corruption to that of “Malay dignity,” arguing, in a mid-September speech before crowds of pro-government “red-shirt” protesters, that Malaysia’s minorities had to learn to respect Malay institutions and leaders. “Slapped once, we [Malays] did not do anything. The second time ... nothing ... the third time ... nothing ... but the fourth time had crossed the limit. Malays also have rights,” he thundered. “The Malays will stand up when their pride is scarred, when their leader is insulted, condemned, and humiliated.”

During the tense days surrounding the Red Shirt rally there were a number of anti-Chinese provocations. Malay protesters called Chinese reporters “pigs,” an offensive slur. Red-shirt rally organizers defended the use of the term, saying that it wasn’t offensive to call ethnic Chinese “pigs,” as the Chinese dietary code had no prohibition against consuming pork. Jamal Md Yunos, the

leader of a separate Malay Dignity Uprising rally, threatened to march with his men to Kuala Lumpur’s Chinatown because, according to him, the Chinese traders did not share their profits with Malaysia’s other races. When, eventually, “Malay dignity” protesters gathered in front of Chinatown they were only dispersed by police water cannon. A red-shirt rally was threatened in Penang, the racially diverse, majority ethnic-Chinese island that once hosted Malaysia’s Jewish community, in response to so-called insults to Malay dignity and Islam. The rally ended up being called off at the last minute but not before Jamal, the Red Shirt leader, suggested that the Chinese community pay his organization \$10 million to guarantee that there wouldn’t be anymore “Malay dignity” rallies staged in Chinese communities.

It was during this precarious period that the Malay political leader Aziz Kaprawi suggested that the political party DAP—the primary political party of the country’s ethnic Chinese, whose platform calls for ending Malay special privileges and establishing a secular state—was funded by Jews. Anthony Loke, DAP’s organizing secretary, denied the charges that DAP received Jewish money, calling them a blatant diversionary tactic. “UMNO leaders are not ashamed to misuse the name of Islam and to ‘defend’ Islam in order to make halal the \$700 million in Najib’s account,” he said.

The claim that DAP, a political party that represents ethnic-Chinese, takes money from Jewish interests, is effective because racist stereotypes of Jews and Chinese in Malaysia are similar. Daniel Chirot says, “The association of secret finance with Chinese is not so difficult to believe, so the association comes naturally. It’s also known that [predominantly ethnic-Chinese] Singapore and Israel are very friendly. All these things can be used.”

The other element is that Najib’s UMNO ruling party is facing challenges from the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, an Islamist party which promotes the use of Islamic law. Despite their major philosophical differences, The Islamic Justice Party and ethnic-Chinese DAP have formed an alliance to challenge the ruling UMNO, so linking DAP with Jewish money could be an attempt to undermine the alliance. According to Daniel Chirot, “The more insecure the ruling party is the more likely it is to use anti-Semitism to counter the opposition.” He described the use

of anti-Semitic rhetoric as an attempt to “out-Muslim” rival political parties.

When I first arrived in Kuala Lumpur, I scheduled interviews with student leaders who were involved in the Bersih Movement to protest Malaysia’s culture of corruption. From the outside Malaysia looks like it’s headed for some type of reckoning, I told them. Where did they think their country was going?

One of the students I met with was Lau Yi Leong, an ethnic Chinese Malaysian activist who had recently been arrested for protesting the government in front of Parliament. He told me that when he was released from the police, he thought his father would be angry at him for making trouble. Instead he found that his father was simply grateful that he was still alive. “If you understand my father’s background, being in Malaysia pre-merdeka [independence], when there was so much racial violence, it turns out he is justified to think like that,” Lau said. But Lau is from a younger generation where the races mingle more freely, and where, thankfully, ethnic-Chinese don’t have to worry they will automatically be beaten or even murdered by the police if they are detained.

When Lau grew up he was determined to think of himself as Malaysian rather than Chinese, but he is now is deeply disillusioned by the state’s role in keeping the races separate. One of the things that made him realize this was falling in love with a Malay girl but not being able to maintain the relationship. “Malay girls are very pretty, we can get along with each other very well. They tend to be very humble, easy-going people. But because of legal regulations we don’t have the opportunity. From the very beginning you understand it’s impossible because of religion,” he said. Muslims in Malaysia are not allowed to convert to different religions, and inter-religious marriage is forbidden, so if he wanted to marry a Malay

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woman he would have to convert to Islam. He considered doing this, but decided he didn't want to be put under the authority of the state's Islamic enforcers.

Lau sees anti-Semitism as a symptom of a wider problem about racial intolerance. "For Malaysia's progressives there is a consensus that there are good Jews and bad Jews, as with any other people. But it's still only a small minority [of Malaysians] that understands that," he adds. Because most Malaysians continue to believe Jews are worse than other people, he said, "If you are anti-government the first label they will put on you is you are sponsored by Jews."

He was determined to continue fighting for a multi-cultural democracy. "People think it's impossible to get rid of Malay supremacy, but for me it's possible as long as we can persuade the majority Malays that there isn't anything scary about giving up their special rights. There is still this fear among them. I don't hate them. I don't hate these radical Malays, because they are a product of the regime. Everyone is born not racist. Racism is a product of the state."

Jon Emont is a journalist based in Southeast Asia. His writing appears in Tablet,

Open Letter

(continued from page 1)

Judaism.

2. The reasons behind [the You Family] informing to the Police Department are as follows:

The You family, in the long term, has claimed the leadership of the Li family and Kaifeng Jewry. Under the pretense of requesting help for Kaifeng Jewish children attending school and the elderly [receiving care for] being sick, they have scammed donations of American and Israeli Jews, as well as Hong Kong and Chinese Christians. The donations made by Barnaby Yeh's organization [the Sino-Judaic Institute] and other foreign Jews directed towards Beit Hatikvah have all been distributed by [members of the You Family], so that Kaifeng Jewish families in difficulty have not received a modicum of assistance.

3. It was Yeh who discovered that [the You Family] have scammed money. [Through proxies,] Yeh warned them time after time, but they have not heeded the

warnings. Thus, Yeh told everyone the situation of the Kaifeng Jewish community, and so all of us support Yeh, and re-organized the school leadership. Thus, [the You Family] had a negative reaction to Yeh! They wanted to expel Yeh from China! They wanted to let the government shut down our school in which we learn Torah!

4. As well, their family is very wealthy! You Qing's [ex-] husband Sun Bing has done business in Africa for a period of over ten years and is very wealthy. You Qing has been in the United States for three years, with a monthly salary of \$4,000 USD. Li Xiurong is a retired factory supervisor/engineer, with a very high retirement fund. You Yong, Peng Wenxia, and You Qing own storefronts in the most luxurious parts of Kaifeng. They have luxury homes in Kaifeng! With such a wealthy family, You Qing's son (Sun Youtian) still requests scholarships from Rabbi Tokayer. Sun Youtian and You Yeheng, the daughter of You Yong, have clearly expressed that they dislike Israel and Judaism. They have only claimed Jewish identity to scam money! They have scammed the help of foreign Jews!

5. The Chinese government has been very good to us. We love China, love the Chinese Communist Party. This time, the Kaifeng police department is only examining the situation! From 1949-1995, during the planned economy era of China, we Kaifeng Jews were given treatment still higher than Han Chinese; we could eat more lamb and grain foods. Using Jewish identity in the university entrance exam could add more points! In China, we have never been oppressed, nor have we ever been persecuted. We Kaifeng Jews could learn Judaism in Kaifeng, and the government has never disallowed the learning of Judaism. According to our understanding, the City Government of Kaifeng still wants to rebuild the Kaifeng Jewish Synagogue, (perhaps as a tourist site,) and the government has always protected our Jewish Synagogue's ruins.

6. Kaifeng Jews are completely opposed to [the You family's] method of informing on Kaifeng Jews. Anything and everything that You Qing has said in the American courts is a lie! In order to get a green card in the United States, she unfeelingly has hurt everything and betrayed the feelings of us Kaifeng Jews! You Qing's mother is called Li Xiurong, and not Li Qiaoyun. You Qing took the identity card of some-

one named Li Qiaoyun, thinking that the race written on the identity card was Jewish. You Qing has claimed Li Qiaoyun as her mother, so You Qing is a scammer! We hope that you Jews will not help You Qing, as if you continue to assist in her lies, the result would be extremely severe.

7. The family of Li Xiurong has done many bad things in the Li family, scamming parents, family, nephew, and brother, as well as scamming [NAME REDACTED] to beat members of the Li family that they dislike.

8. [The You family] was baptized by Christians in Hong Kong in 2009, and Li Xiurong's godson is a Christian pastor named Mr. Wong.

9. Attention! You Yeheng exploited the American organization Kulanu in order to obtain a visa for half a year in the U.S., but after one year she has not returned to China. She has scammed Kulanu. You Yeheng's boyfriend Zhu is not Jewish, but he also claimed to be a Kaifeng Jew in order to go to the U.S. This kind of girl who does not keep promises reflects the scamming nature of Li Xiurong's family.

10. A letter from the Kaifeng Jewish community. We strongly request that you no longer help [the You Family], and do more harm to the Kaifeng Jewish community!

11. Beit Hatikvah, which you have sponsored since 2012, has already merged with Shavei Israel's Kaifeng Jewish community, and Shavei Israel provides for rental and activity fees. All funds of the Kaifeng Jewish community are managed by [the You Family]. It is possible that your organization and Shavei have, together, given them rent and activity fees.

12. Updates

A. [The You Family] had gathered reports of Barnaby Yeh and the Kaifeng Jews' activities in Kaifeng, and wrote up a report to Li Xiuqin (Li Xiurong's third sister) and Si Qingxiang (her husband) so that they would turn in to the government agency. Li Xiuqin and Si Qingxiang had worked in the government agency for a long period, and they have connections with the government. [In China many things rely on connections.]

B. Why Li Xiuqin and Si Qingxiang act in this manner is because they

are the lackeys of Li Xiurong's family, having cooperated with her in order to scam the money of foreign Jews as well as Chinese and Hong Kong Christians. Li Xiuqin is the majority shareholder of Kaifeng's Zhaomazi mall, receiving a monthly income of 20K+ CNY, while Si Qingxiang is a former employee of the national bureaucracy, with retirement funds of 6K+ CNY. Their oldest daughter Si Yi owns the three most luxurious restaurants in Kaifeng: two of A-Wu Meishi Jiudian, and one of Yujingyuan Jiudian. Si Yin's daughter called Bian Siyu is about to take the exam to go to university. The second daughter Si Ji and her husband are bureaucrats, the two of them together receiving an annual salary of \$20K+ USD (considered the highest salary in Kaifeng), and their son is Zhu Dongpo. A family of such opulence in Kaifeng still requests scholarships from American Jews, but they have not contributed a penny of their money in the Kaifeng Jewish community. Please beware of these people who want to scam; we believe we must assist the poor and help those who need help!

Signed by 12 Representatives of the Kaifeng Jewish Community

Let's dance for peace – in Chinese

by Sam Lipski

Excerpted from *The Times of Israel*, 15 May 2016

***Nirkod Lashalom, Nashir Lashalom
Harokdim ba'olam mishpachah
Let's dance for peace, and sing for peace
All the world's dancers are a family***

On the second day of Passover this year, a Hebrew song and its accompanying Israeli dance, composed and choreographed in Melbourne, Australia, made international cultural history.

In Hong Kong.

Which is where a 27-person Chinese choir sang the Mandarin version of Nirkod Lashalom — Let's Dance for Peace, and some 200 performers who danced it came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Macau, and mainland China. Nirkod Lashalom was the opening ceremony's centrepiece in the 2016 World Dance Day festival.

Every year since 1982, when the UNESCO affiliated International Dance Council (CID) introduced World Dance Day, millions of dancers in 170 countries, including Israel, have continued to celebrate it. Every dance form, from classical ballet to hip-hop, from modern dance to ethnic folk, and from tap to jazz, joins the festivities. But this is the first time, as far as my research could establish, that an Israeli dance has featured in a World Dance Day's opening ceremony anywhere outside Israel.

Let me declare a "personal" and family interest. My wife Aura, a professional singer and songwriter, wrote the words and music for Nirkod Lashalom some 18 years ago, together with her late mother Vera Levin.

My mother-in-law was born in Harbin, and grew up in the Shanghai Jewish community. In 1949, as Mao Zedong led the Communist revolution, she moved to Israel, where she developed her passion for Hebrew song and dance, and then to Australia. She returned to Israel in the 1960s, and then resettled in Australia. But her love of both Chinese and Israeli culture was lifelong. So she would have loved seeing how Nirkod Lashalom has taken on new meaning in Chinese.

The Hong Kong connection is also "personal". It began last August after Aura was a guest at the International Symposium for the Preservation and Development of Folk Dance. When she'd returned to Melbourne, Aura's Hong Kong dance-teacher hosts, Hang-Mai Fung and husband Lau Ting-Kwok, who've been to Israel and attended the Karmiel Dance festival, heard her recording of Nirkod Lashalom. As Mai later told me: "We just loved the music". And as the song's message of peace resonated in Chinese as much as in Hebrew, the rest really is history.

But there's a back story. Aura had received the Hong Kong invitation because www.israelidances.com, the website she created and has developed over the past 12 years, has become the "go-to" online home for thousands of dancers in 35 countries. Many of them, such as those in Hong Kong and Singapore, aren't Jewish, and keep up with the ever-expanding Israeli folk-dancing repertoire via the website by following the dances' Hebrew song-titles in translated and transliterated Mandarin Chinese, of which the website lists over a thousand. But that's still only a small percentage of the total Israeli dance repertoire.

That's not a misprint. Israeli folk dance happens to be one of Israel's least known, but more successful "soft power" exports.

Even many Israelis, otherwise knowledgeable about their country's cultural outreach, have only the vaguest idea about the worldwide industry of touring Israeli choreographers, dance camps, conferences, workshops and videos.

Outside Israel, apart from the aficionados, it's rare to come across anybody whose awareness of Israeli dance extends much beyond Hava Nagila and maybe Od Lo Ahavati Dai at bar mitzvahs and weddings. But even in Israel its reach is often under-rated. Although folkdance has a Zionist history that predates 1948, and although the annual Karmiel Dance Festival, with its 80 performances and 5,000 dancers, attracts more than 300,000 visitors, no Israeli has ever come close when I ask how many dances they think there are.

For the record, www.israelidances.com lists the class schedules for 35 countries and detailed information for 8,724 different dances. No joke: 8,724. And that's not even all of them. All the more reason for noting that Nirkod Lashalom has made a name for itself. In Hebrew, 33 other languages, and now certainly in Chinese.

Israeli dance, however, is not new to Hong Kong. The legendary choreographer, Moshe "Moshiko" Yitzhak-Halevy, a veteran of the Yemenite Dance Theatre Inbal and thousands of teaching sessions, visited Hong Kong in 1968. And ever since, the local folk dance groups have included Israeli circle dances, debkas, line dances and partner dances in their weekly sessions...

So it really is special that Mai chose Nirkod Lashalom as the song to open World Dance Day. Granted, my personal bias may be showing again. But then Nirkod Lashalom itself began as something very personal — at a dance camp in New Zealand in 1998. Aura, Vera, and veteran Israeli choreographer, Shmulik Govari, were almost the only Jews there among more than 100 Israeli dance aficionados. The New Zealanders' affection for Israel so moved Vera that she told Aura: "We have to write a song." Which is what they began as they drove around New Zealand, and completed back in Melbourne.

After music producer Martin Splitter arranged the song, Aura recorded it, added it to her website XXX, and with Yehuda Kaplan, then a broadcaster at Australia's Special Broadcasting Service's Hebrew program, had it translated and transliterated into 35 languages, including Chi-

nese. Then nothing much happened for the next 10 years.

Since 2008, however, Nirkod Lashalom has become “The Little Hebrew Song That Could”. It had its “world premiere” in June 2008 at Hava Netzeh B’Machol, the 38th Israeli Dance Festival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, when it was choreographed as a performance piece for the “Nirkod Lashalom Show.”

At about the same time in Melbourne, avid local dancer Peter Leipnik began developing a folk-dance version. On a visit to Australia, leading Israeli choreographer Shlomo Maman joined Peter to work on the dance. By August 2008, it was a short-listed finalist in the Karmiel Dance Festival, the first time the Festival had ever accepted a dance composed and choreographed outside Israel. This led, via the Internet, to dance groups performing Nirkod Lashalom from Montevideo to Riga, from Singapore to Vilnius, and from New York to Warsaw.

And now, on World Dance Day 2016, from Israel to Hong Kong, via Melbourne.

Sam Lipski is the CEO of The Pratt Foundation, a former Editor-in-Chief of the Australian Jewish News, and the founding publisher of the Jerusalem Report.

Five Kaifeng Women Make Aliyah

Excerpted from the *Shavei Israel website*

Five women in their 20s from the Chinese Jewish community of Kaifeng arrived in Israel to begin a new life as immigrants.



The women, Gao Yichen, Yue Ting, Li Jing, Li Yuan, and Li Chengjin, who have been studying Hebrew and Judaism in their native Kaifeng, arrived on Monday and traveled directly to the Western Wall.

They must still undergo a formal conversion by the country’s chief rabbi.

The women will continue their Jewish studies at Jerusalem’s Midreshet Nishmat — the Jeanie Schottenstein Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women, with the support of the Shavei Israel organization, which will also cover their living expenses and support them as they prepare for their conversions. Upon completion of the conversion process, they will receive Israeli citizenship.

Being part of the Jewish people is an honor, because of the heritage and wisdom,” Li Jing said and explained that on a previous visit to Israel she placed a prayer note in a crevice of the Western Wall asking to return and live in Israel...

According to Shavei Israel, it was the first time in seven years that members of the Kaifeng community were able to immigrate to Israel...

In October 2009, seven men from the community came to live in Israel. In total, Shavei Israel has brought 19 members of the Kaifeng Jewish community to Israel, the organization said in a statement.

BOOK NOOK

Jewish Identities in East and Southeast Asia

By Jonathan Goldstein

Berlin: deGruyter Oldenbourg, 2015
242 pp. \$140 USD

Reviewed by Steven I. Levine

To the relatively uninitiated, including this reviewer, a long time student of modern Chinese history and politics, it is something of a revelation that vibrant Jewish communities have been scattered throughout East and Southeast Asia for several centuries. In a dazzling work of scholarship, Jonathan Goldstein, a leading scholar of Euro-Chinese Jewry, presents compact histories of seven Jewish communities in Singapore, Manila, Taipei, Harbin, Shanghai, Rangoon, and Surabaya. He gracefully accomplishes the difficult feat of combining macro-historical analysis, setting these outposts of Judaism into their historical and cultural contexts, with intimate portraits of each community, its leading families, and its charismatic leaders. Given the links between these communities and their Jewish brethren in Israel, the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, his study is a valuable contribution to world history as well as to Jewish history. The book is well-illustrated with photographs of persons, places, and historical documents. Notwithstanding its modest length, this is a book of prodigious scholarship by an author intimately familiar with his subject. The footnotes are well-worth reading. They include references to a very large number of primary and secondary sources in multiple languages including English, Hebrew, Russian, and German, published and unpublished memoirs, private letters and personal communications, interviews, and the author’s personal observations.

Eschewing the kind of heavy theoretical superstructure which too often makes academic history stultifying and unreadable, Goldstein emphasizes three dimensions of the very different identities of the communities he studies, namely, their “multicultural, and particularly religious identity; multi-ethnicity with an emphasis on language, and multi- or transnationalism, with a special consideration of politics and territory” (p. 4). He points to five factors influencing identity formation – colonialism/imperialism, memory, regional nationalism, socialism, and Zionism. These factors provide sufficient structure to integrate the community por-

traits into a cohesive narrative. Without the structure, the chapters might have appeared as unconnected islands in a widespread archipelago.

Goldstein devotes his longest chapters to the very different Jewish communities in Singapore and Shanghai. Orthodox Baghdadi Jews first settled in numbers in Singapore in the mid-nineteenth century as “entrepreneurial immigrants” whose multi-stranded cultural and commercial ties with their brethren from the Persian Gulf across to India and beyond facilitated their development into a highly prosperous community. The Baghdadi Jews cleaved to their traditional religious practices while many played important roles in the political and cultural life of the British colony. Goldstein notes that Manasseh Meyer (1843-1930) became the largest real estate owner in Singapore by 1900. During World War II when Singapore was occupied by the Japanese, most Jews evacuated to India, but returned after the war. They continue to thrive in contemporary Singapore under both secular and religious leaders, enjoying full equality with others in this multiethnic state, while providing significant philanthropic contributions to Israel.

A significant scholarly literature exists on the Jews of Shanghai, a literature to which Goldstein himself has contributed a lot. As in Singapore, Baghdadi Jews were the pioneers of Jewish settlement in nineteenth century Shanghai, actively engaging in building community institutions, including synagogues, schools, a burial society, cemetery, and kosher provisioning. They were also active in the municipal life of the international settlements in Shanghai which were governed by foreigners until the end of World War II. Revolutionary turmoil and the lead up to war and the Holocaust brought several waves of Russian, Central European, and East European Jewish refugees to Shanghai where there were no barriers to settlement or even visa requirements. Destitute European refugees were supported by the smaller but well-established Baghdadi Jewish community under the indifferent eyes of the Japanese wartime authorities. Shanghai’s Jewish population peaked at over 20,000 between 1942 and 1945. Among them were secular Jews representing every stripe of radical politics and religious proponents of both mainstream Zionism and all of its side currents. Intellectual and cultural life flourished. After the war the Jewish sojourners in Shanghai either returned to their pre-war homes or emigrated to the newly established

State of Israel. A radical fringe joined the Chinese Communist Party and devoted their lives to its cause. Apart from these, only a small number intermarried with Chinese and assimilated.

One of Goldstein’s main themes is the multiplicity of Judaisms one encounters among the communities he examines. The enormous elasticity of cultural forms of Judaism allows for very different identities. Yet wherever they were, and in many different ways, Jews retained and affirmed their Jewish identity, ranging from completely secular to ultra-Orthodox, but always with a sense of who they were, whether defined by faith, cultural practices including foodways, language, and, above all according to Goldstein, memory. Memories of the scattered lands from which they came, and deeper memories which bound many of them to an historical homeland in Israel which promised more than a sojourner’s temporary refuge even for those, like members of the small Jewish community in the Philippines, who were quite content to remain where they were. Incidentally, Goldstein’s first-hand description of the Bat Mitzvah in Manila of the daughter of an American Jew and his Filipina (second) wife is priceless. Referring to themselves as “the Bagel Boys,” these Jewish men, most of whom have married Filipinas, live very comfortably in gated communities like those one finds in suburban America.

As a graduate student studying Chinese in Taiwan in 1967-68, I was invited to a Passover seder at the American army base in Taipei, presided over by a rabbi who was a chaplain in the U.S. armed forces. (As in other fields, Jews of my generation are overrepresented in the community of American China scholars. My mentor at Harvard University was the distinguished Sinologist Benjamin I. Schwartz [1917-1999]. This was before Chinese scholars from both China and Taiwan entered the ranks.) Not until 1975, however, did a formal Jewish community come into being in Taiwan, but it numbered only several dozen families at its peak. The minuscule size of the Taipei Jewish community, as well as those in Rangoon and Surabaya (in Indonesia) enable Goldstein to provide a very intimate view, including portraits of persons such as Ephraim Einhorn, the “Maggid of Taipei” who helped knit the community together.

On a larger stage, that of Harbin, a major city in Northeast China (Manchuria), from the late nineteenth century through

the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, a refugee population, principally composed of Russian Jews, flourished economically and culturally, led by yet another extraordinary individual, Dr. Abram Kaufman. In the Harbin chapter, Goldstein focuses on the Olmert family, one of whose sons, Ehud, rose to the prime ministership of Israel following the emigration of almost all Harbin Jews between 1948 and 1951.

There is no simple equation to explain how Jewish communities in East and Southeast Asia responded to the conditions under which they lived. In some cases – Rangoon and Manila – tolerance and cultural space led many Jews toward intermarriage and assimilation. Yet in culturally, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically pluralistic Singapore, the Jewish community flourished and identities were not only retained but strengthened. Elsewhere, under difficult conditions of war, civil conflict, and local nationalism, most Jews expressed solidarity across political divides and differences in religious practice.

In his conclusion, Goldstein poses once more the central question of his inquiry, “what caused some vestigial Jewish identity to endure in seven East and Southeast Asian cities.” (p. 194) Pointing to the role of charismatic leaders and anti-Semitism as binding forces, he re-emphasizes the five factors that provided the structural beams of the edifice of his study – memory, colonialism/imperialism, regional nationalism, socialism, and Zionism. In discussing the nineteenth-century Baghdadi Jewish communities in East and Southeast Asia, Goldstein discerns what he calls a proto-Zionism that both antedated and anticipated the full-fledged Zionism that was formally articulated only toward the end of that century. In Zionism, as in other expressions of nationalism, historical memories, both real and constructed, play a vital role in inspiring, aggregating and solidifying nationalist consciousness. In East and Southeast Asia, even while engaging in the business of living, whether in comfortable or difficult conditions, historical memories, a consciousness of being members of a transnational community although one not yet embedded in the form of a modern nation state, but looking toward its creation, and then supporting the State of Israel, was a key factor in the endurance of the Jewish communities which Goldstein’s masterful study delineates for us.

Steven I. Levine is a Research Faculty Associate in the Department of History at the University of Montana. He was

born in New York City in 1941, educated at the Bronx High School of Science, Brandeis University (B.A. 1962) and Harvard University (Ph.D. 1972). He taught Chinese history, politics, and related subjects at the university level for forty years and published extensively in these fields. He is fluent in Chinese and Russian. His recent works include: *America's Wars in Asia: From the Philippines to Vietnam* (2012), co-authored with Michael H. Hunt. He collaborated with primary author Alexander V. Pantsov on *Mao: The Real Story* (2012), and *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life* (2015). He has published half a dozen book-length translations from Russian and Chinese. He lives in Stevensville, Montana and Hillsborough, North Carolina with his wife, Madeline G. Levine, a retired professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and distinguished literary translator from Polish. He may be contacted at chinabox@bellsouth.net.

China and Israel: From Discord to Concord

by Jonathan Goldstein and Yitzhak Shichor (eds.)

The Hebrew University Magnes Press Jerusalem, 2016, 306 pages

Language: Hebrew

Paperback US\$29.70; eBook US\$24.75

Reviewed by Gustavo D. Perednik

Not only is the title of this book reminiscent of Agnon's story *From Foe to Friend* (1941), its topic also seems to be similar: the attempts of the Jewish state to befriend a huge and powerful enemy. The struggle bears fruit only towards the end of the story, as the permanence of the protagonist's presence is acknowledged.

Relations between China and Israel have improved greatly over the last two decades, to such an extent that even this recent and updated collection of essays inevitably fails to cover some cardinal events.

China and Israel: From Discord to Concord was edited by two fellow members

of the SJI International Advisory Board -Yitzhak Shichor and Jonathan Goldstein-who also contribute to this anthology with illuminating articles on security oriented issues.

Other contributors include Israeli diplomats who were pivotal in the knitting of the China-Israel bond. Among them are Isai Magid (consul in Shanghai 1949-1951), Reuven Merhav (consul in Hong Kong 1985-1988, subsequently director-general of the Foreign Ministry), Zev Suffott (first ambassador to China) and Moshe Yegar (head of the Ministry's Asia-Africa Department.) The rest of these thirteen essays were penned by scholars from Israel, the USA, China and India. Jonathan Goldstein, a historian at the University of West Georgia, wrote both the introduction and the epilogue.

The book encompasses several aspects of the evolving relations between Israel and China. In their essay, Shichor and Merhav divide these relations into four stages: Drought (1949-1978), Tillage (1979-1984), Seedtime (1985-1991) and Harvest (1992.)

In actual fact, the optimistic picture described in the book has been surpassed by reality, with many economists forecasting that China will soon outdo the US as Israel's largest trading partner. Thus recent years are a fifth phase that might be called "The Boom".

Suffice to say that during the first half of last year, China invested more than \$2 billion in Israel, compared to just \$300 million throughout the previous year. In parallel, in March 2015, Israel became a founding member of China's AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,) reflecting the role of the Jewish state as a major economic partner. Examples abound. The Horizons Ventures capital fund, founded by Hong Kong magnate Li Ka-shing, is leading a US\$10 million strategic investment in Windward, an Israeli maritime data and analytics company. The Israeli Trade Authority signed an Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) agreement, which simplifies customs and approval procedures for Chinese exporters to Israel. The privately-held Chinese conglomerate Fosun International bought the majority of shares of Israel's Delek Group, and has agreed to purchase the Ahava cosmetics firm. For the history of this partnership, see Yoram Evron's essay

Economics, Science and Technology in the Israel-China Relations.

Economic aspects are just one of many areas covered by *From Discord to Concord*. Other essays, such as 1991: A Decisive Year, written by Zev Suffott (who passed away in 2014), describe the development of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Suffott details the titanic efforts that took place throughout 1991, culminating in the establishment of relations between Israel and both China and India during one momentous week in 1992. The two Asian giants together comprise more than one third of the world's population and their relations with Israel are currently excellent in both cases.

Previously, China and India had both adopted an anti-Israel position as part of their strategy to befriend Muslim countries, the Third World and the Non-Aligned. As described by Goldstein, Shai, Suffott and others, the Conference of Bandung, which took place in Indonesia in April 1955, was the first international expression of world discrimination against Israel – a forerunner of today's BDS.

In those days, China lumped Israel and Taiwan together as the two Asian countries to be systematically boycotted. Although its rationale purported to be "anti-colonialism," China was very selective in the type of "colonialism" it opposed, never criticizing intrusive actions in Kashmir, Tibet, East Timor or Afghanistan. Indeed, as Suffott well explains, China stood out as "the only non-Muslim and non-Arab country that avoided all official contact with Israel" since the 1950s.

Lilian Craig Harris's article *China and the Arab Middle East 1948-1996: Arab Viewpoints* ably describes the Chinese position vis-à-vis the Arab world: Even though the People's Republic of China sided with the Arab world against Israel for forty years, the Arab regimes distrusted the PRC for its supply of weapons to local revolutionaries in Yemen, Sudan and Oman. Later on the PRC sold weapons to both sides in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), as part of a pragmatic foreign policy called "friendly to everyone."

On this topic, of special interest is the article by Anthony Alexander Loh,

which apologetically describes the anti-hegemonic motif in Chinese policy since the days of Confucius. (Loh is a Chinese scholar who completed his PhD in Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.)

Other articles deal with the network of small organizations set up in China to assist Jews. Thus, Magid describes how two institutions were set up in Shanghai to help the migration to Israel of several hundred Jews, including personalities such as Sinologue Ellis Joffe (1942-2010).

Aharon Shai, a historian of South-East Asia and former rector of Tel Aviv University, writes about a relatively marginal issue - the policy of the Israel Communist Party towards China during the second half of the last century. Having interviewed a number of Israeli Communist leaders, including Meir Vilner and David "Sasha" Hanin, Shai describes how Israeli Communists distanced themselves from China in 1969 – indeed, the chaos brought about by Mao's Leap Forward was despised even by their mentors in the Kremlin. Less convincing is the supposition that the rapprochement between Israeli and Chinese Communist parties in 1987 strengthened mutual understanding between the two nations, considering the anti-Zionist rhetoric that Israeli Communists voiced in Beijing.

One remarkable point is that, during Deng Xiaoping's reforms, interest in Israel was prompted by Israel's success in defeating Soviet weaponry.

Reuven Merhav and Yitzhak Shichor deal with the place of Hong Kong in China-Israel relations, noting that the path to the establishment of relations was paved in Hong Kong, which hosted meetings between the two countries on science, agriculture and security issues. Moshe Yegar and P. R. Kumaraswamy (a research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Institute of the Hebrew University) discuss the implications of China-Israel relations for South and South-east Asia.

The anthology is focused more on history than on the future. Thus, an interesting topic not included is the possibility that Israel will become a bridge between the US and China, equidistant as it is between them as it was between previous world empires – Egypt and

Babylonia, the Greeks and the Persians, the Romans and Asia.

From *Discord to Concord* was published in a previous version in English (1999); this Hebrew version includes some new articles and updated versions of the others.

Gustavo Perednik, an Israeli educator and author, has been a member of the SJI International Advisory Board for a decade. He has lectured on Sino-Judaic topics in several Chinese universities, as well as in the US and Israel. His twentieth book, Chinese and Jews, will be released in Spanish by the end of this year. He may be contacted at perednik@netvision.net.il.



Briefly Noted Jew Asian

By Helen Kiyong Kim
and Noah Samuel Leavitt

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In 2010 approximately 15 percent of all

new marriages in the United States were between spouses of different racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, raising increasingly relevant questions regarding the multicultural identities of new spouses and their offspring. But while new census categories and a growing body of statistics provide data, they tell us little about the inner workings of day-to-day life for such couples and their children.

JewAsian is a qualitative examination of the intersection of race, religion, and ethnicity in the increasing number of households that are Jewish American and Asian American. Helen Kiyong Kim and Noah Samuel Leavitt's book explores the larger social dimensions of intermarriages to explain how these particular unions reflect not only the identity of married individuals but also the communities to which they belong. Using in-depth interviews with couples and the children of Jewish American and Asian American marriages, Kim and Leavitt's research sheds much-needed light on the everyday lives of these partnerships and how their children negotiate their own identities in the twenty-first century.

Keren R. McGinity, author of *Marrying Out: Jewish Men, Intermarriage, and Fatherhood*, describes the book as "Essential reading for scholars of intermarriage, inter-partnered couples and families, Jewish outreach professionals, and all students of race, ethnicity, and religion...The alternate narrative Kim and Leavitt offer blasts open the door to new ways of understanding Jewish American, Asian American, and JewAsian identities, challenging dominant racial, ethnic, and interfaith marriage discourses in the process."

About the Authors: Helen Kiyong Kim is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Whitman College. Noah Samuel Leavitt is an associate dean of students at Whitman College and has served as the advocacy director for the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

中國-猶太學院

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- 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.
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