



# Points East

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

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## The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem

The following article is compiled uncritically from its website <https://int.icej.org>.

[Founded in 1980, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) is considered the largest global pro-Israel Christian ministry, with branch offices established in over 95 nations and a reach into more than 170 countries worldwide.

The first Kaifeng Jewish family to make aliyah was sponsored on their journey home by the ICEJ and went via the Finnish Transit route described below. According to the ICEJ website, more Kaifeng Jews are now taking Hebrew language courses and religious studies in preparation for moving to Israel, with assistance from Shavei Israel, its partner in the Bnei Menashe aliyah. The ICEJ is helping to cover the flights for these Kaifeng Jewish families as well. For example, the ICEJ-Taiwan branch recently donated \$25,000 for this unique aliyah operation.

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Readers may recall that Vol. 30, #3 featured an article "Messianic Zionism, Settler-Colonialism, and the Lost Jews of Kaifeng" which was strongly critical of the ICEJ and its role in bringing marginal Jewish groups to Israel and the West Bank. Ed.]

### The Beginning

During the late 1970s the Lord began stirring the hearts of believers across the world concerning the nation of Israel and its prophetic role in modern times. Then, in the summer of 1980, the Israeli Parliament declared the city of Jerusalem to be the undivided, eternal capital of the State of Israel, established as such by King David almost 3,000 years earlier. Protest resounded across the international political spectrum, resulting in the closure of thirteen national embassies in Jerusalem.

A number of Christians living in Israel were then hosting a Christian celebration during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. They sensed Israel's deep hurt over the withdrawal of the foreign embassies and felt the call of the Lord to open a Christian Embassy in this, the City of the Great King. They called it the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and it represents Christians from around the world, speaking words of comfort and support to Israel. Ever since, the Embassy has provided a "servant's heart" ministry to the people of the land.

### A Theological Statement

... much of Israel's sufferings have been bound up with her calling. She, by the choice of God, became the vehicle of world redemption. The redemptive blessing of God has come to all the families of

*(continued on page 12)*

## Jewish Identity in China: A Chinese View

By An Tifa. Translated from Chinese by Tiberiu Weisz

This article under its original title "A Group of Jewish Descendants from Kaifeng Want to Immigrate to Israel, but Their Identity Is in Doubt" was published in Chinese in 21st Century World and on the internet at: <http://www.sina.com.cn/c/2002-08-06>. Weisz's translation first appeared in Covenant: Global Jewish Magazine 3:1, August 2009 and is excerpted here from his new book, A History Of The Kaifeng Israelites: Encounters with Israelites in Chinese Literature (Outskirts Press, 2017). Ed.]

[Translator's Note: As the Chinese title indicates, this article is written for Chinese audiences, and the text follows Chinese reporting practices that differ considerably from reporting style in the West. To make the article more reader friendly for Western readers, the translator has made some structural changes and eliminated many repetitions, duplications and redundancies, while remaining true to the original article.]

Among a group of people studying Hebrew at the Foreign Language Institute at Nanjing University was Zhang Xingwang,<sup>1</sup> a teacher from Kaifeng with a small black cap called a kippa covering his head. Zhang said that he does not have a great knowledge of the Jewish tradition, but he wears the kippa in search of spiritual sustenance. Because of this search, he is very attentive when he follows the instruction of the Hebrew teachers.

At the invitation of Professor Xu Xin, Director of the Jewish Cultural Studies Department at Nanjing University, Chinese students, historians, teachers, scholars and other interested parties came from all over China to attend a summer program of Israel cultural studies. He also invited several descendants of the Jews from Kaifeng and a Jewish professor and his wife to teach Hebrew and Jewish culture.

Zhang Xingwang introduced straightforwardly the long history of the Jews in Kaifeng... In the past, these Jews marked "Jews" as their nationality in the census. In 1952, two Jewish delegates from Kaifeng went to Beijing to represent the community at the celebration of the National Day<sup>2</sup> and were received by the leadership of the Central Committee. A few years ago at the time of the census most of the people changed [nationality] to "Muslim" or "Han." Zhang Xingwang was obviously not pleased. He said [that the Jews] were obviously not Muslims or Han Chinese, so why ask them to change their nationality? It is unreasonable that they cannot get such recognition.

*(continued on page 12)*

## Won't You Please Come to Chicago?

**SJI members are invited to come to Chicago for the first ever SJI member meeting.** It is a crucial gathering.

At this meeting, we will decide the future of SJI. Should SJI try to continue its work in Kaifeng and/or support efforts to move interested Jewish descendants to Israel? Or should SJI focus on giving scholarly and artistic grants, and publishing Points East? Or should SJI congratulate itself on what it has accomplished and just close up shop?

Behind these questions are ones that harder to answer: Would a change in Chinese policy allow SJI to continue its work in Kaifeng? Do we have the ability to influence the Chinese authorities to make such a change? Is a revival of the Jewish community in Kaifeng even possible?

If SJI members decide to continue the organization's existence, then we'll need to elect new officers and a board of directors.

All members in good standing (i.e. current in their membership dues) are invited to attend, participate and vote.

So, save the date: Sunday, June 3rd, Chicago. Probably in Skokie, but the place to be determined.

Please indicate your possible attendance by emailing [info@sino-judaic.org](mailto:info@sino-judaic.org).

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## SJI MEMBERSHIP

<u>Country</u>	<u>Total</u>
United States	133
Canada	11
China	20
Israel	16
England	7
Australia	3
Japan	2
Germany	2
Switzerland	1
South Africa	1
Taiwan	1
Total:	197

## FROM THE EDITOR

Since the situation in Kaifeng remains unchanged, I thought it would be worth reminding readers of the face of suppression by offering you Points East first centerfold, which contrasts pictures of better times with those from the present.

Also featured is a tourist's journal recording her trip to Kaifeng in 1982 and a report by a recent visitor there in 2017. The hesitant, even defensive, attitude that marked the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's "opening up" is mirrored in the fearful sentiments that are the result of today's policies.

Another article dealing with a look back is Tibi Weisz's translation of An Tifa's Chinese language article dating from 2002, which is important as a historical document on Kaifeng Jewish identity. Likewise the lead article on the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, which played—and perhaps still plays—such an important role in bringing far-flung Jewish and semi-Jewish groups to Israel. Whatever one thinks about their messianic mission—and I, for one, am critical of it—one cannot but be impressed by what the ICEJ has accomplished.

Given the on-going suppression in Kaifeng, I could enter 2018 on a depressed note but three things give me hope for a better future there. First, over the past thirty plus years, the Kaifeng Jews have been given a booster shot of Jewish content that should sustain them well beyond the current crisis. Second, foreign Jewish individuals are still able to visit Kaifeng and meet with Jewish residents there. This people-to-people contact remains an essential lifeline during these trying times. Third, and most importantly, Kaifeng Jews now living in Israel can return home to visit, bringing with them first-hand knowledge and direct experience of living Judaism.

Ideally, the Chinese authorities should make some accommodation for the unique status of the Kaifeng Jews (neither as a national minority nor as an official religion) so that they can maintain their identity as Chinese Jews without harassment or fear.

**Anson Laytner**

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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## FINANCIAL REPORT AVAILABLE

SJI members interested in receiving a copy of the annual financial report should send a self-addressed envelope to: Steve Hochstadt, Treasurer of the Sino-Judaic Institute, Illinois College, 1101 W. College Ave., Jacksonville IL 62650.

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I refer to Professor Jordan Paper's fine article on: Why Foreign Jews Are Responsible for the Problems of the Kaifeng Jews. Surely Professor Paper is right that many people do not know you can be Han (Chinese) and also Jewish. In fact, the term "Han" has been adopted by many Chinese who are not Han, but Bai, Hakka (Kejia), Miao, Zhuang, etc. These are minorities, some of whom are so identified in their ID Cards. This is generally not true of Kejia or Chaozhou persons. Be that as it may, confusion among foreigners is not surprising. After all, the Chinese people, confident in their culture, do not expect great wisdom from foreigners about matters Chinese.

One can keep blaming the Opium War of 150 years ago for many things that are going on today, but most of the blame is nonsense. China is a world power, second largest economy in the world. Its people are not feeling persecuted by Yangguizi (foreign devils).

We have known for sometimes that some persons in the Chinese government are hostile to Jewish activities in Kaifeng. Why they have been able to reassert their malevolent authority is unknown to us. Surely we are not to blame. The authorities in Kaifeng are treating people of Jewish origin badly. We must object and oppose their wrongful conduct. Hopefully, with wisdom and patience we will change their egregious behavior. Let us not blame the victims and their supporters for the wrongful behavior of the oppressors of the Kaifeng Jewish community.

David C. Buxbaum  
anderson.guangzhou@anallp.com

Dear Rabbi Laytner,

FYI and for the record: In 1995, 22 years ago, a paper was published in the Sino-Judaic Occasional Papers, number 2, pages 67-84, entitled: "A Plan to Settle Jewish Refugees into China." This paper had been translated from the MinGuo Dang-An Shi Liao, Arch. Nationalist Period, vol.3, 1993, pgs. 17-21. Original documents were from 1979. This paper had been submitted by us, Michael and Diane Rabinowitz.

We visited the Kuomintang (Guo Min Dang) Archives at the Yang Ming Shu Wu Library, hidden in the trees on a hill north of Taipei, in Taiwan. When we went there, in 1997, we had an appointment to visit and went in a KMT bus. The library is actually underground, for security at the time, and was part of a larger estate of Chiang Kai Shek. It is now opened to tourists.

Although I am not sure we actually saw Chiang Kai Shek's signature on any "plan"; we did see some official signature and did see the plans and did see letters of the banker Jakob/Jacob Berglas outlining how much money needed for trucks, etc. Irene Eber, who has published in 2012 on Jewish refugees in China, and Gao Bei, a history professor from the University of NC, in her book of 2013, have mentioned Jakob Berglas in their books. I al-

ways wondered what happened to him. Did he escape Germany? Did he get to China? My meager efforts to find out have been fruitless.

Respectfully yours,

Diane Rabinowitz  
wenwutaichi@cox.net

To the Editor,

Hello! My name is Annette Jonas-Galula. I live in Israel, but I was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I have been researching my dad's family for the past 4 years and I am in the process of writing a memory book on the family. My dad, Peter Jonas, was born in Berlin, Germany in 1925. He escaped on the Kindertransport to England in June of 1939.

Peter's mother, my grandmother, was born Annie Gertrud Loewenthal, the older sister of Rudolf Loewenthal. Annie married my grandfather, Erich Jonas in 1920.

My grandma escaped from Berlin to Peking, China in 1940 with the help of her brother, Rudolf, who was by then a Chinese citizen and teaching at the Yenching University. A year later, in 1941, Annie had to move to the Shanghai Ghetto where she was interned until 1947, when she made her way as a stateless refugee to Minneapolis, Minnesota. My dad visited his mother in Minneapolis in 1949 (she didn't recognize him after a 10-year absence!), travelling from England, and that's where he stayed, eventually meeting my mother.

When my older brother had his bar-mitzvah in 1969, Rudolf came with his wife to Minneapolis from the east coast (Washington D.C. I believe) to participate in the celebration. My grandma Annie and her brother Rudolf shared a very special relationship as siblings and I know that Annie was very happy to see her brother in Minneapolis. I remember Rudolf very clearly although I was just 11-years old. As a matter of fact, Rudolf and his wife took such a liking to my older brother that they wanted to take him back with them to the east coast to live with them!

I have discovered through my research the many books and articles that Rudolf wrote about the Far East. I am particularly interested in his book, "The Sino-Judaic Bibliographies by Rudolf Loewenthal", because, specifically, there is an introduction in the book by Michael Pollak, where he writes about Rudolf's life and his work. [We sent her a copy of Pollak's introduction. Ed.]

...Any personal info about Rudolf that you may have (possibly letters) and could share with me I would be highly grateful for. My dad did receive some of Rudolf's personal photographs and other documents after Rudolf's death in 1996.

I greatly appreciate your time to read this email and I am looking forward to hearing from you. Wishing you all a sweet Shana Tova and G'mar Hatima Tova!

Sincerely yours,

Annette Jonas-Galula  
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## Shattered by Glass: Memories of Krisallnacht and Shanghai

By Kevin Ostoyich

Reprinted from *The American Institute for Contemporary German studies*, John Hopkins University <http://www.aicgs.org/issue/shattered-by-glass/>

### A Conversation on a Staircase

Dr. Karl Kollwitz, husband of the renowned artist Käthe Kollwitz, advised Else Engler against continuing her pregnancy. Hitler's Germany was no country in which to raise a Jewish child, he had claimed. When the distraught Else left the office, she encountered Käthe, who was ascending the staircase bringing sandwiches up to Dr. Kollwitz's office. Seeing how unhappy Else was, Käthe stopped her and the two talked for a while. After the conversation, Else decided to go ahead with the pregnancy, and on September 12, 1934, she gave birth to a baby boy with Dr. Kollwitz attending. Given the important role Käthe had played in the decision to have the child, Else decided to name her boy in remembrance of the son the Kollwitzes had lost in the First World War: Peter.

Else was a milliner and had a salon in Berlin. Her father was a tailor and specialized in making uniforms and thus most of his customers were military men. Her husband, Dr. Leon Engler, had been born in what is now Romania, but as a child had fled to Vienna during the First World War. Leon would always consider Vienna his hometown. Leon had a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Vienna and worked in Berlin as a chemist in a sugar factory. The family lived in an apartment above a Jewish-owned store in a Jewish neighborhood in Berlin.

### Shattered Glass

Leon had felt protected in Germany as an Austrian citizen, but after the Anschluss in 1938 by which Austria was incorporated into the Greater German Reich, things changed, and Leon lost his job in the sugar factory. He unsuccessfully tried to run an ice cream parlor as a chemist and then started a lending library. During Kristallnacht in November 1938, when Peter was four years old, the windows of the Jewish store below the Englers' apartment were shattered. Leon decided to go into hiding, for any Jew with a doctorate was in jeopardy of being rounded up as a medical doctor and accused of malpractice and other such falsehoods. Else had two young non-Jewish German ladies who were learning the millinery trade in her hat salon; they were farm girls and took Leon into hiding. Meanwhile, Else found out at a travel agency that Shanghai was an open port and that a Japanese ocean liner was leaving in three weeks from Genoa, Italy. Else proceeded to sell most of their belongings in order to purchase three tickets. Once Else had evidence that they were leaving Germany, Leon could safely come out of hiding. She asked her father to accompany them, but he refused, thinking his military

customers would protect him. He was wrong.

### A “Colonialist Piss Pot”

The Englers arrived in Shanghai in early 1939. Peter distinctly remembers the incredible noise as the ship was unloaded by the Chinese laborers, known as Coolies, who chanted as they carried the luggage off the ship. He also recalls the horrid smell.

At first the family lived in a refugee camp, but then Else found a job in a hat salon and Leon started producing gold alloys for dentists. Peter explains that in those days the Chinese would cap their teeth with gold as a sign of prestige “similar to how we drive cars that are much too big for us here in the States.” Given that both parents drew an income, they were able to afford a place in a fairly high-class neighborhood in the French Concession and send their son to the Western District Public School. Peter explains this was “a very, very British school. We wore uniforms and sang ‘God Save the King’ [...] every morning, and played rugby, but they never allowed me to play; I was too little.” Peter attended the Western District Public School until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Thereafter the school was used by the Japanese as a prisoner-of-war camp for the British and Americans. Else and Leon then sent Peter to the Shanghai Jewish School. Peter remembers very little about his first year—1942—at the Shanghai Jewish School; he was to return there after the end of the war in 1945. Although boxing, for example, was very popular, Peter did not participate because he was too small and skinny. His parents rented a piano and secured lessons for him, but he did not play with much enthusiasm.

Looking back, Peter is not proud of how he acted as a child. He characterizes himself as having been “a colonialist piss pot.” He explains, “I learned very quickly that we [...] Europeans were the superiors of the natives. My parents hired a nanny, an amah who always called me ‘Master Peter,’ always walked three steps behind me when we were walking on the street. [...] And I very quickly became quite used to this. And there’s an anecdote that I like to tell: My parents also hired a private rickshaw coolie for me [...] who would take me to school in the morning and pick me up from school afterwards, and one day, [...] it was in the fall, there was a fairly severe monsoon rainstorm [...] and the streets were flooded, my rickshaw coolie couldn’t come to pick me up, and it was fairly late in the afternoon, he figured that I would be pretty hungry so he brought me something to eat, a Chinese delicacy, a meatball that was wrapped in seaweed and steamed. The most revolting thing you’d ever want to have cross your lips. I just took one bite of it and flung it back into this guy’s face. It’s not the man I became, but in this colonialist environment, I became a typical colonialist brat. And I regret this to this day. I even have a problem telling the story without tearing up. That’s how one’s environment can shape who you are and become who you are.” He says his friends were also typical colonialist brats. They had no Chi-

nese classmates, no Chinese friends. His only interactions with Chinese children were violent: usually fights provoked by the European kids throwing stones at the Chinese kids. He regrets this and is ashamed of the Europeans’ behavior in China.

### Life as a “Hongkew Kid”

In 1943, the occupying Japanese forces issued a proclamation that all stateless refugees who entered Shanghai after January 1, 1937, had to move into a Designated Area in the rundown Hongkew section in the northern part of Shanghai. Else and Leon moved into a house on Wayside Road, now Huo Shan Lu, with the same families they had shared a house with in the French Concession and hired a new amah to look after Peter. Peter was quickly transferred from the Shanghai Jewish School in downtown Shanghai to the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association (SJYA) school in the Designated Area in Hongkew. The SJYA was also known as the “Kadoorie School” after its Sephardic Jewish benefactor. All the residents living in the Hongkew Designated Area had to receive permission from the Japanese to leave and enter. The SJYA was one or two blocks outside the Designated Area and Peter, too, had to receive permission. In order to continue her millinery work in downtown Shanghai, Else also had to acquire a pass. The distribution of passes was overseen by a notoriously sadistic man named Kano Ghoya, who, being short in stature, tended to take out his sadism on tall men. Else never encountered any problems, nor did Peter. Peter remembers a visit by Ghoya—who styled himself the “King of the Jews”—to the SJYA. Peter and his classmates had to sing for the Japanese official, who proceeded to tell them a bizarre story about his grandmother, who he claimed was such a noble lady that she always had her clocks turned off every few months so they could rest. Looking back now with a laugh, Peter claims this story “is so crazy, it’s got to be true!”

By this time Leon could no longer sell his gold alloys, and thus had no reason to leave the Designated Area. He still put his professional knowledge of chemistry to use, however. Peter notes, “The preferred currency in Shanghai was the US dollar, but in the middle of the war the inflow of US dollars was abolished, and a trade developed in US currency. It was the physical appearance of a dollar bill that substantially affected its value; a crisp new dollar bill was worth more than a soiled used one.” Leon used his chemical skills to devise an array of smelly detergents in the Engler’s kitchen and literally laundered money with the detergents and a flat iron in order to increase the value of the notes. Peter says he “has no idea how much of our sustenance” came from his father’s “money laundering.” This was illegal, and Leon was eventually caught by the Japanese; however, he was able to bribe his way out of trouble with cash and a wristwatch.

Peter often tries to “reconstruct what [his] youth was like.” He has come to the conclu-

sion that he and the other Jewish children in Shanghai were afraid: “I think deep down [...] all us kids—although we never talked about it—[...] were living in fear. We didn’t know what’s going to happen to us, what our parents were going to do, will this war end? We were bombed occasionally by the American Air Force and that was pretty scary. Although we did not experience any atrocities, we did witness some atrocities that the Japanese inflicted on the Chinese population.” Peter vividly recalls a brutal beating of a Chinese coolie, who had been caught stealing a Salvation Army tea kettle tin cup: “I can still see the scene. He was on his knees with his hands up praying for them [...] to stop. His face was all bloodied up. That left an impression upon me. But [...] this wasn’t something where you would run home and say ‘you know what I just saw?’ [...] You accepted these [events] as kids. You accepted these events as that’s the way life is.”

Peter says the Jewish kids did not have anything to do with the Japanese children, who were easily identifiable by their military uniforms—“even the little ones,” he notes. Whenever he or his friends encountered Japanese kids, they would avoid them.

Peter notes that because his parents were relatively well off, their living arrangements were better than most other refugees. Many who were less fortunate had to live in barracks-style Heime with little to no privacy and subsisted on food provided by soup kitchens. Many of Peter’s schoolmates lived under such conditions. The predicament of one boy particularly plagues Peter’s memories. The boy’s father had been a tobacconist in Berlin, and in the Designated Area, the father, son, and a hired Chinese coolie would spend the days going around picking up cigarette butts and the evenings taking the tobacco out and rolling it into new, whole cigarettes. The father and son used their sleeping cots in their squalid single-room home as their work benches. Given that the boy spent most of his evenings rolling the tobacco, slept where the cigarettes were rolled, and did not have access to a proper shower, he stank horribly. Because of his foul odor everyone avoided him. Upon the encouragement of Else and Leon, Peter eventually befriended the boy, although their friendship did not become close until after the Shanghai experience.

In general, the family had very little interaction with people from other nationalities and religions. Nevertheless, Else did have such interactions from time to time. One such interaction was quite remarkable and could very well have saved her life. Toward the end of the war, Else came down with a severe case of the intestinal disease known as “Asian” or Tropical Sprue. This disease can be very serious if not treated properly. One of the regular customers of the millinery shop was the wife of the German consul general. The two women became acquaintances, and when the lady found out that Else was sick she had her husband send away to Germany to have the

necessary medicine delivered by diplomatic pouch. The medicine arrived and was given to Else's doctor in order for her to receive treatment. Peter notes that had they been in Germany, such a bureaucrat could just as easily have "signed the document to send us on a cattle car to Auschwitz." He believes it very important that people learn this story: "There's a lesson to be learned from this story. I don't know what it is. But there is a lesson to be learned. [...] How our environment [...] [shapes] [...] who we are and who we become. And if we don't like it, we've got to do [something] consciously [...] for if we just let our environment shape us, we can become different people."

The worst day of the war for Peter and many other Shanghai Jews was July 17, 1945, when American bombs hit the Designated Area and many refugees and countless Chinese were killed. Peter underscores the word "countless" explaining "no one bothered to count them." Leon put on his Pao Chia uniform and started helping. Peter recalls how as they were approaching a Chinese victim on the street, a Japanese military ambulance showed up, three Japanese military men in uniform got out with a stretcher, put the Chinese man on the stretcher, took photographs, then put the Chinese man back on the street, got back in the ambulance, and drove away.

#### After the War

Peter remembers after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, there was speculation that perhaps the war would soon be over. He and his father went out after curfew to see what was going on in the streets. As they were looking around they were spotted by a Japanese officer who was riding in the sidecar of a motorcycle. Peter and his father saw the officer struggling to get up in the sidecar of the moving motorcycle and reaching for his sidearm, so they ran away as fast as they could. As they ran they heard the officer discharging his gun. According to Peter, "this was the closest encounter I ever had to becoming [a] [...] collateral victim." When the war ended on August 15, 1945, Peter said the Japanese soldiers remained briefly, but they no longer had bayonets fixed to their guns. Shortly afterward they just vanished.

The American Navy took over Shanghai and provided K-Rations to the refugees. The containers had typical WWII military rations like Spam, chewing gum, Hershey's chocolate, and coffee (the latter of which, Peter noted, "my mother quickly commandeered"). Peter also remembers a small military bible being included on one occasion. He recalls that by this time the refugee children had become so scrawny and miserable looking that the Americans started distributing soy milk. "But not the kind that you can buy in a supermarket. This was actually just soy beans just ground up [...] with water. Disgusting stuff! I would rather drink cod liver oil than that stuff. But it helped! For all the time I was in the camp [i.e., the Designated Area] my front teeth had just begun to grow out and they didn't grow out

for two and a half years. Within weeks after we got this soy milk, my teeth came out. And I also got for some reason [...] a liver injection. That's something I wouldn't volunteer for either! The liver is some viscous stuff and the needles are the size of hollowed out knitting needles!"

Peter says that the most dramatic change was that for the first time they were not afraid. The Americans were very friendly. He notes the sailors were definitely not interested in finding out where the opera houses were. "They wanted to know where the bars were and where the whorehouses were, and we took them to these places, and in return they would invite us on board their ships. [...] My friend [...] even got a sailor hat. I think he slept with this damn thing! He never took it off [...] he was so proud of it! [...] These were the good times."

Immediately after the end of the war, Peter went back to the Shanghai Jewish School. Now Peter travelled to school on a school "bus"—a bare truck with no seats. Peter believes that it was at this time he finally started to get a decent education, although he says the "Hongkew children" were treated as being somehow lower than the other kids. On one occasion, a teacher actually referred to them as the "Hongkew kids" in class. As a result, the children got together and talked about going on strike in protest to their teacher having called them this derogatory term.

Peter did not have a good relationship with his parents, who always seemed preoccupied with other things. Leon's business partner Fritz Adler and Fritz's wife, Stella, actually served more as surrogate parents for Peter in Shanghai. Fritz did not think that Leon was bringing up Peter properly as a boy, so he would give Peter gifts that he thought were more masculine such as soccer boots and boxing gloves. One of Peter's prized possessions growing up—and one he still cherishes deeply to this day—is the accordion that Fritz gave him for his Bar Mitzvah.

Peter played this accordion in what was undoubtedly the most important musical performance of his life. It transpired on a flight to Israel. Peter remembers having discussed the creation of Israel with his father in Shanghai. He remembers how his father went over a map with him and told him that the borders would most likely be problematic and unstable and that the family was not going to go there. The family never seriously considered moving to Australia, and the United States also seemed an impossibility for them given the quota system. Else and Leon decided that Peter and Else would stay temporarily with Else's sister in Israel, while Leon would remain in Shanghai and see what the situation would be like under the Communist regime. Else's and Peter's journey to Israel lasted about ten days and involved trips from city to city by airplane. On the last flight when the pilot announced they had entered Israeli airspace, Else prompted Peter to take out his accordion and play the Israeli national an-

them, "Hatikvah." According to Peter, "Even the cabin crew were wiping tears from their eyes."

Leon's plan was to set up a soap factory in Shanghai if the foreign concessions were re-established. This plan was dashed, though, when the Communists took control of the city. Leon was then evacuated to Canada via San Francisco. Upon arriving in San Francisco, he was put on a sealed train to Vancouver because he did not have an entry visa for the United States. While Leon tried to establish himself in Canada and prepare the entry of his wife and son, Else and Peter left Israel for Rome, then Northern Italy, then Austria, until finally journeying to Canada on Austrian passports. "We arrived by boat in Halifax and as we [...] handed the immigration officer our passports, he stamped them, handed them back, and said, 'Welcome to Canada.' That had a big effect," Peter chokes up and says with tears welling in his eyes, "For the first time we were welcome somewhere and not being chased." Else and Peter were then reunited with Leon in Montreal.

Despite the fact that he was, in his terms, "literally off the boat," the teacher and kids in his new school in Montreal were very welcoming. On the first day, a group of boys took him out for a sundae, becoming lifelong friends in the process. Given his aptitude in mathematics, Peter pursued an electrical engineering degree at McGill University. Afterward, he moved to the United States to conduct graduate studies at Cornell University. After earning a Master's degree in electrical engineering in 1961, he started working in an applied research think tank affiliated with Cornell University in Buffalo, NY. The Vietnam War, which Peter vigorously opposed, was intensifying in the mid-1960s and Peter enrolled as a part-time Ph.D. candidate in the Biophysics Department at the State University of New York at Buffalo Medical School. He earned a Ph.D. in 1974 and found a job as a biomedical engineer in the Department of Surgery at the St. Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, NJ. In 1984, he was recruited to join the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department of the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) in Newark, NJ. In 2000, he was a charter member of the Biomedical Engineering Department at NJIT, from which he retired as Associate Professor Emeritus in 2002.

He is now retired and lives with his wife Dina, in New Jersey. Peter and Dina have two sons who were born in Buffalo, NY.

#### Shattered by Glass

The memories of his childhood continue to haunt Peter. Kristallnacht has cut deeply into his psyche: "For many years I had a very abnormal reaction to the sound of broken glass. I never knew it, I never related [...] it, I had no idea what that was. Even as an adult. In graduate school I worked in a lab, and every once in a while somebody [would drop] a beaker, and on one or two occasions I would have to go into the bathroom and put my head between my legs and get my act back together

again. And I never related it to anything. Then when our oldest son [...] became [...] the age I was—four years old—during Kristallnacht, I went into a clinical depressive state, so much so, that I needed psychiatric help. And the physician, looking at my history, related that and suggested that that may be what today would be called PTSD, he suggested that somehow in the back of my mind the experience of Kristallnacht was embedded. [...] I was in treatment for quite a while.”

About 20 or 25 years ago, Peter’s Shanghai refugee experience started gradually to come back to him. It started when he was asked by the NJIT to tell his story to students. Then he was invited to speak to a Hebrew school for middle school children. He then started to be asked by the Holocaust Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Metrowest, NJ, in Whippany to speak to middle and high school students and the occasional synagogue. The engagements started to increase more and more, and Peter started to realize that whereas for the longest time no one seemed to care much about his Shanghai past, now everyone wanted to hear about it.

“You know, twenty years ago, if somebody asked me where I grew up, [...] I would say ‘I grew up in Shanghai’ [and then they would say] ‘oh, that’s interesting, how ‘bout the weather?’” Now everybody is suddenly interested in all this. Peter wants to know why this is so, but for the life of him he cannot figure out why.

Peter’s wife, Dina, thinks the reason for the recent interest may be that the European history of the Holocaust has “been done [...] there is so much out there” making the history of the Shanghai Jews something new or novel. Perhaps it also has to do with the fact that it deals with China, and people would not necessarily think of China as being a place of refuge. Regarding China, Peter notes that the Chinese government is very much interested in telling the story and says “We have an explanation for that...we, the handful of four or five of us [former Shanghai Jewish refugees] who get together and are still in touch, and our explanation is that the Chinese government is interested in fostering better economic relations with Israel. [...] I was even interviewed [in 2015] by Chinese TV.”

Peter explains that when it comes to the issue of Jews finding refuge, one “ought to use the word [...] ‘Shanghai’ [...] rather than [...] ‘China,’ because Shanghai was this open port, all the other ports were not open, [so the fact that the Jews found refuge] can be attributed thanks to the Japanese, who eventually locked us up, not the Chinese. [...] In this interview with the Chinese TV, [the interviewer] keep saying ‘what do you have to say to the Chinese people?’ and I said ‘Xiexie ni,’ ‘thank you’ in Chinese, but that’s not what she wanted to hear. She wanted me to laud China as a whole. And it wasn’t China [...] Shanghai was run by the [Shanghai] Municipal [Council] and not the Chinese. They had no power whatsoever.” Peter says, “I didn’t tell her what she

wanted to hear.”

Peter returned to Shanghai in 2005. He had gone to his former house and had been transported back in time: “As I walked into the house, I grabbed hold of the banister, and the feel of the banister was identical from what it was sixty years before and brought back memories, and the creak in the steps brought back memories, [...] It did a number between the ears [to] trigger these memories. [...] Not all of them were pleasant. [...] It’s astonishing how much information is in there and it just takes a trigger to bring [memories] to the forefront.”

Over the years Peter has gotten together with other former Shanghai Jewish refugees either at large-scale reunions or more intimate gatherings of friends. He has always been struck by how differently people have turned out from their Shanghai past. He believes anyone who does not realize this diversity of experience does not fully understand the history of the Shanghai Jews. To highlight this point, Peter talks about how he and a close friend of his are completely different aside from both having been refugee children in Shanghai. Whereas his friend became a lawyer, Peter became an engineer. Whereas his friend is very orthodox and recently welcomed his 24th great-grandchild, Peter identifies himself as a “remorseful, Jewish atheist” and has no grandchildren, let alone great-grandchildren. Peter explains, “We have nothing in common but our common experience in Shanghai, and we’d walk through fire for one another.”

### Doubts

Peter has spoken to many audiences about his Shanghai experience. That audience is about to expand greatly given that his life story will be the subject of an episode in the new PBS history series titled *We’ll Meet Again*, set to air in Winter 2018.

Peter often speaks to school children about his experience. He feels the task that lies before this generation is immense: “I’d like them to realize that my generation has left your generation and certainly their generation such a lousy globe, that they’ve got such a difficult task in front of them to make some, to bring some civilization [...] even to this country.” He tries to convey to the students a message about the dangers of obedience: “I often ask permission of the teachers before I talk to allow me to tell the students about my ‘hypothesis’ that when you are asked [by someone in authority] to do something you are uncomfortable with, don’t immediately obey and don’t immediately say no, ask for an explanation.”

Although Peter does feel that he has an important story to tell, he often is afraid that his story is just a series of anecdotes without any real “food for thought.” One story that he thinks is particularly profound is the one about the German consul general procuring medicine that possibly saved his mother’s life in Shanghai. “That’s a ‘food for thought’ [but] what does that mean?” For Peter, the meaning speaks to the underlying importance of environment and authority in conditioning responses. That is why he always returns to the

“hypothesis” he imparts to students: “If you asked me what caused this whole Holocaust, one of my hypotheses [...] is that the young people are too obedient. You think that being obedient is an asset and that’s something you ought to praise young people for, and it’s not that. You can be too obedient. And [...] at the Nuremberg Trials the universal defense was ‘I was told to do it.’” Peter would rather that the next generation “not have this as a possible defense.” This ultimately is the moral Peter tells school children: “Don’t unconditionally do something someone else tells you to do, just because someone else tells you to do it.” Although Peter tells his story and conveys this moral, he ultimately does not think he is making any meaningful contribution by telling his story. The current plight of the Syrian, Yemeni, Sudanese, Burmese, and other refugees makes him frustrated and angry. He believes the only difference separating these refugees from the Jewish refugees to be language and time. He states emphatically, “We should learn from this story [of the Shanghai Jews]. But we haven’t learned.”

Peter Engler bears the scars of history and is a reminder of how much the previous century shattered the world like glass. Named after a fallen German soldier of the First World War, plagued by the sounds of Kristallnacht and brutal images of the Japanese occupation of China, and remorseful of his “Colonialist piss pot” childhood, Peter sometimes questions the counsel Käthe Kollwitz gave to Else Engler on a staircase early in Hitler’s Third Reich. He has tried to find meaning in his life and convey some lessons from his experiences to children, but ultimately does not think he has made much of a difference. “I wish I could pat myself on the back and say, ‘you’re doing something useful and meaningful’ but I don’t.” He hopes that the producers of the *We’ll Meet Again* series will be able to make something positive out of his story and that the younger generation will break the chains of obedience and somehow cultivate civilization in a lousy globe. He admits, though, he has his doubts.

Professor Kevin Ostoyich served as a Visiting Fellow at AICGS in Summer 2017. He is chair of the Department of History at Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, IN). His research on the history of the Shanghai Jews is being sponsored by a research grant of the Sino-Judaic Institute and the Wheat Ridge Ministries – O.P. Kretzmann Memorial Fund Grant of Valparaiso University. The article is based on an interview conducted on July 20, 2017. Further details and clarifications were provided subsequently by Professor Engler in correspondence with Professor Ostoyich.

*The Pao Chia was a self-watch patrol that the Japanese occupation forces made compulsory for male members of the stateless refugee community confined within the Designated Area.*

*Peter describes himself as being Jewish by heritage. He says that if anyone ever asks him, his religious affiliation he says he refers to himself as a “remorseful, Jewish atheist.” He explains, “I*

*(continued on page 10)*

## Kaifeng Then and Now: China Journal, 1982

By Barbara R. Stein

[Barbara Stein visited Kaifeng in the summer of 1982 on a Henan China Archaeological Study Tour organized by the Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas in cooperation with Zhengzhou University, China International Travel Service (Zhengzhou Branch), and the University of Missouri.

The 34-member study group arrived in Shanghai May 30, 1982. While there they visited Fudan University, the Shanghai Museum and other cultural sites, as well as the Pengpu Peoples' Commune, which specializes in growing vegetables. They travelled by overnight train to Kaifeng and visited the Fan Pagoda, the Iron Pagoda, and the Dragon Temple. The tour continued in the area along the Yellow River, cradle of Chinese civilization, for the next eleven days. On June 14, tour members flew to Beijing to visit sites in and around the capital city for four days before the tour officially ended.

The following excerpted entry comes from Ms. Stein's notes of her visit in Kaifeng. Ed.]

### June 1st, Shanghai

... After dinner we went to the train station—16 hrs to Kaifeng.

### June 2nd, Kaifeng Guest House

Arrived in Kaifeng in time for lunch. We are at the "very best" hotel in town! The food here, however, is much better than in Shanghai—not so greasy and with lots of veggies...

### June 3rd, Kaifeng Guest House

...And finally we stopped at the Kaifeng Museum. It was only after much negotiation as it was not open to the public. We first viewed a courtyard with row after row of gravestones inscribed with the bibliographies of the deceased. These had been removed from tombs in the area but had never been properly prepared for display. After much nagging, a curator was brought out who indicated to us two sets of stone tablets, purportedly the stelae describing the building and the rebuilding of the temple in Kaifeng. Jews lived in Kaifeng during the Jin Dynasty (~1100 AD) and the tablets

date from the 14th and 15th C. Pictures were not allowed to be taken but it did not matter as the stones had been so worn that very little of the inscription was readable. The curator said, however, that there were four such stones, not three as the guidebook indicated.

This afternoon we will drive down the main street of what was formerly the ghetto in Kaifeng. None of the inscription was in Hebrew.

After lunch, our first stop was a guild, not a temple per se, but more a meetinghouse constructed by the people from three provinces. Today it is used as a grade school. This was followed by a trip to the site of the old synagogue. Nothing is left there and no marker indicates the past. A hospital has been built on the site but, nonetheless, I feel a sense of history, of roots. I took Grant's (Goodman) picture and he took mine. The next alley over was that of the former ghetto. The street sign translates to mean "road of the scriptures", or some such thing. I took a picture of the sign and the alley. A group of people wanted to walk down the lane and when I caught up with them I found that Chae-jin (Lee) had asked a local boy if he knew of any descendants of Jews who might still live in the area. And sure enough, one woman still exists. She has no artifacts and knows nothing of Jewish history and culture, only that as a child she was told that she was of Jewish ancestry. I took her picture.

## A Visit to Kaifeng, Autumn 2017

By Poloni b. Poloni

[Poloni b. Poloni is a pseudonym for the author, who chooses to remain anonymous given the current situation. Ed.]

My wife and I did get to Kaifeng just for an overnight visit. Through a friend of my son who had spent the last few years in China, we were able to meet up with T., a descendant of the Jews of Kaifeng. T. met us at our hotel for breakfast along with a friend and then spent a good part of the day with us.

He took us to the location of the synagogue on the ancient Jewish lane. There we met an older woman who also keeps a small museum and makes

paper cuts. She joined us to walk around the neighborhood and to the former location of the mikvah (or ancient well), which was the last remaining item on the grounds of the original synagogue first constructed in the 12th century. It was filled in by local authorities in 2016. When we were there, a group of workmen appeared to be preparing to build something.

A young man from the neighborhood, not Jewish but very interested in and knowledgeable about the topic of Jews in Kaifeng, and his parents came along. He is in his last year of high school, aiming for admission to Peking University (China's top university) and spoke pretty good English. My wife speaks some Chinese, very rusty, and not adequate for detailed conversation, so he was a great help. Otherwise we were relying on my wife's limited Chinese and Microsoft Translator, so some of the details were not always clear.

T. showed us a building where gold was traded by a Jewish group, possibly the Shi family, photos of his grandfather's grave with Star of David, etc. He said there were about 2,000 people who can trace their roots to Jewish ancestors, and about 500 of those who identified as Jewish. 26 Kaifeng Jews have made aliyah.

We had hoped to see Jewish artifacts in the museum, but were told that these are no longer open to tourists.

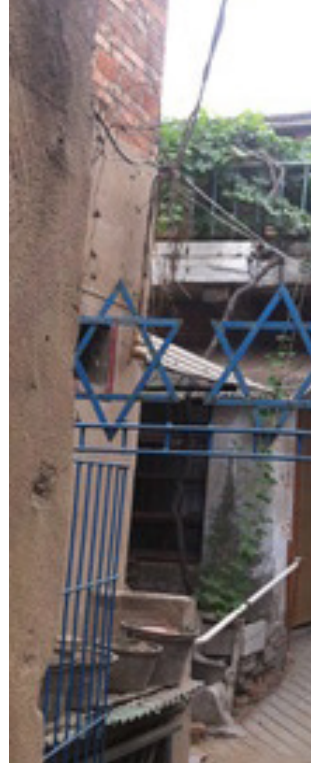
T. was more than willing to talk about the Jewish community, their history, and their dreams, but unwilling to talk about the recent government crackdown, or for that matter, anything related to the government. He only suggested that we talk to our friend who had introduced us when we got home, in order to understand the current situation. The situation does not appear to have changed much since foreign media outlets reported on the tightened restrictions on the community in 2016.

Despite being less than clear about many of the details, and the hints of difficulties with the government, the day with T. and the others in that neighborhood was certainly a highlight of our recent stay in China, a true spiritual journey.

# PICTURES OF THE KA



*The Synagogue Well Site Then*



*The Jewish School*



*The Synagogue Well Site Now*



*The Jewish School*



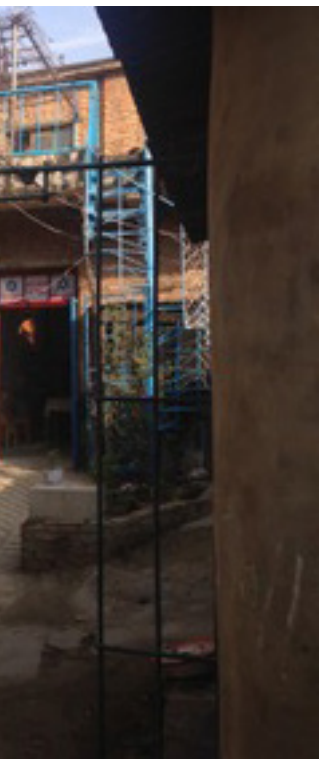
# KAIFENG SUPPRESSION



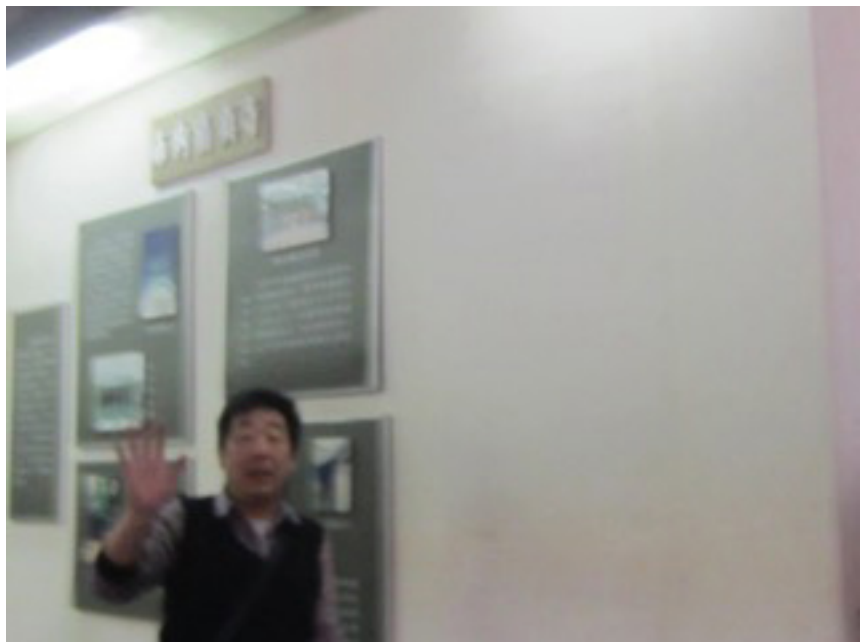
School Then



The Merchant Guildhall Museum Exhibit on Kaifeng Jews Then



School Now, (Closed)



The Non Existent Exhibit Now

## Shattered by Glass

(continued from page 6)

*am Jewish by heritage. I am an atheist, because I cannot believe in a higher being that controls my destiny. And I'm remorseful because I wish I could. That is my outlook on life, and I don't mind publicizing that."*

## Revival of a Soviet Zion: Birobidzhan celebrates its Jewish heritage

By Shaun Walker

Excerpted from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/27/revival-of-a-soviet-zion-birobidzhan-celebrates-its-jewish-heritage> 27 September 2017

In front of Birobidzhan's railway station, loud-speakers blast out Yiddish-language ballads while hundreds of schoolchildren in ersatz folk costumes dance circles around the menorah monument that dominates the square. Across town, labourers are building a kosher restaurant, the city's first. A two-storey building under construction next door will house a mikvah...

The Jewish renaissance in Birobidzhan is the latest chapter in the surreal tale of this would-be Siberian Zion, founded nearly a century ago. Nestled on the border with China, seven timezones east of Moscow and a six-day journey away on the Trans-Siberian railway, the region was first settled en masse during the early 1930s as part of a plan to create a Soviet homeland for Jews during the rule of Joseph Stalin.

Its story since then has reflected the vicissitudes of Soviet and then modern Russian history. The population of the area, still officially called the Jewish Autonomous Region, is barely 1% Jewish, but the authorities are trying to cultivate the memory of Jewish customs and history among the residents and even hope to attract new Jewish migrants.

Eli Riss, Birobidzhan's 27-year-old rabbi, said the local Jewish community currently numbered 3,000 at most, and only 30 were regulars at the synagogue. His parents emigrated to Israel when he was young but after religious schooling he returned to his birthplace as a rabbi...

When the area was officially established as the Jewish Autonomous Region in 1934, 14 years before the foundation of Israel, it was the first explicitly Jewish territory in modern times. By 1939, 18% of the population was Jewish and Birobidzhan had a Yiddish theatre and Yiddish newspaper. The work of the police department, courts and city administration was carried out at least partially in Yiddish.

Some historians have suggested the Birobidzhan project was tainted with antisemitism from the very beginning, creating a "dumping ground" for Jews thousands of miles from any areas where they had traditionally lived and in terrain that was miserably difficult for human

habitation. But in the 1930s many Jewish intellectuals promoted the project with vigour. Jews travelled to Birobidzhan from inside the Soviet Union, western Europe and even farther afield – infected with a revolutionary fervour that gave a Jewish flavour to the utopianism that characterized many of those involved in the early Bolshevik project.

The optimism was short-lived. During Stalin's purges, much of the local party leadership was executed and expressions of Jewishness were discouraged. After the second world war, the region saw a new influx of Jews who had escaped the Holocaust and had no homes to which to return. A new wave of antisemitic purges was followed by decades of disinterest in Jewish identity.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, cheap goods from across the border in China flooded the market and economic misery ensued, as in almost all the former Soviet lands. But unlike most other Soviet citizens, the Jews had a way out from the misery: to leave for Israel. Iosif Brenner, a local historian, estimates that 20,000 Jews left Birobidzhan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the majority for Israel.

Alexander Levintal, the region's governor, said Birobidzhan was still suffering from the effects of mass Jewish emigration. "When the Soviet Union collapsed and the borders opened, about 70 families of Jewish doctors left, and medicine in the region has still not fully recovered," he said. Riss, the rabbi, said that among the few thousand Jews who remained there was little Jewish cultural identity. "Our community has lost the understanding of what it means to be Jewish."

Birobidzhan Stern, the town's Yiddish-language newspaper, is now published in Russian but has two pages in Yiddish each week. The paper's editor, Elena Sarashevskaya, fell in love with Yiddish as a child, studied it at university and now writes the Yiddish pages.

Sarashevskaya, who is not Jewish, said she intended to go on publishing the Yiddish pages even though most people in the city could not read them. "Yiddish is imbued with a real life-force; maybe it's linked to the suffering of the Jewish people," she said. "People are always pronouncing Yiddish dead but it's still very much alive, it's always finding new ways to survive."

In Birobidzhan there is certainly an attempt to keep Yiddish and other elements of Jewish heritage alive. Street signs use both Russian and Yiddish, and one school still offers Yiddish lessons, although the university Yiddish faculty closed down a few years ago. A four-day Jewish cultural festival held this month in the city featured a concert from a cantor of Vienna's main synagogue and the opening of an exhibition on the city's history, organised by an Austrian diplomat and featuring Russian, American and Israeli artists...

One of the stranger parts of Birobidzhan's story is that although it was meant as a Jewish statelet, religious Judaism was alien to Soviet atheism and thus frowned upon. The local museum contains Yiddish leaflets warning

locals not to celebrate Passover, and Sarashevskaya leafed through back issues of Birobidzhan Shtern from the 1980s, pointing out that although the newspaper was in Yiddish it contained no discussion of either Judaism or Israel.

With so few Jews now living in Birobidzhan... the Jewish cultural centre gives the impression of a Jewish Disneyland rather than of a living, breathing community.

If the local government gets its way, more Jews would move to the region, especially some of those who left in the early 1990s. Rostislav Goldstein, the senator for the region in Russia's upper house of parliament, said Birobidzhan's proximity to China could provide advantages for Israeli businesses wanting to crack the Chinese market.

He said he wanted to create a local version of the aliyah, the name given to the process of attracting Jews from the diaspora to Israel. "We have one big advantage over Israel, and that's that there are no Arabs shooting here," he said.

Livental, the local governor, was rather more circumspect, but said his personal chauffeur had emigrated from Birobidzhan to Israel in the early 1990s but recently returned as he could not get used to the local mentality. "If the economic situation here improves then more people will want to return," he said.

## Unexpected Learnings from the Jewish Communities in Asia

Reprinted from [ejewishphilanthropy.com](http://ejewishphilanthropy.com) 24 December 2017

By Simone Szalmuk-Singer

Jewish identity, communal continuity and Israel's image abroad, are arguably some of the most important topics in the Jewish world today. Connecting with the Jewish communities in Asia provides fascinating perspective and clarity in these areas.

The recent Asia and the Jewish World: Intergenerational Leadership Conversation in Hong Kong, was the fourth annual Asia gathering convened by the Pratt Foundation, Jewish Funders' Network and Australian Jewish Funders. Philanthropists, business people and communal leaders from Asia, Israel, Europe, the United States and Australia came together to continue the conversations that occurred previously in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai. Each successive year the richness of insights gained and connections forged, provide endless opportunities for the global Jewish landscape.

The Jewish communities in Asia comprise a wonderful tapestry of Jews from all over the world. Many come to Asia to pursue career opportunities. In recent years, the success of Israeli technology and innovation has led to increasing growth in these communities.

Sam Lipski, CEO of the Pratt Foundation, observed that "it has become apparent that the 'global Jewish mainstream' remains largely isolated from the small but growing and vibrant Jewish communities in the Asian region.

Not the other way around.”

By connecting with this thriving part of the Jewish world, we open ourselves up to so many learnings and possibilities.

### **1. Pluralism and tolerance are key factors in maintaining Jewish Identity**

The conference opened with a panel of young entrepreneurs living and working in Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. They described the unexpected discovery and development of their Jewish identity. They confessed that they found it easier to be a Jew in Asia than at ‘home’ in Israel, the US or Canada as the communities in Asia are generally pluralistic, successfully fostering collaboration between different streams of Judaism.

Larger Jewish communities and Israel can learn from this. Extensive Jewish infrastructure will fail to foster Jewish identity if the environment is divisive and polarising. By contrast, a collaborative, tolerant and welcoming environment is more conducive to developing and enhancing a sense of Jewish identity and engagement.

### **2. Providing impactful leadership opportunities leads to more engagement**

With strong Jewish identity comes a desire to be communally active. Many of these young entrepreneurs were excited about their ‘communal’ potential in Asia. They recounted how ‘back home’ stepping up for communal leadership roles was not enticing as they had to join the ‘bottom’ of the pile and wait twenty, thirty or forty years to climb to the top where impact was possible. In the smaller communities of Asia, young people often have increased opportunity to have impact earlier.

It is not uncommon for leaders of larger Jewish communities to bemoan the lack of young people willing to assume community positions. Perhaps we would do well to reflect on how communal structures and leadership development planning, or lack of, may be acting as a barrier for future generations to meaningfully engage.

### **3. Israel as the Start-up Nation is a very successful narrative for investment, philanthropy and engagement.**

Asia has become a hub of Israeli business activity. Israel’s image in these countries is centred around innovation and hi-tech. Israel-focused investment and philanthropy from China and Hong Kong is booming. The relationships with top Chinese philanthropists, the Li Ka Shing Foundation and Ronnie C. Chan illustrate the enormous opportunities for cooperation and potential for far-reaching impact.

The Guangdong Technion-Israel Institute of Technology campus in Shantou in the Guangdong Province of South Eastern China is an outstanding example of collaboration. This partnership is a powerful combination of the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of Israel and the scale of philanthropic resources in China.

Solina Chau, Executive Director of the Li Ka Shing Foundation and Professor Peretz Lavie, President of the Technion, described the journey that led to a transformational \$US130 million gift to the Technion by the Li Ka Shing Foundation. Ms Chau referred to the deep connection with and understanding of Jewish values and culture that has inspired Li Ka

Shing who believes that “education is the tool to shape destiny ... it is the key to close the social gap.” Ms Chau explained that the Technion impressed the Li Ka Shing Foundation more than any other institution in the world as in China they were accustomed to finding answers to existing questions whereas at the Technion they sought answers to questions “we don’t know yet.”

Ronnie C. Chan, Chairman of Hang Lung Properties, captivated the conference with his knowledge of Israel acquired from leading business delegations to Israel where he introduces top Chinese business leaders and philanthropists to Israelis from different sectors. His enthusiasm and passion for the country’s innovative culture has been pivotal in generating significant Chinese investment in Israel’s social and business sectors.

The relationship and the ‘rock star’ status Israel holds in Asia has been cultivated over recent decades. It reflects the power of a positive Israel narrative embedded in an innovation culture. At a time when Jewish engagement and connectivity to Israel are declining, non-Jewish Chinese engagement is increasing. The relationship between Israel and the diaspora is a controversial topic which is outside the parameters of this article except to say that there is so much more potential for investment, philanthropy and engagement with Israel when the focus is on a positive narrative where Israel is not portrayed as a never-ending emergency cause but rather, a partner for innovation and solving world problems.

### **4. The power to grow comes from those who seek the growth**

The case study of Moishe House guides us on how to bring the Jewish communities in Asia together and connect them to world Jewry by providing a template of how programming and experiences can be transferred effectively across communities. It shows that global programs can be adapted to local realities; every community does not need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ but rather, can benefit from existing global initiatives.

David Cygielman Founder and CEO and Jim Heeger, Chair of Moishe House described how Moishe House grew from four friends choosing to live together in 2006 to 108 houses in 27 countries around the world, serving more than 50,000 young adults each year through over 8500 programs. The key to its scaling success is that each house was generated by the community who need to want it, be prepared to fund it and put in the time required to run it.

The success of Moishe House is inspiring and illustrates what is possible with philanthropic vision, as well as highlighting the importance of the will and commitment of the people on the ground.

### **5. Building social capital around the globe – anything is possible**

Yaakov Lehman, an Israel based educator and entrepreneur inspired with his presentation on the relevance of social capital. He defined ‘social capital’ as the collective value of all social relationships within a network, as indicated by the individual and collective benefits generated from the trust, mutual reciprocity, knowledge transfer and collaboration. Social capital creates benefits for both those within the net-

work and bystanders alike.

Lehman taught us how to build social capital in the new digital age. Whereas formerly one would rely on religion, family and geography, today the new model relies on vision, shared language and immersive experiences with authenticity, intimacy and vulnerability.

The Asia gatherings are facilitating the building of social capital. From year to year, connections are made, learnings exchanged and a global community is built. The anecdotes abound. Motivated by the 2016 conference in Shanghai, participants from Shanghai established a Jewish Young Entrepreneurs Group where older community members met with newer members to share experiences in China. A young American participant, Abe Sorock living in Beijing, ended up on a Jewish leadership experience in Israel at the illustrious ROI Summit, where he was then inspired to have a bar mitzvah as an adult having not had one at 13.

In the days following this year’s conference, as a result of new connections made, Yaakov Lehman from Israel enlightened the students at Carmel College in Hong Kong about the value of social capital. Hong Kong journalist Erica Lyons provided a wider audience an insight into Jewish life in Hong Kong by publishing her work on the Australian platform Jewish Women of Words. The inaugural Gen17 Asia survey commenced. This was adapted from the Australian Gen17 survey of the Jewish community in Australia. The information gathered will enhance our understanding of local Jewish populations in Asia, their backgrounds, level of Jewish education, values, level of religious observance and views on the importance of Jewish continuity and Israel.

At this year’s conference, the presence, enthusiasm and leadership of young people was palpable. They are pushing for action and change and stepping up to represent the new face of their communities. Global in outlook and “digital natives,” they will be the engine of a robust Jewish network that links Asia with the Jewish World. Together, we laid the foundations of a framework for how a regional network in Asia could develop and operate. We will now work towards building a roadmap to move forward.

Whilst the global Jewish community can learn from the communities in Asia, the possibilities for shared learning, impactful philanthropy and investment will be multiplied by building stronger connections with and between the communities in Asia. Weaving meaningful connections does not happen overnight, it is a long term process which relies on visionary philanthropy as well as a local groundswell of will to convert the enthusiasm of the conference into an exciting new reality for the whole Jewish world.

Simone Szalmuk-Singer is Co-Chair of the Australian Jewish Funders, the network of Jewish funders inspiring effective philanthropy and strengthening community. She is also a Board Director of Jewish Care Victoria and Co-Founder of Jewish Women of Words. She may be contacted at [simone@szalmuk-singer.com.au](mailto:simone@szalmuk-singer.com.au).

## The International

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the earth through Israel.

This vehicle has been constantly challenged by the powers of darkness. For them the equation has been simple; destroy Israel and you effectively destroy the purpose of God for the world. Thankfully Isaiah declares that this “day” of warfare is coming to an end. On that “day” all the world will know that Israel existed for their blessing and not their cursing.

The Prophet Isaiah says, “Speak comfort to Jerusalem”. Another translation of the same verse says, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem”. A people in peace, joy, victory and blessing do not need the words of comfort or tenderness. No, it is a people in perpetual trauma and conflict that need comfort and tenderness. Sadly church history has been anything but this! Their words have been harsh, bitter and reviling. Thankfully we at the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem heard an exhortation from heaven in 1980 that called upon us to “speak comfort to Jerusalem”...As Israel moves steadily but surely to her God-given destiny, we are determined to “stay the course” with her.

### Aiding Aliyah: The Finnish Transit

From its inception the ICEJ has had two dominant goals; first, to serve as a conduit of comfort and blessing through which believers in the nations could show their love and support to Israel. Second, the ICEJ stands as a prophetic voice to this generation concerning God’s unwavering plan to fulfill His covenant promises to the fathers of Israel. Namely, that He would ultimately restore the children of Israel to their rightful land and sequentially to a right relationship with their God, the God of Israel.

For the past three decades the personnel of the Christian Embassy, in Jerusalem and worldwide, have worked diligently to accomplish these God-ordained responsibilities. Even in the face of consistent struggle,

the work has impacted literally hundreds of thousands of Christians and Jews throughout the earth.

In 1989 the Soviet Union did not have diplomatic relations with Israel and there were no direct flights between the two countries. Dr. Ulla Järvillehto, a medical doctor and member of the Finnish parliament, sought official permission from the governments of Finland and Israel to bring the Russian Jews to Israel through her country. Ulla became the founder of the ICEJ branch in Finland and over the years worked tirelessly to establish and maintain the Finnish transit program... By March 10, 1990, the Finnish aliyah route was officially opened with the approval of both governments, and it has remained open since then, even when other routes closed down during the Gulf War in 1991. On May 28, 1990, in the early hours of the morning, the first Christian-sponsored flight of Soviet Jews arrived at Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport...

In total, the Christian Embassy assisted more than 3,000 Jews to make aliyah in 2017, including from Ethiopia (1,200), Russia (1,100), Belarus (800), Ukraine (70), and India (50), among other countries. Since its founding in 1980, the ICEJ has helped nearly 140,000 Jews return to their biblical homeland, or roughly ten percent of all Jews who have made aliyah in that time period.

This represents an investment of over \$50 million in aliyah efforts, with most of the assisted Jewish olim coming from the former Soviet republics but also thousands from Western Europe, North and South America, the Bnei Menashe from India, and the Kaifeng Jews from China. All of these efforts have been made in close coordination with the Jewish Agency and Keren Hayesod.

“The great ingathering of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel is still continuing and it is a real privilege and joy for our organization to play such a central role in this historic return to Zion,” said Dr. Jürgen Bühler, President of the ICEJ.

## Jewish Identity in China

(continued from page 1)

Zhang Xingwang also maintains that the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews had forgotten the Jewish culture. The original Kaifeng descendants had congregated near the Teaching Alley (jiao hutong) but after 1958, they moved out. Only the Zhao family remained there. Looking at this from a daily life perspective, they were no longer observing the Jewish tradition. This year [2002] is the first time that [the Jews] have celebrated Passover. Although most of the [Jews] are still in the habit of not eating pork, there is no Jewish person who is true to the image of “the sect that extracts the sinew”<sup>3</sup> of the sheep. They forgot the traditional customs and therefore came here [to Nanjing] to study Hebrew hoping to return and search for their historical Jewish memories.

[Meanwhile, in the class] these Jewish descendants repeated after the teacher a Hebrew prayer: “In front of the Lord we sing a new song—Hallelujah!” Everybody made great effort to have the correct pronunciation as each one hoped to enunciate every single word of the hard-to-study Hebrew sentence.

### With Illegal Emigration the [Jin] Family Stretches the Boundaries

When the reporter asked Zhang Xingwang about the [Jin] family who had already immigrated to Israel, he responded without hesitation: “They are different from us, we are patriots.” He also admitted that there were Kaifeng Jews who ran away illegally but this was a matter of purely individual behavior. He also said that just because this family name was Jin, it does not mean that we study Hebrew for the pleasure of the Jin family. “First we are Chinese, but because we have Jewish bloodlines, we are Chinese with Jewish characteristics. We teach this to our children: that first of all we love our country.”

Outsiders need to understand that this is a

(continued on page 13)

## BOOK NOOK

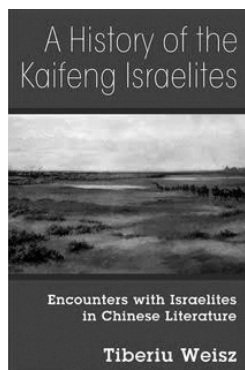
### A History Of The Kaifeng Israelites: Encounters with Israelites in Chinese Literature

By Tiberiu Weisz

Publisher: Outskirts Press ISBN: 9781478789529 Paperback: 280 pages

Suggested retail price of \$29.95. Available from the publisher, on Amazon and Barnes & Noble, or from your local bookstore. This is Tiberiu Weisz’s third book in a trilogy on Judaism and China.

The book traces the presence in Chinese literature of a small group of Jews who migrated and settled in China. Weisz identifies the



Chinese characters that denoted Israelites in ancient Chinese literature and, based on these, the author documents their presence and activities. According to the author, early Chinese sages quoted and made references to these Israelites while later literature treated them as natives.

Tiberiu Weisz is an academic, business consultant and author. He writes about cross-cultural issues linking China and Judaism. His articles have been published worldwide in-

cluding Asian Jewish Life and Sephardic Horizons. Weisz was born in Romania, educated in Europe, Israel, US and Taiwan, is fluent in several languages.

For more information or to contact the author, visit [www.outskirtspress.com/kaifeng](http://www.outskirtspress.com/kaifeng)

### Documentary Tells Tale of Jewish Refugees to China

By Amy Spiro

Excerpted from <http://www.jpost.com/Not-Just-News/Documentary-tells-tale-of-Jewish-refugees-who-fled-to-China-506522>, 2 October 2017

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sensitive issue. Zhang Xingwang illustrated this point: "We were the little birds in the forest, without worries and concerns. Later as the cats [hunters] became numerous, we saw the guns' fowling pieces and ran. Now, many people are looking for us both from China and abroad." He repeatedly stated that the majority of the Kaifeng Jewish descendents are patriots...

Zhang Xingwang explained the value of the Jewish presence in China: "The Kaifeng Jewish community has an impact on the world. They often receive Jews from foreign countries and from Israel. The Israelis consider the Jews of Kaifeng especially important, because it serves a testimony to the friendship between China and Israel. We are saying that the Chinese people are good toward the Jews; they do not discriminate against the Jews. Living circumstances in Kaifeng are favorable, and the Jews can survive and flourish for another thousand years." In conclusion, he said, "it is not important whether or not the government recognizes us as Jews, nor is it important that the census cannot be changed, what is important is that we feel that we are Jews in our hearts. Neither this nor the next generation will forget that we are Jews."

#### **But the Young Generation of Jews Has a Different View of Their Jewish Identity**

At the Hebrew school [in Nanjing] was another female student, majoring in International Relations at the Eluosi Mosque.<sup>4</sup> Her name is Shi Han, a second year student who used the summer vacation to go to Nanjing University to study Jewish culture. Although her [maternal] grandfather was a representative of the Jewish descendents at the Beijing [festivities] in 1952, she has no deep historical affiliation to Judaism and her interest in this class is mostly curiosity. "I rarely mention that I am Jewish; only when classmates come over to my house and ask about the few books and the pictures in the house, I tell them that I am a descendent of Jews." When the government allowed [the Jews] to

test for their DNA in the 1980s, the proof came back that she had the same DNA traces as an Iraqi Jew. She has no understanding of Judaism and even less of the Bible. But when she was asked about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, she said: "Of course we are on the side of Israel."

The Jin family obviously went one step further [in their quest] of their ancestors' tradition. According to reports, when Jin Xiaojin, who worked at the Institute for Minority Research, found out in the 1980s that he was of Jewish descent, he sent his daughter Qu Yian, who at the time was a reporter in Beijing, to Los Angeles to study Judaism.

#### **The Latest Jewish Records**

Kaifeng is an old city; its economy naturally cannot be compared to the coastal area. Song Nushi, who works for the city Migration Assistance Bureau, said that, because of the high unemployment rate, many people considered going to work abroad, and last year a number of people asked about Israel.

Zhang Xingwang directed the reporter to the Teaching Alley (jiao hutong). That place is marked on the map as the "remnants of the Jewish Synagogue" but the original synagogue site has been replaced by the Peoples' Number Four Hospital and the only historical marker is an ancient well in the hospital boiler room.

Cui Shuping, a widow of a Jewish descendent, lives on the southern side of the Teaching Alley. She is a Han Chinese but her late husband Zhao Pingyu was of Jewish descent. Every day she sees local and foreign visitors. On the table in the house, there is a candleholder and a "Great Six Star" (Magen David) paper-cut window decoration that her daughter had cut out and put in the framed mirror. She told the reporter that the paper cut is both a decoration and a reminder. On the sides of the door are hung two traditional Chinese scrolls designated for peace. Apart for these reminders, her house is no different from that of her neighbors.

On the fourth floor of the Kaifeng Museum is the Jewish Department, and to gain admission one needs to apply in advance. Fortunately, the gatekeeper was there and asked the guide to take the reporter to the fourth floor, on condition that she take no pictures nor make any recording. On display in the museum is an extremely important memorial engraving, the original stone stele of "The Record of the Rebuilding of the Pure and Truth Temple" and "The Record in Honor of the Daojing Temple."<sup>5</sup> The floor was very dark and very humid and the mood was somber. Due to the declining number of visitors, Zeng Guangqing, the head of the department, told the 21st-Century World reporter that the Kaifeng Jews were a historical phenomenon and that there is no Jewish minority among the 56 national minorities in China. But of course the reporter does know this.

The local Kaifeng Jewish descendents, however, welcomed the publicity [offered by the reporter]. Li Suisheng's wife bought a watermelon to serve the reporter while she showed her two sets of original census documents as proof of their nationality. The nationality of Li Suisheng was clearly marked "Jew" in the old Red Book.<sup>6</sup> The new census is handwritten and has the word "Jew" for Li Suisheng and his daughter, but a closer look at the census record of Li Suisheng shows that there is a trace of change. His wife explained that the census official wrote it wrong and he immediately corrected it.

#### **Officially, Neither Country Recognizes Them as Jews**

The reporter followed up with the census registration office. The People's Police pulled up the record of Li Suisheng on the computer and the reporter could see on the screen that the nationality of the three members of the Li clan is Han Chinese. The deputy director explained that most of the new census is computerized but the transfer [to computerized system] occurred while the census was taken. At the time, the software was not secure and therefore Li Suisheng's registry was handwritten. But he added that the computerized system has only two nationalities Han or Muslims. China has 56 nationalities and Jews are not among them.

Not only the local government did not recognize them as Jews, but when the reporter went to the Office of Migration of the Foreign Ministry [in Beijing] inquiring about the application of the Jin family to Israel, an official at the Public Documentation Office admitted that in 1996 the local government made an error issuing those certificates. At the time, the Public Notary Office issued individual IDs that did not constitute legal recognition of the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Later the Public Notary Office revoked the Jewish certificates and since then IDs with "Jew" on them were illegal. According to the official, China has only 56 minorities, and the Jewish minority is not among them.

[The reporter went] to the Israeli Consulate in

#### **BOOK NOOK** *(continued from page 12)*

"Above the Drowning Sea," directed by Rene Balcer - who is known for his work on Law and Order and Law and Order: Criminal Intent - premiered last week at the JCC in Manhattan. It will play at the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival next week and then head to the Hong Kong Jewish Film Festival in November.

The film, narrated by Julianna Margulies (The Good Wife) and Tony Goldwyn (Scandal), tells the story of "the courageous intervention of Ho Feng Shan, the Chinese Consul in Vienna who defied his own government and braved the Gestapo to issue visas to the refugees."

The 90-minute film, shot in six countries, in-

cludes interviews with refugees themselves, Chinese residents who aided the newcomers and animation which tells some of the stories from 75 years ago...

Balcer co-produced the film with his wife, Carolyn Hsu-Balcer...At a post-screening discussion at The Asia Society in New York on Thursday night, Balcer noted how the story of Above the Drowning Sea still has such relevance today.

"They always say this is a nation of immigrants. Well this is a planet of immigrants, of refugees, and there's always movements of populations," he said. "Because, at some point, whether its 50 years ago, 10 weeks ago or 1,000 years ago, somebody told our ancestors yes you can stay here, and it's OK."

Beijing located on the 4th floor of the West Trade Center building. The response from the Israeli Consulate was the same. The Public Relations Officer told 21st Century World that the Israeli Consulate recognizes only the legal procedure of the Foreign Ministry and does not regard the Jewish certificates as legal. He also said that the Consulate had not issued immigration certificates to any Jewish descendents.

Though neither country admits officially that they are Jews, a few organizations assist the Kaifeng descendents to return to their traditional culture. Chou Cailian, a Chinese Canadian, helped many Chinese minority poor children with education. Since he [Chou] suspects that his great-grandmother was of Jewish descent, he had helped several Jewish descendents of Kaifeng. He financed the education of fourteen Kaifeng Jewish descendents; among them was Lijing, Li Suisheng's daughter, who just recently had received a scholarship. In March of this year, Chou Cailian invited the families of the descendents to a restaurant to celebrate Passover. At the same time, other organizations also assist the Kaifeng Jewish descendents to immigrate to Israel. The Jin family only recently immigrated to Israel with the help of such an organization...

#### Are the Kaifeng Jewish descendents Jews?

To clarify this question, the reporter interviewed Professor Xu Xin from the Nanjing Jewish Cultural Center.

21st Century World: The Jews of Kaifeng are a historical incident. But, from an Israeli standpoint, after some descendents of the Jews of Kaifeng immigrated to Israel, it suddenly became reality. Could you put the issue of the Kaifeng Jews in simple terms for us?

Xu Xin: The issue of the Kaifeng Jews as was talked about in China in the past actually referred to the remnant of the historical Kaifeng Jews...After the Opium War in 1850, two Chinese missionaries from Shanghai were sent to Kaifeng and they wrote a report that was widely publicized in the West. According to that report, there was no longer a rabbi in Kaifeng and they estimated that [the community had been without a rabbi] or a successor since the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, they [Jews] ceased to observe the traditional customs because the role of the rabbi was very important in Judaism.

The Kaifeng Temple had been in disrepair for a long time, and it was evident that the Jews stopped going to the synagogue. Since the synagogue belonged to the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews, the descendents sold the building in 1914. This attracted the attention of the Shanghai Jews. Jews have a tradition of helping each other, and when they learned that the Kaifeng descendents sold the Torah scrolls, they were very sad. They established an "Association for the Aid of the Kaifeng Jews" and wrote letters to the world Jewish communities calling for saving

the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews. But the outbreak of World War II shelved the issue; they [the Jews] faced other disasters in the world. At the time there were several Kaifeng Jews who went to Shanghai and were well received by the Shanghai Jewish community, they also underwent circumcision, but afterward there were no more attempts to restore the tradition.

#### 21st Century World: The descendents of the Kaifeng Jews called themselves Jews in the past, what is your view about this question?

Xu Xin: After the end of the 19th century, there were no Jewish descendents in Kaifeng, but some people followed the tradition and called themselves Jews. The Kaifeng Jews followed the patrilineal tradition, that is, if the father was Jewish, the offspring were Jewish, too, and they used the father's surname. In the 1920 census, during the Republican Period [1911-1949] a few Kaifeng descendents wrote "Jew" as their nationality affiliation. They did so out of conviction of historical loyalty and not due to political or economic aspirations. Even on the 1952 census [form], some Kaifeng Jewish descendents wrote "Jew" [as their nationality] even though there were not many [who observed] Jewish tradition at the time, but in that generation, people were permitted to determine their own religious affiliation. The census did not require any proof of ancestry or nationality; descendents knew the origin of their ancestors. This kind of "Jew" was actually [a Jew] in a cultural sense. Interestingly, the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews based their being Jews on the tradition, but other people claim that they are not [Jewish]. This is strange because no other minority, not the Han Chinese nor the Muslims are required to prove their [affiliation], so why are the Kaifeng Jews?

21st Century World: But according to the Law of Return, they are not Jews.

Xu Xin: That is correct. I was talking about Jews in a cultural sense. Strictly speaking, I do not regard them as Jews, and that refers to the "Jewish descendents", too. I think that it is ludicrous that they want to immigrate to Israel. According to the Law of Return, only if the mother is Jewish, or the individual is converted to Judaism, he or she is a Jew. Based on these standards, they are obviously not Jews, because the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews follow the father's lineage. But this is a legal definition, and one cannot suppress these peoples' traditional right to call themselves Jews. We should not forget that during biblical times the Jewish lineage was patrilineal and only after the exile [586 BCE], the standard changed to matrilineal.

When China examined its definition of national minorities, the status of the Jewish minority was also considered. In 1952, two delegates from Kaifeng represented the Jews in the National Minority Day Celebration. But in 1953 the Central Committee reaffirmed the article [of the basic laws] that

maintained that there are only 56 minorities in China, and Jews were not among them, yet the [same article] also protected their rights to preserve their traditional customs.

21st Century World: Now it appears that the Kaifeng Jewish descendents want to immigrate to Israel, how do you look at this?

Xu Xin: In the 1990s, the Kaifeng descendents became interested in immigration. Among the Seven Surnames of the Kaifeng Jews, the Jin family went to Beijing and asked to immigrate. The Consulate of Israel, however, refused to consider their application because of the Law of Return. Then they [the Jin's] went to Israel from a third country (from Russia to Finland and to Israel). My understanding is that a Christian organization helped them. But, I doubt that they can become eligible to be Israelis according to the Law of Return unless they convert...Most Chinese do not understand Israel; they think that immigration is good. But, I tell them straightforwardly that immigration is a difficult affair. I do not approve of immigration, they do not speak the language, they have no skills and life in Israel is very difficult.

#### Special correspondent An Tifa reports from Jerusalem:

Since 1986, many foreign and Chinese visitors have come to Kaifeng to interview L. (I use the name L. because the interviewee did not agree to use the real name),<sup>8</sup> and the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews. After the establishment of relations between China and Israel in 1992, these kinds of interviews increased daily. And L.'s name started to appear in a few places both in China and abroad. An unexpected opportunity in 1999 changed the fate of L. At the beginning of that year, L. received assistance from an organization that in the 1920s started to help overseas Jews to immigrate to Israel, and they expressed their willingness to assist L. to be the first Kaifeng Jew to immigrate to Israel.

#### Once the reporter met L. she asked: "Why do you want to immigrate to Israel?"

L. said, "Since I was little, I have known that I was Jewish. When I was little, my mother told me that one branch of [the family] is Chinese and one branch is Israelite. Reaching out to the other branch has been one of my dreams since childhood."

After 1999, L. sought the path of immigration, but that path was not successful. It can be said that behind each emigration from China, there is a complicated story. But in the end they achieved their goal. By the year 2000, they obtained the various permits, spent four months in Finland, and went to live in Israel.

L. explained the process of immigrating to Israel as a Jew. "First, I needed to prove that I was a Jew. Though I wrote 'Jew' as my nationality in the 1996 census, officials told me that I had to write either Han or Muslim and could not continue to write 'Jew' as nationality because there was no such name

among the 56 names. Then I had to produce an official notarized letter. I went to the Foreign Ministry in Beijing where I was told that [such] a notarized letter needed to be approved by higher levels at the Ministry. After two weeks, I received the approval of the higher officials in the ministry, and in addition, it was also stamped by the Israeli Consulate." L. continued: "If one wants to maintain Jewish identity one needs also to obtain a notarized [letter] from one's rabbi. But there are no rabbis in China. The few Jewish descendents 'perhaps several thousand people altogether' are widely scattered throughout China and very few of them are observant Jews."

Once the identity is recognized, traveling becomes a question of expenses. According to the records, the aid society who helped them emigrate, had already taken into account the expenses and successfully provided them enough financing. Thus in the fall of 1999, L. [and wife] embarked for Finland, where they stayed for four months and in the end they arrived in Jerusalem.

"Because of the sensitivity of the immigration issue, the government hoped that we would not come to Jerusalem directly from Beijing, therefore we adopted a two stage plan. First we went to Finland and then to Israel. Our expenses in Finland and in Jerusalem were covered by the aid society. For two years after we left Kaifeng we had received about ten thousand US dollars in aid."

They lived in Jerusalem for two years, and received a monthly stipend of US \$ 600 (5000 Chinese yuan) that covered the rent. In addition, they received 6000-yuan (\$700) a month for living expenses and medical insurance equal to the [standard of living of a] middle-income family. They were also provided with furniture and appliances. L. did not work. He spent half days, three times a week, at an ulpan, the rest of the time he had free time. He went for walks, watched TV, read books, surfed the Internet and cooked. At least three times a week, he went to the synagogue and used Hebrew to read the prayers. L. said that once he felt he could communicate, he was able to look for a job. Gradually the aid society decreased the amount of aid and eventually stopped it altogether. No matter to what standards one compares L.'s living conditions, his two-room apartment is not considered small. On the snow-white painted walls, hangs a Chinese scroll. Also displayed in the living room are seven or eight picture frames depicting the old Kaifeng synagogue and the scenery around it.

**During the interview the reporter asked L: "To what extent did you observe the Jewish tradition in Kaifeng?"**

L. said, "In the old days, there was a saying that 'seven surnames and eight families'<sup>9</sup> of Jews lived in Kaifeng. These surnames were bestowed in antiquity by the emperor. Our surname was historic and our ancestors held

a fourth grade official rank in the court. The household was rather prosperous. There were also rather many Jews in old Kaifeng who observed the tradition. We had our own family tree, which also was a proof that we were Jewish. Before the Cultural Revolution [1966-1969], our family still kept the imperial tablet<sup>10</sup> but later we lent it to a display in Beijing. It was never returned to us, and we lost its trace. There are also stone inscriptions left in Kaifeng that had recorded the deeds of our ancestors. The graves of our Jewish ancestors near Kaifeng are still in good conditions. There are approximately 30 tombs. Buried among the bodies of nine generations is [the grave] of my elder brother who recently passed away.

On the door of our house, we had a special Jewish sign that we touched when we entered or left the house. It was a sign of 'to go and come in peace'. Our family observed the Sabbath from Friday sunset until sunset on Saturday. That time we did no work. Our family had also read the Chinese version of the Jewish prayers."

L.'s wife is not of Jewish descent but she said that [since her marriage] she had understood and respected [her husband's] national identity and traditional customs. L. said, "During the ninety years of living in Kaifeng, our family had not eaten pork or shrimp and these customs have been preserved until today." Before immigrating to Israel, L. ran a rather small factory and his wife used a room in the house to run a barbershop. L. has an elder sister and a younger brother who live near the community housing in Kaifeng. They also follow the same customs as the L. household.

**The interview is nearing an end and the reporter asked L: "Do your sister and brother hope to immigrate to Israel? Why did they not come yet?"**

L. said: "Of course, they would like to immigrate; they also sent in their application. But two main obstacles are in the way: One, there is no organization that is willing to give them the documentation that they are Jews. Two, financing is also a problem. You know, immigrating requires a lot of money and the organization that helped and financed us is helping other people."

In conclusion, it must be added that L.'s family are not the sole Chinese Jews living in Israel. During World War I, many Jews sought refugee in Shanghai and other places in China; some of them married to local Chinese. The children of these mixed marriages have Jewish blood. After the liberation, some of them went to Israel with their Jewish mother or father; others came to Israel after the opening of relations between the two countries, in search of their mother or father. In every town or city in Israel, one can find such examples.

**About the Author:**

An Tifa is special correspondent for the 21st Century World, a Chinese periodical.

## About the Translator

Tiberiu Weisz is the author of three books about China and the Jews: *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China* (iUniverse, 2006), *The Covenant and the Mandate of Heaven: An In-depth Comparative Cultural Study of Judaism and China* (iUniverse, 2008), and the new *A History Of The Kaifeng Israelites: Encounters with Israelites in Chinese Literature* (Outskirts Press, 2017).

## Translator's Notes

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Xingwang was the spokesman for the Jewish community in Kaifeng and also goes by the Hebrew name of Moshe. He is very outspoken about Judaism in China and, here, he expressed his views to a Chinese reporter. He is a physical education teacher and a Wushu (martial arts) coach at a high school in Kaifeng. He is also member of the Chinese Communist Party and a former city council member. I met him several times but had never had a chance to talk with him. At one of the dinners, I sat next to his daughter, at the time a high school student, with whom I exchanged a few words. She was very surprised that I could talk in fluent Chinese, and once she realized that we could converse freely, she was very talkative. Unfortunately she was called away to give us a "demonstration of her knowledge of a Hebrew song."

<sup>2</sup> What he is referring to was the celebration of the National Minority Day in 1952 when the Kaifeng Municipal Government and Bureau of Central South chose two Jewish descendents from Kaifeng, Ai Fenming and Shi Fenying, to represent the Jewish minority at the national celebration. Both members became ardent Communists and later worked for the government. According to Xu Xin, the reason that these two Jews were chosen was "that the local government was aware of the existence of Jews in the city and wanted to ensure equal rights for any ethnic group living in their region. These two Jewish descendents were introduced as Jews while in Beijing and were well received during the celebration." (For details see: Xu Xin, "Chinese Policy Towards Judaism," *Points East*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (March, 2004), pp. 3-4, and Gustavo D. Perednik, "The Chinese of Jewish Descent at Kaifeng," *Points East*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (March 2008), p. 4).

<sup>3</sup> This is what the Jews were called in the eighteenth century when the missionaries visited them. For details, see Michael Pollak, *Mandarin Jews and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> I am not clear about the meaning of this sentence nor certain of its exact location. Eluosi is a Russian minority that lives between the Uyigur Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang. [Editor: It may simply mean "Russian Language Mosque."]

<sup>5</sup> This is the original stele of 1489; the other side is the engraving of the 1512 inscriptions. For a full translation of the Chinese text see *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions*.

<sup>6</sup> An official document.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed explanation of these events, see Xu Xin, "Chinese Policy Towards Judaism."

<sup>8</sup> [Editor: "L." of course is Jin Xiaojing. It is unclear why he and the reporter used a pseudonym since his name is mentioned throughout the rest of the article.]

<sup>9</sup> This is another name for the Jews in Kaifeng.

<sup>10</sup> This tablet was displayed at the entrance of the Kaifeng synagogue.

**In Memoriam  
Chan Sui Jeung "SJ"**

1933 – 2018

Civil Servant, Scholar, Author

**On the Passing of Chan Sui-jeung "SJ"**

By Den Leventhal

Chan Sui-jeung first appeared in my life at a meeting of the management board of the (former) Jewish Recreation Club back in 1984. He spoke to the membership with great animation of the need to preserve the history of the Jewish community of Hong Kong. His challenge resulted in the creation of the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong (JHS). And, while not himself Jewish, he remained closely involved with the JHS and its activities throughout his life. Our personal relationship became a strong and most enjoyable friendship.

As the JHS developed a professionally managed Judaica Library, "SJ" supported the creation of an archive of materials within it that would support research not only into our Hong Kong history, but also into every aspect of the Jewish experience in Chinese history. His own research work resulted in the second publication of the JHS Monograph Series, *The Jews in Kaifeng: Reflections on Sino-Judaic History* (1986). His lively and exuberant personality infused all who knew him with enthusiasm for our activities in the JHS.

He was born into a family whose history in Hong Kong goes back some 200 years. He graduated from the University of Hong Kong in 1959. From 1968 to 1994, SJ was a career Administrative Officer in the Hong Kong Civil Service. He also was an Honorary Research Fellow of the Centre of Asian studies in the University of Hong Kong. His other publications include *Calendar of Traditional Chinese Festivals and Local Celebrations* and *East River Column: Hong Kong Guerillas in the Second World War and After* (2009).

SJ maintained a wide circle of friends, both locally and internationally, and was always available in both social and scholarly settings. It is said that the greatest riches in life come from our personal relationships. SJ was solid gold for me. He will be missed, and remembered.

*Den Leventhal is a past Board member of the Sino-Judaic Institute, a founder of the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, and author of How to Leap a Great Wall in China.*

**How SJ Became a Scholar of the Kaifeng Jews**

Excerpted from *Jewish Times Asia*, 6 February 2018

How does a nice Hong Kong Chinese boy get involved enough with the Jewish people to be invited to speak at the Museum of the Diaspora in Tel Aviv? For SJ, the connection was entirely accidental...

A chance meeting put SJ in touch with Lord Lawrence Kadoorie. This led in turn to a meeting with Abe Ladar, then Consul General of Venezuela in Hong Kong.

Ladar had written a letter appealing to Jewish communities all over the world for pictures and other artifacts relating to Jews in China for an exhibition called "Jews by the Yellow River" to be held in Tel Aviv in April 1984.

He met SJ, read his manuscript, and invited him to speak on the subject at the Jewish Recreation Club in December 1983. While that lecture was packed, only two people in the audience had ever heard of a Jewish presence in Kaifeng...

One of the best-known books on the community is *The Chinese Jews*, by Catholic bishop W.C. White. This book was published in 1942, at a time when the community in Kaifeng was only in tenuous connection with the outside world. An erroneous claim by another historian that the Chinese Jews were being persecuted came to SJ's attention...SJ's rebuttal was published in New York, and catapulted his scholarship to the forefront on the topic of the Kaifeng community.

It was through this series of circumstances that SJ Chan found himself speaking at the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, in April 1984, on the subject of the Jews by the Yellow River.

The research grew into a monograph called *The Jews in China: Reflections on Sino-Judaic History*, which was first published in 1986 and re-printed in a new edition in 2004.

But that's not the end of the story.

"I met other people at the Jewish Recreation Club, including an American called Dennis Leventhal, and the Club Chairman, Mark Ejlenberg. They asked Dennis and I to meet and discuss how to improve the Club. We hit upon the idea of creating a library; starting with the hundred books that the club had at that time.

Today, the Hong Kong Jewish Community Centre Library has more than 4100 items (including CDs, video and audio tapes, periodicals, newspaper clippings and children's books), including the most complete collection of material on the Kaifeng Jewish community in the world.

Chan and Leventhal next established the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong. The Society meets regularly to hear lectures and sponsors walking tours of Hong Kong from a Jewish perspective. Its current ongoing project involves cataloguing the graves in the community's cemetery.

*SJ in happier times*



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