



# Points East

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

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## Reflections on the Shanghai Refugees Museum

by Lu Pan

Excerpted from: *Remembering the Pain of "Others": Reflections on the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and Beyond, in Writing the War in Asia – a Documentary History*, 1-10. <http://warinasia.warmap.org.uk/pan> 14 October 2015

...This study takes the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum [SJRM] as a case study and presents the subtle transformations of the war narratives in post-revolutionary China. The study also investigates the possible motivations behind the building of war memorial sites for "others," namely, the foreign communities, rather than for local Chinese communities. The case is worth exploring because it can provide insights into the broad context of memory making, history writing, and transformation of urban space in China. Without denying the historical worth and necessity of the museum as an important part of World War II memory on a global scale, this paper focuses on some critical perspectives that intend to push further the discussion on commemorative spaces and the public and war memories in China. The study contextualizes possible reasons for the erection of the museum in terms of the political circumstances of contemporary China. Moreover, the study provides two critical perspectives on the narratives of the museum, particularly with regard to those that were excluded and the reasons for the exclusion.

### The Museum

Located at 62 Changyang Road, Hongkou District, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum is now open to the public after it was fully repaired in 2007. It consists of three sections, namely, the renovated site of the synagogue and two exhibition halls. The ground floor of the main building was restored to its historical appearance in 1928. The second floor houses over 140 pieces of visual material, a multimedia installation, and a rich collection of artistic works relevant to the Jewish experience in Shanghai. The documentary *Shanghai Ghetto* (2002) by Dana Janklowicz-Mann and Amir Mann is continuously played on a screen.

The museum also displays duplicates of the passport of a refugee, the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, and a large stone tablet engraved with the handwritten message of Yitzhak Rabin during his visit to the museum. A digital database of the Shanghai Jewish community was established on the initiative of the Israeli consulate in Shanghai in 2008. The database lists the names, genders, addresses, nationalities, exile itineraries,

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## An Exchange of Views on Japan's Role in WWII

[Last April, Frank Joseph Shulman <[fshulman@umd.edu](mailto:fshulman@umd.edu)> sent out the following article from *The Japan News* and invited Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan to comment on it. His comments in turn sparked responses from Profs. Martin Meadows and Steve Hochstadt. Ed.]

### Fukui: Port City Remembers Jewish Refugees

By Mutsuko Kuwata

Excerpted from *The Japan News*, 9 April 2022

TSURUGA, Fukui — During World War II, Jewish refugees who escaped Nazi persecution were given a warm welcome by locals at Tsuruga Port in Fukui Prefecture. Today, a museum in the city is keeping memories of that period alive by sharing eyewitness testimonies.

Tsuruga Port flourished as an international stopping point following the opening of a shipping route between Tsuruga and Vladivostok, Russia, in 1902. The port connected to Tokyo by train, and many people would travel to and from Europe via the Trans-Siberian Railway. After using the railway to reach Vladivostok in 1940-41, the displaced Jewish people sailed across the Sea of Japan to reach Tsuruga Port...

The Jewish refugees who arrived in the 1940s were given "visas for life" by Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara (1900-1986), who worked at the consulate in Kaunas in Lithuania. It is said that the residents of Tsuruga were very hospitable toward the Polish and Jewish refugees.

The Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum, which opened in 2008, exhibits testimonies from Tsuruga locals who remember the refugees' arrival. One account notes that Tsuruga Station was full of displaced people. Another says a public bathhouse was made available to the refugees for free.

These and other interesting historical episodes were collected by members of a local historical society. However, few records exist about what happened to the refugees afterwards, and many residents know little about their arrival at the port.

"We wanted to clarify how local citizens were involved," said Takaharu Furue, a member of the group. Furue, 71, explained that members had been actively collecting the testimonies since 2006. When they checked the various remembrances against an old city map, they were able to discover

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## SJI MEMBERSHIP

Country	Total
United States	124
China	16
Israel	9
England	6
Canada	3
Germany	3
Taiwan	3
Australia	2
Japan	2
Greece	1
Mexico	1
Singapore	1
Total:	171

## FROM THE EDITOR

As I write this column, President Xi Jinping is set to secure an unprecedented third five-year term at China's 20th Party Congress. It is also seven years since the equally unprecedented suppression of the Kaifeng Jewish community began.

I had thought about writing President Xi an open letter urging him to reconsider this crackdown. After all, the Kaifeng Jews are miniscule in numbers, and they are not a threat to anyone; they are not fanatics or extremists and by their own admission they love their country deeply. All they want is to be able to live openly as Chinese Jews and to learn more about their ancient culture. I'd be polite and constructive, writing as a friend of China and the Chinese people, as someone who deplores the decline in US-China relations and who wishes it were otherwise.

But where to publish such a letter? To publish in an American paper might yield momentary satisfaction just in terms of raising the awareness of the problem, but it wouldn't accomplish anything. In fact, it might even exacerbate the situation in Kaifeng. And there isn't a publication in China that is likely to touch the issue. Instead, I'll say my piece here, where I'm sure that Chinese officials are unlikely to come read. There are advantages to insignificance...

I used to say that the Kaifeng Jews had been inadvertently swept up in China's campaign against unauthorized religions, of which Judaism is one. They were collateral damage, if you will. But, after numerous communications on the subject, delivered orally by intermediaries and in written form, I must assume that either the matter is so insignificant to the Chinese authorities that they can't be bothered to do anything or that there is nothing inadvertent about the suppression. Either way, it is upsetting.

It grieves me that China ignores the issue and that the suppression continues. I wish that the authorities would celebrate the longevity and persistence of the Kaifeng community and honor it the way they do the former European Jewish communities of Shanghai, Harbin and elsewhere.

I had a chop made from my time in China. It reads, "Serve the People." The situation of the Kaifeng Jews is easily remedied if the will is there. President Xi, have your people talk to the Kaifeng Jews. Work it out. Seven years of suppression is a long time. Seven years also marks the sabbatical year. So, President Xi, give it a rest. Cancel the suppression now!

Anson Laytner

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Editor

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## In the Field

### • Hochstadt Article Published

Prof. Steve Hochstadt has an article titled *Japanese and Jews in Shanghai* published in *Modern Judaism - A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience*, Volume 42, Issue 3, October 2022, Pages 211–243, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mj/kjac013>

## Remembering My Father Feng Shan Ho – A 25th Anniversary Retrospective

By Manli Ho

My father, Dr. Feng Shan Ho, died in San Francisco on September 28, 1997, on a warm Sunday afternoon 18 days after he turned 96. He died peacefully, with his spirit undiminished by the grave injustice he had suffered, in which his good name and distinguished diplomatic career were besmirched by false accusations made by Taiwan authorities. He died penniless, having been impeached and denied a pension for 40 years of loyal service.

As a newspaper reporter, I wrote my father's obituary and sent it to the San Francisco Chronicle and to my former employer, The Boston Globe. I included a single mention of my father helping Jewish refugees and confronting the Gestapo to rescue his friend, a Mr. Rosenberg, while serving as China's Consul General in Vienna, Austria in 1938.

Soon afterwards, I answered a telephone call from a Jewish impresario, who was eager to add my father to his touring photographic exhibit on diplomat rescuers of Jews. I told him I knew little more, but his inquiry piqued my curiosity. If I could chase down this cold case, not only was it a fascinating story, but perhaps I could vindicate my father and restore his good name.

A month after my father's death, I embarked on a 25-year quest to recover the long-lost history of my father's pivotal role in the mass rescue of Jews on the eve of World War II, and in the creation of a refuge of last resort for 18,000 of them in Shanghai, China.

It has been a Herculean task, begun 60 years too late, requiring a comprehensive grasp of the historical context which spanned different continents and cultures. I had to school myself in the complexities and ever-changing political landscape of East and West on the threshold of a world war, followed by a civil war in China.

I scoured archives in Vienna, Washington DC, Israel, Nanjing, and Taipei. Much of the Chinese documentation was hard to

find, inaccessible or lost during the civil war. Most Holocaust literature at that time focused on the Final Solution, the Nazi extermination of six million Jews in concentration camps. There was little, if anything, on earlier Nazi efforts to expel Jews from their territories during a brief window which allowed escape. Only two books addressed Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai, both flawed and incomplete.

I did have a couple of advantages: being a diplomat's daughter, I understood the intricacies of diplomatic bureaucracies and procedures, and I understood my father's strategic mind and his *modus operandi*. Even so, it was a complicated puzzle that took years to piece together.

One of the most important questions to answer was one of origin: How did Shanghai, China, end up as a refuge for Jews? At the time, no one had heard of Shanghai visas, much less who had issued them or what they were used for, as Shanghai apparently required no entry documents.

I searched for survivors, but where would I begin to look six decades later? If still living, they were scattered to the four winds. Along the way, I encountered skepticism and naysayers. There were those who refused to believe a Chinese diplomat would save Jews and questioned the usefulness of the visas.

But through persistence, old-fashioned shoe leather journalism and luck, I began to find visa recipients a month after my father's death. Little by little, a picture began to emerge.

In his memoirs, *Forty Years of My Diplomatic Life* (Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1990), my father had written: "Since the Anschluss (the union of Austria and Germany in March 1938), the persecution of Jews by Hitler's 'devils' became increasingly fierce. The fate of Austrian Jews was tragic, persecution a daily occurrence. There was an American relief organization which was urgently trying to save the Jews. I kept in close contact with this organization, and spared no effort in using any means possible, thus saving who-knows-how-many Jews!" The American relief organization was the American Joint Distribution Committee.

What were the means that my father used? The Anschluss in March 1938 had precipitated a refugee crisis which most Western nations and their diplomatic representatives would turn their backs on. The Nazis instituted a draconian policy combining economic expropriation and enforced expulsion to rid their territories of Jews.

Unlike his diplomatic peers, my father faced two major obstacles as China's

representative in 1938. The first was access to his home country, most of which had been occupied by the Japanese in 1937. No entry documents issued by a Chinese diplomat would be recognized by the Japanese occupiers. The second was his home government, which did not want to jeopardize relations with Germany and ordered him to desist from helping Jews, an order he defied.

The strategy my father devised to help Jews was the off-label use of a standard entry visa, which he issued to only one place – Shanghai. The Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1937 had ousted the Chinese harbor authorities. The other foreign powers in the city did not want the Japanese to control the harbor as it would inconvenience them. As a result, the harbor was left completely unmanned, without passport control or immigration. No documents were needed for entry.

My father's "Shanghai Visa Strategy" provided Jewish refugees with the "proof of emigration" required by the Nazis to leave their territories, freed those incarcerated from concentration camps, especially after Kristallnacht, and facilitated passage through other countries which would otherwise have been inaccessible. Most importantly, the use of Shanghai as an "end destination" identified an accessible refuge of last resort to which some 18,000 European Jews fled in 1938 and 1939.

I recount how this history came to light because for a pre-"fake news" era newspaper reporter like me, it has been particularly painful and frustrating to see how many inaccuracies, distortions and fabrications have since appeared about this particular history. Now that my father is well-known, there are those who have rushed to claim credit for my father's story, and those who have plagiarized my work about him as their own. As the US president John F. Kennedy once said: "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan."

On the 25th anniversary of my father's death, I would like to set the record straight. I have considered it my duty and responsibility to maintain the integrity of his legacy, not just for the sake of my father and the survivors, but more importantly, for history. That can only be done if we strive, as Mao Zedong so famously put it: "To seek truth from facts."

• It was Chinese Nationalist government policy to help Jews, and all their diplomatic missions abroad were ordered to do so. Therefore, Feng Shan Ho was just following orders.

To date, no evidence has been found of such a policy. This claim has been based largely on cherry-picking sources of information and misinterpreting and



conflating the fast-changing events and shifting political sands of 1938 and 1939.

In 1938, Sino-German relations had already begun to deteriorate. Hitler had turned toward Japan, China's occupier, and Germany's soon-to-be ally. In desperation, Vice Foreign Minister Chen Chieh was dispatched to Berlin as ambassador to try to salvage relations. Not wanting to appear to be contravening Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, Chen ordered my father to stop his rescue activities, an order my father disobeyed. In April 1939, my father was punished for his disobedience. By then, the Chinese had lost hope of repairing relations with Germany and had begun to look elsewhere for allies.

In February 1939, in an attempt to garner the support of wealthy and powerful American and British Jews, Sun Ke, the head of the legislature, proposed a plan to make the Western province of Yunnan a sanctuary for Jews. But because of lack of funding, the plan never came to fruition and Shanghai remained the only viable Chinese destination for Jewish refugees.

- Because the Gestapo encircled the Chinese consulate building, Feng Shan Ho issued visas to Jews at a nearby café.

Anyone who has done the research would know that the first place Nazi hoodlums went to grab Jews was at Vienna's cafes. My father himself had been held at gunpoint during one of these searches. On the other hand, the consulate building was protected under the Geneva Convention and would have been the safest place to issue visas.

- According to newspaper interviews, Feng Shan Ho was "discovered" even before his death by an academic who was told by Jewish survivors he met in Vienna.

When I asked this academic for the names of his sources, he told me that he "forgot". Very few, if any, Jewish survivors returned to Vienna or to Europe after World War II. Even those who received my father's visas had no idea who he was, much less knew his Chinese name.

- It was through the urging and materials provided by an academic in Shanghai that Feng Shan Ho was designated a "Righteous Among the Nations" in 2000 by the state of Israel.

Israel's Yad Vashem conducts a rigorous legal investigation into every case for the Righteous designation and is not subject to any outside influence. My father's case took three years, based on testimonies by survivors, many of whom I found, and other official documentation, none of which was supplied by any Shanghai academic.

- Feng Shan Ho's story was disseminated from China to the West.

Actually, it was the other way around. My

father's story began to be disseminated in the West in 1998 through publications and exhibitions. He became more widely known in China through a long feature article in February 2000 by People's Daily reporter Zhang Niansheng, who interviewed me at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. Later that year, when my father was designated a Righteous Among the Nations by Israel, the story became world-wide.

- In 2000, Feng Shan Ho was designated "the Chinese Schindler" by the United Nations.

It was the media that so designated my father, just as every rescuer of Jews has been called a "Schindler" after the movie "Schindler's List". In my mind, it would be more appropriate to call my father a "20th Century Zhuge Liang" (181-234 AD) after the Three Kingdoms Period diplomat, statesman and master strategist.

- An Israeli prime minister was reported as saying that Feng Shan Ho "was not just a hero, not just an angel, but God."

In their religious tradition, Jews do not even dare name their god, much less call a human being one.

- A stone monument in Israel called Feng Shan Ho "A hard to forget Chinese."

There is no such monument. To date, the monuments bearing my father's name are at the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem; the Israeli Foreign Ministry wall honoring Righteous Diplomats; commemorative plaques at the two former Chinese consulate buildings in Vienna; a small square named after my father in Milan, Italy; the Garden of the Righteous in Milan; the Illinois Holocaust Museum; and Boys Town Jerusalem school.

Over the years, I have refrained from giving an exact figure for the number of visas my father issued, simply because we don't know. Not even my father himself knew. I have seen all sorts of guesses, but ultimately, it doesn't really matter, because tens of thousands of Jews were saved as a result of his actions.

*Manli Ho did not follow her father's diplomatic footsteps and instead chose journalism. She was a member of the Boston Globe reporting team that earned the paper a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Boston school desegregation crisis in 1975. In 1981, she was one of the foreign editors who helped launch China Daily and has continued to work with the paper during special events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the launching of China Daily's US edition. After spending the past two decades uncovering and documenting the history of her father's wartime heroism, she is still working on a book.*

## Reflections, continued from page 1

arrival-departure dates, occupations, final destinations of immigration, and photos and contacts of about 600 of the [approximately] 20,000 Jews who fled to Shanghai. Visitors can search for and enter information into the digital portal located in the exhibition hall to "give a record of the community, where its residents came from, their stories and struggles, where they have since moved and even how they might now be reached." Prominent positions in Exhibition Hall No. 2 are also occupied by photos of the honored guests of the museum, most of whom are politicians and officials from Israel, Germany, and the US; staff of foreign consulates in Shanghai; and leaders of the Hong Kou District).

The third floor presents the history of the Holocaust and the Auschwitz Camp through archived and reproduced materials. Exhibition Hall No. 3, which is outside the synagogue, was erected in 2008 as a venue for past temporary exhibitions. Today, the hall displays the stories of 27 Jewish refugees and their lives in Shanghai. In the courtyard, the shop sign of Atlantic Café, which was run by Jewish refugees 70 years ago, was removed from the façade of the original building and now decorates the new Atlantic Café, the opening ceremony of which was attended by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his short visit to China in May 2013. Occasionally, the museum also hosts Jewish weddings and coming-of-age rites. "North Bank Suzhou Creek," a musical stage play about the stories of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, premiered in the museum in March 2012.

The museum proudly displays the contributions of Shanghai and China to the anti-fascist movement in WWII even beyond the East Asian context. The People's Government of Hongkou District allocated more than US\$ 1 million in special funds to the full renovation of the synagogue in accordance with the original architectural drawings found in the city archives.

## Commemorative Space in Modern China

From the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing to the Mausoleum of Mao in Beijing, the commemorative spaces in modern China have been carving out a new kind of public space for nation building. Built in line with various historical agendas modern China went through, these spaces play an important role in political education, the construction of Chinese national identity, and the establishment of new social norms and a specific kind of aesthetic environment for each historical context.<sup>5</sup>

As a sub-category of modern national commemoration, war memorial sites represent the violence among human beings that is regarded as part of the founding myth of any nation state. As Nuala Johnson pointed out, "(w)ar memorials are of special significance because they offer insights into the ways in which national cultures conceive of their pasts and mourn the large-scale destruction of life."<sup>6</sup>

Narratives associated with commemorative spaces that serve as memorial sites for both the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War strictly follow the socialist tradition of eulogizing these wars as "just wars," which were waged against internal and external enemies. As the nation also largely relied on the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the post-1949 historical narratives in China overtly emphasize the role of the Communist Party in liberating the nation and its people from suffering and humiliation during the Sino-Japanese and Civil Wars. However, by the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the student movement in 1989, the Chinese commemorative spaces and monuments no longer possessed an ideologically straightforward function as agencies in the construction of public memory. Since the late 1970s, the national agenda of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has turned from a fierce political struggle to an economy-oriented open-door policy. Consequently, the country has been experiencing an economic boom since the early 1990s. As a result of the firm political rule of the Chinese Communist Party, the political hierarchy of the PRC is confronted with the issue on the incorporation of Chinese national monuments into a revised national ideology that is still deeply entangled in the continuities and discontinuities of the PRC's political vicissitudes.

### The SJRM: A New Way of Commemorating WWII in China?

The conditions described above seem to indicate that the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum is an unusual war memorial in China when compared with others of its kind that continue to create popular memory through orthodox political education, such as the Beijing War of Resistance Museum.<sup>7</sup> Particularly, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum is neither dedicated to overtly praising the Communist Party nor closely related to patriotism. The neutral and somehow detached point of view of the museum in narrating the war in Europe and the sufferings of the European Jews only vaguely corresponds to the long-term anti-fascist stance of communism and to abstract internationalism. The official commemoration of World War II in today's China is deeply related to the political tensions not only between China and Japan but also between the PRC and Republic of China on Taiwan. The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum ad-

resses neither area.

How can one understand the erection of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum in the larger context of commemorative space making in contemporary China? Does it mark a true departure from orthodox war memorials in China? The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum commemorates the suffering of others, but how are China and its people featured in its narratives? In the following, the birth of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and its historical narrative are described in the context of the status quo of World War II memory making in China and beyond as they are represented in the country's public commemorative spaces.

### 1. Reasons for Erection

This study considers two major conditions that can account for the establishment of the museum and its current situation. The first condition is that this commemorative space was used as a tool for making specific diplomatic profile. The principal part of cultural memory in China is still largely shaped by the state in a top-down manner. Thus, the memory discourse on "Jews in China" must be endorsed by the government. The early 1990s represent a turning point, as they gave rise to a growing interest of Chinese research institutions in Jewish studies in China; this interest is logically associated with the establishment of Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations in 1992 after the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> As a result of mutual political recognition between China and Israel, the rise in the number of Jewish studies in China, especially in Shanghai, is understandable; "in the mid-1990s, the Shanghai authorities began to notice increasing pressure to recognize the Jewish history of the city."<sup>9</sup> The motivation to rediscover the Jewish history of Shanghai does not entirely reveal an interest in understanding the city's multi-layered past as such. The salvation of the "memories" of Shanghai was prioritized for international diplomacy and not for the public participation of users in the city. As with other religious relics in China, the restoration of a physical structure does not result in the restoration of the events that were once held in the space. "Despite the narrative of an ab initio humanitarian impulse in China, being Jewish is not an acceptable ongoing identity for Chinese nationals. Judaism is not a recognized religion in China."<sup>10</sup> The website of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum proudly quotes the following comment of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin about the museum during his visit to Shanghai: "To the people of Shanghai for unique humanitarian act of saving thousands of Jews during the WWII, thanks in the name of the government of Israel."<sup>11</sup> Although it encourages local audiences to visit this commemorative space as a tourist spot that introduces the war experience of

foreign communities in a "neutral" or even tenderhearted narrative, the museum is actually managed by the Foreign Affairs Office in Hongkou District; the primary target audience does not seem to be the local residential population. The entrance fee to the museum amounts to RMB 50, or approximately € 5, and is hence rather high for a visit to a museum of limited scale and may thwart a good many of local visitors.<sup>12</sup>

Shanghai has its own good reason for exploring the precious memory that can easily sensationalize not only the local people but also the whole world. Being a symbolic space of the rapidly developing Chinese economy and a symbol of its fast-paced modernization, cultural memory narratives about the past of Shanghai have usually been characterized by their eagerness to connect with their cosmopolitan past. A persistent wave of old Shanghai nostalgia for the interwar years when it enjoyed its alleged golden time has had its long-lasting influence on the cultural scene of the city since the 1990s. The image of Shanghai as a showcase of the post-Mao economic achievement of China and its rising role in a globalizing world finds the most suitable soil in the history of the Jewish refugees. The generosity of the nation and the practice of international humanitarianism in the city and nation, despite the change in regime, continue and deserve the respect of the world, as the scholars of the Shanghai Social Science Academy have suggested. They argue that this part of Shanghai's history can serve as "a unique 'cultural name card' for Shanghai in foreign communication and exchange," thereby suggesting that the city can be a showcase for a global audience.<sup>13</sup>

The following is the comment of a Chinese expert on Jewish studies, Prof. Xu Xin from Nanjing University, on the launch of the database of Jewish refugees:

Academically speaking, the history of Shanghaianders is a part of the global research data on the Jewish diaspora around the world. It is therefore valuable to collect the data for the purpose of social statistics; in the meantime, most of the "Shanghaianders" have wonderful memories of China, their children would come to Shanghai for root seeking. This will increase their interest in and favorable impression of China, which will enhance mutual friendship and China's soft power. This has been the first time for both China and Israel to collect and compile such data on a remarkable scale and in such an intensive collaboration. This project is valuable in multiple reasons: in consummating social statistics, rescuing historical materials and promoting diplomatic relations.<sup>14</sup>

For the creation of a cosmopolitan image of Shanghai (and thus of China) in the West, the unique Jewish experience during the Holocaust becomes a highly valuable cultural



capital for the global profile of the city. Jeffrey Sichel, one of the directors of the stage play "North Bank Suzhou Creek," claimed that the experience of Shanghailanders is "the Chinese version of 'Schindler's List.'"<sup>15</sup> Thus, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum can be seen as a process with which Chinese authorities could present China as a mirror image of the West. The museum epitomizes a historical self that is eager to be affirmed in the eye of others, that is, by assertion from the West. In this sense, this endeavor to be in line with the West, discourse serves as a means of articulating the spectacle of China's imagined modernity.

## 2. Critical Reflections

### 1) Missing Narratives

According to Pierre Nora's famous concept of "lieu de mémoire" (site of memory), the lieux "are created by a play of memory and history" and "a schematic outline of the objects of memory."<sup>16</sup> In this form, Nora argues that the commemorative spaces of our time lack spontaneous memory. Museums are built to remind people that they are unable to remember if they are not reminded. Memory becomes a passageway toward history; no "true memory" can be traced. Nonetheless, the endless birth, rebirth, and re-discoveries of numerous memories of past events are triggered not only by the forgetfulness of the public but also by the obsession with archives and "paper memories" of institutions and individuals. As a result, "what is being remembered is memory itself."<sup>17</sup> The infinite re-discoveries reversely legitimize the ruptures in history and memory as well as the responsibility to "rescue" them from oblivion.

The timing of the reemergence of rescued memories from the stories of Jewish refugees was highly orchestrated and attempted to smoothly suture the rupture between the past and the present. The neighborhood in which the Shanghailanders lived turned from a milieu de mémoire, which refers to the real environment of historical happenings, into a lieu de mémoire, or the Refugees Museum. This past "on arrival" inevitably trims down twigs and branches that obscure the picture of a self-sustainable present and can be illustrated by what has not been elaborated on in exhibition displays. First, any controversial historical situations remain invisible. Examples of such situations include the subtle relation between Japan and Germany and its influence on the decision of accommodating the Jewish refugees in Shanghai as well as the postwar conditions that the Jews faced and those that forced the Jews to leave China for further exile. In fact, the architectural design proposals of the museum that endeavored to explore the contested meanings of the historical period were all only partly successful. In *The Carved History*, foreign actors Choa and Bar-Galand

emphasize that the design of memorials is a symbol of the relations between life in exile and memory. This notion largely echoes some of the ideas of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin. The Shanghai-Toronto-based corporation Living Bridge reestablished a communal environment, instead of only gentrifying an individual architecture, of several other historical sites and cultural facilities in Tilanqiao as part of the North Bund Project.<sup>18</sup> Two projects that were proposed between 2004 and 2005 have yet to be completed.

No other contestation of China's attitude toward the Jews during the war can satisfactorily reveal the monolithic nature of the museum narrative. As in most academic research findings on Jewish history of China, arguments that justify the possibility of the survival of the Jews in Shanghai usually produce a harmonious picture. For example, most claims assert that anti-Semitism is unknown in China, that Chinese and Jewish cultures historically have many aspects in common, and that China was very generous to accept the refugees who were denied a safe haven by all the other countries.<sup>19</sup> Shanghai was depicted as an abstract symbol of the tolerance of China toward Jewish refugees in the just cause of the fight against fascism.

However, claiming that anti-Semitism did not exist in wartime China is inaccurate, although the majority of the Chinese population did not harbor strong resentments against the Jews. No large-scale persecutions occurred during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai and the degree of hostility towards Jews, as exhibited by Japan or by the pro-Japanese Chinese government, was largely motivated by immediate political interests. Zhou Xun studied Chinese perceptions of Jews and claimed that anti-Semitism in East Asia, such as in Japan and China, differed from its counterpart in the Western cultural context, "which was, as Sander Gilman put it, 'half of the dichotomy of 'Aryan' and 'Semite' which haunted the pseudoscience of ethnology during this period and beyond.'"<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that Western anti-Semitism may have provided the raw materials, hostility toward the Jews in Asia was constructed through other kinds of dichotomies, namely, those of "East" and "West," of "Japan" and "America," and of "tradition" and "modernity."<sup>21</sup> Thus, such dichotomies also played an important role in Japan's justification of its aggression toward China.<sup>22</sup> In Japanese-occupied Shanghai, the images of Jews were constructed in relation to capitalism and Western influence, thereby promoting the region's attempt to build a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."<sup>23</sup> Nationalist Wang Jingwei had been a staunch follower of Sun Ke (son of Sun Yat-sen) but eventually collaborated with the Japanese in Nanjing to set up a "puppet government"; Wang also joined

the Japanese campaigns against the Jews. For Wang, "the 'Jews' were the antithesis of nationalism and a representation of the 'evil imperialistic West'; the 'Jews' were the 'ancestors of all anarchists and communists.'"<sup>24</sup>

The statelessness of the European Jews posed a threat to nationalism and was therefore used by Wang in his anti-Jewish arguments to defend his consistency in building a new unified Chinese nation.<sup>25</sup> Other researchers have revealed the Sun-initiated but aborted and unrealized plans of relocating the Jewish refugees to Yunnan Province in Southwest China. The objective of this project was to influence the Far East policy of the US and Britain by reinforcing the diplomatic power of China against Japan through the Jews. However, concerns were also expressed over the Jews' statelessness, which would, it was claimed, negatively influence the nation building of the young Republic of China. Thus, the plan forbade the Jews from settling in inland China and being involved in political propaganda.<sup>26</sup>

### 2) Missing Chinese

If the absence of controversial images of the Jewish population in wartime Shanghai can still be seen as a continuation of the hardly reflective commemorative culture in China, it might be unsurprising to see that the narratives of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum also downplay the role of individual Chinese citizens and their wartime accounts. When Chinese scholars began to notice this period of history in the early 1990s, detailed descriptions in Chinese – not unlike Western narratives – soon began to include stories of Jewish refugees fleeing to Shanghai, of the refugees' community life, and of their departure from Europe.<sup>27</sup>

Chinese academia has been attempting to connect Jewish and Chinese cultures from a grand historical perspective to remind the people of Shanghai of their forgotten friendship with the Jews, "thereby introducing this history and the themes of their cosmopolitan humanitarianism to the local population." See Jakubowicz 2009:165. Apart from the above academic contributions, the local mass media have also given the topic considerable exposure. World-renowned Chinese American painter and visual artist Chen Yifei even made a film entitled *Flee to Shanghai* (1999) based on the life story of the Austrian violinist Heinz Greenberg. In 2010, the first Chinese animation film addressing the Holocaust and Shanghailanders, *A Jewish Girl in Shanghai*, was co-produced by two major state-backed film producers in Shanghai, namely, Shanghai Animation Film Studio and Shanghai Film Group Corporation. The story and the main characters of the film are based on the account of an acquaintance of the director, Wu Lin, who was then living in Los Angeles. Wu was amazed to learn from the Chinese media about the previously unknown

part of Shanghai and world history during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII in 2005. A Jewish Girl in Shanghai was shown in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, the UK, and Israel. The movie was well received by both Chinese and Israeli audiences and the judges of film festivals at home and abroad. For more details about the film, visit <http://www.jewishgirlinsh.com/index.php>. The film was nominated for the Jewish Experience Award at the Jerusalem Film Festival. In 2010, the film received the Golden Cartoon Award for Best Chinese Film Prize at the China International Animation and Digital Arts Festival in Changzhou, Jiangsu, China.

These historical narratives echo those of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. In the museum narratives, "the Chinese people" are depicted solely as a humanistic and generous collective which aided the foreigners in surviving warfare and persecution. As described above, the rationale behind the database and its contents support the observation that Chinese academia has no interest in the living memory of Chinese individuals during the war and in the insights this could offer for the present. Chinese museum curators and historians do not consider the historical memory of the Jewish refugees as being a part of the troubled war memory of China and therefore worth "rescuing". Similar to Western postwar studies, the post-1949 war narratives dealing with China are predominantly focused on the Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists from 1945 to 1949. The memory related to World War II and the corresponding studies remain ambiguous given the ever-changing situation in domestic politics and diplomatic relations, such as the cross-strait Taiwan-China, Sino-Japan, and Sino-US relations. Therefore, the writing on World War II history in Chinese academia was carefully deliberated so as not to touch upon any possible "political incorrectness" in the official historiography.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, no historic relic related to any Sino-Japanese War experience is listed in Shanghai under the Conservation Unit of Cultural Relics, which is the Chinese preservation system for protecting the important cultural legacies of the nation. The neglect of Shanghai's own spaces of war memories, e.g. Sihang Warehouse where one of the most famous battles between the Chinese and the Japanese troops took place in 1937, is set off by the application for UNESCO recognition of the Tilanqiao area, which covers the site of the Jewish community, as the only historic site of the Jewish refugees in World War II in China. This cosmopolitan stance has been largely institutionalized and therefore continues to be instrumental. The story of the Shanghai-landers offers a theme that still generates

little room for dialogue for both global and domestic speculations on new possibilities in understanding China at present.

### Shanghaianders: A Jewish Experience Only?

This study has suggested that the major subjectivities in the pervading current narratives of the unique war experience of the Shanghaianders need to be revisited. On the one hand, this study suggested that the historical period of World War II be viewed from a perspective that integrates Jewish and Chinese experiences. The "war-ravaged Shanghai," according to Vera Schwarcz, "was a world in which Jewish as well as Chinese refugees tried to preserve themselves and their cultural identity. For the Chinese, the predicament of having become refugees in their own country was particularly painful...The pathos of Chinese dislocation, however, touched the lives of Jewish refugees only lightly..."<sup>29</sup> The similar ordeal of Jewish and Chinese lives during the war is remains partly in the shadows.

On the other hand, this study raised the following questions for the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and for other commemorative spaces in China: how can a winner, benefactor, or victim of a war construct a monument commemorating the war and their experiences? How will the audience perceive it and benefit from it? A plaque that is dedicated to the Jewish refugees from Hamburg at the entrance area of the museum offers an interesting contrast in this regard: the plaque illustrates the gratitude of the municipal government of Hamburg as the "perpetuator" of the persecution of German Jews. Does the museum only provide its local audience with a place where they can identify themselves with the images of Chinese people in an appreciation from the wrong-doer and feel proud? After all, what is there to be proud of? The people of Shanghai who tolerated their poor neighbors from Europe but are invisible in the museum or the city faced with a complex political situation that actually made the landing of Jewish refugees possible? The extent to which a modern commemorative space can further our understanding of WWII and its long-term influences remains an intriguing issue in contemporary China.

Thus, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum narrates history in a manner that separates China and its people from the realm of reflexive and reactive subjectivity. The majority of the local Chinese, however, appear to be unaware of and not participating in the official commemorative culture as prescribed by the Chinese government – a culture that is supposed to warn, and encourage reflection as well as contem-

plation. The museum can be an example of memorial site in contemporary China, where cultural remembrance is created for a specific non-Chinese community under the purview of the agents dominating China's historiography.

The aim of this site is not (necessarily) nation building but rather "destination branding" and fostering transnational partnership. The goal of monuments is not only to remind people of the past or, in many cases, of the excluded narratives, but also to provide people with a space where they can observe and contemplate on their own reactions to the past. Reiterating the value of the anti-fascist spirit of China and the generosity of its people places the memory narrative of the genocide and of political persecutions in Europe during World War II at an observational distance. Despite its effective restoration of architectural relics and attempts to re-invoke public interest (at home and abroad) in this period of history, the museum provides the local public only with an opportunity to acquire factual information rather than an opportunity to contemplate on the relations between memory, history, and the present and the visitors' personal place therein.

*Lu Pan received her Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Hong Kong. Before moving to Hong Kong, she studied literature and cultural studies in Shanghai, China and Bayreuth, Germany. Her current research interests include visual culture, urban space, war memory, and theories of aesthetics. Pan was a visiting fellow at the Center for Metropolitan Studies, Berlin Technical University (2008 and 2009) and the Harvard-Yenching Institute (2011–12). She currently teaches history, culture and creative industries at the University of Hong Kong and HKU SPACE Community College.*

Notes [following the original text's numbering]:

5. See Hung Wu, "Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monument" Representations. No. 35 (1991): 84–117

6. See Nuala Johnson, "Cast in stone: Monuments, Geography, and Nationalism,"

Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 13(1) (1995): 51–65

7. See Rana Mitter, "Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997." The China Quarterly. Vol. 161 (2000).

8. The mutual recognition between the PRC and Israel was smooth between 1948 and 1949. However, the bilateral relations experienced a long deadlock after the Korean War broke out and froze in the Suez Crisis when the Cold War upgraded. Consequently, the gap between the PRC and the pro-US Israel deepened. China's own reform of the Middle East policy after the death of Mao largely set the future tone of the normalization of the Sino-Israel relations.

9. Andrew Jakubowicz, "Cosmopolitanism with Roots: The Jewish Presence in Shanghai before the Communist Revolution and as Brand in the New Metropolis." In Branding Cities: Cosmopolitanism, Parochialism and Social Change, ed. Eleonore Kofman et al., (New York: Routledge, 2009), 165

10. Ibid.

11. Overview of the museum provided by the official website of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, last modified in 2010, <http://www.shanghaijews.org.cn/english/article/?sid=14>



12. New measures were taken to attract local visitors during the researcher's last visit to the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum in May 2013; discounted entrance fee is provided to visitors who complete the visitor's survey question form.

13. Yichen, Dai, and Guojian Zhou. "Protection and Development of Jewish Sites and

Characteristic Architectures in Shanghai" (Lun Shanghai Youtai Yizhi Ji Tese Jianzhu De Bao Hu He Kaifa). *She hui ke xue* 11 (2006): 181

14. Background information on the chronicle database of the refugees provided by the official website of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, last modified in 2010,

<http://www.shanghaijews.org.cn/english/article/?sid=33>. Original text in Chinese; the

quotation is the researcher's own translation.

15. "Play about Holocaust Debuts in China," last modified on March 23, 2012.

<http://forward.com/articles/153650/play-about-holocaust-debuts-in-china/#ixzz2XyCze9At>

16. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 19

17. Nora 1989: 16

18. Jakubowicz 2009: 167–170

19. As background information for the Chinese public, academic research on Shanghai Jews is often accompanied by a brief introduction to the Chinese–Jewish community and its acculturation in ancient China or to the commonality between the Jewish and Chinese cultures in different aspects. See Pan Guang, "Shanghai Jewish Refugees During the Second World War" *Shanghai Academy of Social Science Quarterly* 2(1991); Pan Guang, "The Rise and Fall of Zionism in Shanghai and Its Characteristics," *Historic Review* 02(1994). Tang Peiji, "On Shanghai Jews 7," *Tonji University Journal Humanities and Social Science Section* (1994). ———, "On Shanghai Jews 9," *Tonji University Journal Humanities and Social Science Section* 6, No. 1 (1995). Dong Liying, "Jews in Shanghai in the WWII," *Journal of Tibet Nationalities Institute (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 26, No. 5 (2005). Tang Peiji, "Shanghai –Noah's Ark of the Jews," *Shanghai Studies on Cephistry and Construction* 04(1995).

20. Xun Zhou. *Chinese Perceptions of the "Jews" and Judaism: a History of the Youtai*.

(Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001): 141

21. Ibid.

22. In Japan's propaganda, Japan came to help China restore its lost cultural confidence and promote "Asia self-awakening"; preserving the Chinese traditional classics and cultural heritage from the West was essential. "Western values were defined as liberalism, individualism, capitalism and communism as oppositions to 'Asian'" (Zhou, 143). The image of the Jews was characterized not only by western capitalism and imperialism but also by communist thoughts. Thus, they easily fell prey to the attacks of Japan-sponsored Chinese organizations such as Xinmin Hui as part of the war propaganda.

23. This attempt to free Asia from western assimilation and violation also echoed the Pan-Asianism ideas of China in Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People." See Zhou 2001: 144

24. Zhou 2001: 146

25. Zhou 2001:148. 151–152

26. Dong, "Jews in Shanghai in the WWII." Yin and Zhao 2007.

27. Wang Qinyu, "Jews in the Old Shanghai," *Shanghai Academy of Social Science Quarterly* 2(1987). Xu Buzeng, "Jewish Musicians in Shanghai (1)," *The Art of Music (Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music)* 03(1991). Tang Peiji, "On Jews in Shanghai 3," *Tonji University Journal Humanities and Social Science Section* 5, No. 2 (1994). Tang, "On Shanghai Jews 9." Jianchang Fang, "German Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During the WWII," *Deutschland-Studien* 13, No. 3 (1998). Tang Yading, "Music Life of Shanghai Jewish Refugee Community" *Art of Music (Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music)* No. 04 (1998).

28. See additional information on the vicissitudes of the making of the memorial for the Sino-Japanese War in postwar China in He Yinan, "Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950–2006." In *History & Memory*, Volume 19, No. 2, Fall/Winter (2007): 43–74

29. Vera Schwarz, "Who can See a Miracle? The Language of Jewish Memory in Shanghai." In *The Jews of China*, ed. Jonathan Goldstein (Armonk, N.Y.: London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 293

## Exchange, continued from page 1

the route the refugees had taken to the station.

The group's research began after a 1999 event commemorating the 100th anniversary of Tsuruga Port's opening. As part of the event, Furue, who headed the secretariat for the occasion, exhibited a "visa for life" that had been kept in the town of Yaotsu, Gifu Prefecture, which had links to Sugihara.

Stories about the Jewish refugees generated a lot of attention, inspiring Furue to track down eyewitnesses to help "fill in the historical blanks." To that end, he formed a research team with other group members and gathered 33 testimonies from 29 people...

In 2006, Furue and his colleagues exhibited a number of the testimonies at the Tsuruga Railway Museum, situated in a re-creation of the old Tsuruga Port Station, the arrival and departure point for Europe. Though originally slated to last a month, the exhibition proved so popular it was extended several times.

Interest generated by the exhibition led to the opening of the Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum, with Furue serving as its inaugural director.

Over the years, a number of former refugees and their descendants have visited Tsuruga. In the autumn of 2020, some sent video messages to the museum expressing their gratitude toward Tsuruga, while apologizing for being unable to attend in person due to the pandemic.

One message from a former refugee said it was impossible to forget the kindness of the Tsuruga people, while another from a grandchild of a refugee said, "Thank you for welcoming my grandmother."

Refugees recalled feeling a sense of security in Tsuruga, such as when watching their children freely running around outside, which had not been possible in their home countries. Some even compared Tsuruga to heaven...

In the 1940s, a female Jewish refugee who had landed at Tsuruga Port was treated by an obstetrician and gynecologist in Tsuruga. The woman had suffered a miscarriage while aboard a ship from Vladivostok to Tsuruga while fleeing Nazi persecution.

The woman's life was saved by a doctor who could speak German and Latin, the woman's husband said in a newspaper

article at the time. The husband said he had urged his wife to visit a doctor in Tsuruga.

A local historical society searched in vain for a first-hand account of this episode. Then, a few years ago, Keiichi Takeuchi, an 88-year-old man living in the city, realized that the doctor was his father, Takayoshi, who had run an obstetrics and gynecology clinic at that time.

Keiichi recalled that his father had learned German in high school and even remembered him speaking the language when calling on people. "I guess people couldn't understand German, so he used Latin to explain things," Keiichi said. "I hope they felt at ease being treated in the oriental countryside."

The testimony of a woman who had worked as a nurse at Takayoshi's clinic confirmed the positive identification. She said she had accompanied Takayoshi when he called on the Jewish couple at the inn they were staying at, and that Takayoshi had treated the woman following her miscarriage. "The couple looked sad and sorry," the woman said.

It was later learned that the husband and wife were 39 and 30 years old, respectively, when they landed in Japan. They later left Tsuruga and headed to Kobe.

"My father was a stubborn but decent person," Keiichi said. "He did his best as a doctor and would help anyone."

Takayoshi and the nurse have since passed away. Keiichi, who was in the second grade at the time of the story, became an obstetrician himself and has been leading the historical society for five years. "My father contributed to the honor of our city, and Japan," he said. I'm very proud of him."

In response, Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan <canaan@inter.net.il> wrote:

Dear Frank,

*Thank you so very much for forwarding the Japan News, April 9, 2022 article "Fukui: Port city remembers arrival of Jewish refugees".*

*I read it with great interest and hoped to find something new and refreshing on the part of the Japanese' remorse over their attitude and actions before and during WWII.*

*I found nothing of this kind.*

*I have already expressed my anger over the recent "celebration" for the two Jap-*



anese gentlemen that were honored at the Knesset for the actions they personally took during the dark days of the Holocaust. I wrote then that they deserve every mention and a tangible symbol signifying approval and distinction. I wrote also that at the same time, and at the same occasion, this recognition that was bestowed upon them should have come with distinction to their nation that not only was an ally to Hitler but committed its own atrocities against Jews and others in Asia and in the Far East. In Harbin, I wrote, they did all of these and more while hoping that the "Jewish global riches" will aid their pursuit of establishing a sphere of influence in East Asia, China, the Far East and Siberia.

The article in the Japan News is only a small part of the all-out propaganda efforts to "clean" Japan from its ugly consequences and involvement in imperial ventures since the end of the 19 century.

As for the "Jewish question," there is a trove of materials that indicts the Japanese nation in outright wrongdoings (to say the least).

There are, and always will be exceptions. There are always righteous persons to be found. There will be, always, an example of good will (as in the case of Kobe) But a nation as a whole is a different story.

It seems that the legacy the twentieth century left us with is that politics and diplomacy take over all moral issues.

Japan has been trying with all its strength to cover up an ugly past and join the universal moral code that may, with the help of fading memories, make her look better. It does not work with China and should not work with the Jewish nation — unless there is an all-out remorse and national apology (in both cases).

I not know of even just one case of resistance by any Japanese group to the policies and actions carried out by the Japanese government, Japanese army, or local authorities.

The roots of Japanese antisemitism are long. And as we remember the Nazi atrocities, we should not forget those of the Japanese.

I look at these with increasing worry.

In 70 years, the Russian nation will be "celebrating" the liberation of "their" Ukraine. And Putin, the butcher from

Moscow, will have his statues all over the land making him the hero of the nation. I am sure that in the future we will hear or read stories about Russian humanism that saved sick women. What a pity.

But Prof. Martin Meadows <mmmeadows2@verizon.net> wrote:

Dear all:

This note is **in no way** intended to dispute anything that Dan has said. Having spent more than three WWII years as a guest (enforced) of Imperial Japan, unsurprisingly I agree completely with his assessment of Japan's "wrongdoings" vis-a-vis Jews, when Japan is considered "a nation as a whole." Rather, I wish to point out that, when certain **particular** aspects of Japanese actions are examined, it can be seen that allowances may have to be made for possible exceptions to Dan's otherwise valid generalization.

Specifically, in some earlier exchanges with Dan, I sought to convince him that one such exception can be found in the way that Japan treated Jews in the Philippines. That includes not only Jews who were not interned (because they were not considered to be enemy aliens — i.e., they had German and other Axis-linked countries' passports); it also includes Jews who were interned (including my parents and me) yet were not singled out for harsher treatment than were non-Jewish internees.

Indeed, one could argue the contrary. For example, in 1943 the (civilian) Japanese commandant of Manila's Santo Tomas Internment Camp granted my father and me one-day passes to have my bar mitzvah at the lone Manila synagogue. Also, in 1942 and 1943 (not in 1944, when the military took over) bus-ing of adult Jews to the synagogue was allowed for New Year and Yom Kippur services. But as I understand Dan's position, the mere fact that we were interned — not the fact that we were enemy aliens — is ipso facto evidence of anti-Semitism. Perhaps in reply Dan will take the trouble to correct my (mis) understanding, or perhaps he has since modified his view.

To repeat, this is **by no means** intended to refute or even just to minimize the facts of Japanese anti-Semitism, either in general or with regard to specific groups of interned Jews (as in the case of Jews imprisoned in the former Dutch East Indies). My point, again, is simply

to make clear that there can be exceptions to any generalization (if not to all). Some day, I hope, it may be possible to explain the Philippine exception (apparent? or actual?) to Japanese anti-Semitism.

And Prof. Steve Hochstadt shochsta@ic.edu wrote:

Martin Meadows is very gentle in offering a correction to the sweeping statements made by Dan Ben-Canaan about Japanese treatment of Jews during WWII. He shows that the Philippines represent an exception to those generalizations. I offer other exceptions. Japanese treatment of Jews in Shanghai and in Kobe were nothing like what Prof. Ben-Canaan asserts. Japanese willingness to accept Jewish refugees against the determined efforts of Western powers in Shanghai saved about 19,000 Jewish lives. Add to that Japanese willingness to allow several thousand Jewish refugees, many without any valid visas, to settle in Kobe for up to a year, with material support from the government. I explain in detail the full extent of Japanese treatment of Jews in Shanghai in a forthcoming article in "Modern Judaism". Prof. Meadows and I offer facts about Japanese policy and actions in two important sites of Jewish-Japanese interaction. Prof. Ben-Canaan offers anger and generalities and liberal use of the word "atrocities". It is clear that a thorough regional perspective on these interactions and on Japanese policies is needed, which gets at key questions. How many Jews were killed by the Japanese in each place? For Shanghai the answer is one, killed by lower-level soldiers, whose widow was compensated by the Japanese. How were Jews who were interned and those who were not interned (as distinguished clearly by Prof. Meadows) treated? How many refugees were allowed to enter Japanese-controlled territories and what was their fate?

I would add that the celebration of people who went out of their way to help Jews during the Holocaust is not an appropriate moment to criticize the behavior of others or to throw broad accusations at an entire nation.

## The Hotel Moderne and the Dismal End of Simeon Kaspé

By Simon Watt

[Many thanks to Mark Sommer of Teaneck NJ for sending this article along. Ed.]

Reprinted with permission from *The China Clipper* ([www.ChinaStampSociety.org](http://www.ChinaStampSociety.org)), May 2022

One of the things I enjoy about buying a cover [an envelope—Ed.] is that a little research can reveal some amazing stories. This is what I learned when I researched this cover from a hotel in Harbin

### The Cover



The envelope was sent from Harbin and is clearly addressed to Schleswig-Holstein in Germany and has stamps to the value of 7 fen, well short of the 10 fen normally needed for international mail. The cover proudly bears the hotel's Art Deco style name Hotel "Moderne" Harbin.

The reverse side of this cover is blank with no sign of an excess fee or arrival date stamp and there is also no sign that the envelope had been sealed, which could be a clue. The likelihood is that the contents were printed matter, which cost 5 fen and would normally travel unsealed to facilitate checking.

I suspect the contents may have been a sales list from a stamp dealer and the recipient a collector. The violet commemorative cancels were only used if the customer asked the post office for them and this is a "first day cover" making it especially appealing to philatelists. Both the stamps and the violet special cancel (Zirkel 3) commemorated the First Anniversary of the Founding of Manchukuo. Sadly for the collector, there is no 10 fen (blue) stamp included or he would have had the full set. The dealer's generosity seems to have had its limits.

The cover was very probably posted at the Central Main Street Post Office; the Hotel Moderne is a short walk away on the same street. The black international postmarks were added at 8am the following morning at Harbin K1 (Postal Kiosk 1).

### The Hotel Moderne

There are several accounts concerning the founding of the Hotel Moderne. The Chinese state implies that it opened its doors in 1906 and in 2006 they were promoting the hotel's 100th anniversary. The reality is a little different. The hotel was built as a partnership between an exiled jewellery dealer Joseph Kaspé and a Russian lawyer, Vladimir I. Aleksandrov. The hotel was successful and in 1924 Aleksandrov sold his share in the business to Joseph and moved to Japan where he died ten years later. This means that in 1933, when the above cover entered the mail Joseph Kaspé was the sole owner.

The Hotel was built in the up-market Daoli (wharf) district, the part of Harbin that even today has all the best shops and restaurants. It is a short walk from the Songhua River with its celebrated embankment and promenade. The true date of the Hotel Moderne's opening was 1914 and it was certainly the most stylish place to stay in Harbin. Along with the original 100 rooms it also contained a restaurant, café, theatre and a 700-seat cinema (later enlarged to 1,200 seats) and quickly became a focus for Harbin society.

### The Kaspé Family

Joseph Kaspé and his wife Maria plus their two sons, Simeon and Vladimir, being Russian Jewish exiles were effectively stateless; to remedy this they sent their sons to study in France where after a short while they were able to apply to become French citizens. Simeon, the older of the two studied to become a concert pianist and Vladimir, the younger to become an architect. Both sons were successful in their endeavours.

### The Russian Fascist Party

One sinister element in Harbin after the Japanese invasion in 1931 and the subsequent formation of Manchukuo in 1932 were members of the Russian Fascist Party who had been driven out of Russia by the Communists in 1925. This group had a hatred of Jews and became a tool of the Kempeitai, the thoroughly corrupt Japanese Military Police. The Kempeitai used the Russian fascists to create trouble for the Jews, in particular by targeting them for extortion through the kidnapping of wealthy members of the Jewish community.

### Simeon Kaspé

Joseph Kaspé, in an effort to distance the Hotel Moderne from the troubles caused by the Kempeitai, transferred ownership of the hotel to his sons Simeon and Vladimir who were by then French citizens and no longer simply vulnerable, stateless Jews. Before the Japanese Army entered the city

in February 1932 Kaspé began flying the French tricolour in an effort to gain protection. Sadly, this did not work because in 1933 Simeon was kidnapped.

Sources vary when it comes to the exact date but the most likely is 24th August 1933. Simeon was on vacation and returning to the hotel one evening with his girlfriend when he was grabbed by Russian bandits and taken away following a short struggle. The girlfriend was left unharmed.

Kaspé senior received a ransom note for the sum of \$100,000 the following day. There is some doubt about his motivation but either Kaspé senior was stubborn or he simply lacked access to such a large amount. Instead of paying he approached the young French consul who naively demanded the Kempeitai launch an investigation. As collaborators, this was simply not going to happen.

After thirty days with no news Joseph received part of a human ear along with a note telling him it had once belonged to his son. Kaspé remained steadfast and on 3rd November 1933 Simeon's body was discovered. His captors had been keeping him in a pit thirty miles outside of Harbin. He had been tortured, beaten, mutilated, starved and subjected to extreme cold. The kidnappers, realising that no ransom was forthcoming, had finally shot him in the head and dumped him.

Simeon Kaspé's cruel murder was one of a long line of such attacks and perhaps due to the barbarity of his treatment the Harbin Jews along with many other foreigners in the city staged a huge demonstration as they accompanied the coffin to the funeral. Thousands were marching along with the funeral cortege shouting anti-Kempeitai and anti-Japanese slogans. So much so that the Japanese authorities became worried and had to act.

### The Aftermath

Having come under some pressure and to lower the tension the Kempeitai arrested their Russian stooges, charged them with kidnapping and murder, and handed them over to the Manchukuoan court. The Chinese judges quickly convicted and jailed the kidnappers, but this was not the end of the matter.

Remarkably, the Kempeitai then arrested the Chinese judges for treason. The kidnappers were then re-tried by Japanese judges and handed sentences of between ten and fifteen years each. The criminals spent all of one week in prison before being released, as the result of an amnesty.

Russian newspapers were ordered by the Kempeitai to launch campaigns against the Jews and also foreign organisations such as



the Freemasons, the YMCA, Rotary International and even the Boy Scouts! Wealthy Jews along with members and organisers of these other groups were harassed and beaten up by Chinese bandits and Russian fascist stooges, with the victims having little recourse to the law.

After Simeon's burial, Joseph Kaspé left Harbin for Paris to join his wife Maria and their son Vladimir. He died in Paris in 1938. I am unable to say what happened to Maria but the younger son Vladimir fled Paris before the Germans arrived in 1940 and became a successful architect in Mexico where he lived a long and productive life.

The Kaspé affair has passed into Chinese folk law, Jews no longer felt safe in Harbin and thousands left, many going to Shanghai or wisely leaving China altogether.

In 1945 the Russians drove the Japanese out of Harbin and in 1946 the hotel became the property of the communist state authorities. In 1949 the Hotel Moderne became known as The Harbin City Government Guesthouse and was used for hosting high standing CCP officials visiting Harbin for inspections and conferences.

In 1983, under Deng's new economy, it was renamed as the Harbin Hotel but it was not until 1987 that it underwent the refurbishment needed to attract international visitors.

The Hotel Moderne remains state owned and in the 1990s somebody obviously realised the marketing value of the hotel's history and renamed it yet again, this time as The Hotel Modern. Why did they miss off the final "e"? In doing this, to my mind they threw away some of its old European Art Nouveau romance. You can stay at the Hotel Modern today if you should ever visit Harbin and if you also find a cover from the Hotel Moderne in your collection, do please spare a thought for a young piano player whose life was so tragically cut short.

## References

*The Many Faces of the Hotel Modern* by Mark Gamsa Kempeitai, *Japan's Dreaded Military Police* by Raymond Lamont-Brown Simon Watt is a China stamp collector based in England and the focus of his collection is Manchuria/Manchukuo.

## Thoughts about an Ancient Chinese Scholar Visiting the "Wailing Wall"

By Lee Moore

Excerpted from <https://supchina.com/2020/05/14/kang-youwei-and-late-qing-nationalism/>

Increasingly, China has responded to criticism of its handling of COVID-19 with nationalistic rhetoric. The recent spat with the U.S. has led some scholars to draw comparisons with the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901). Nationalism has even come to shape the country's diplomacy, with people calling it "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy," after the jingoistic action movie *Wolf Warrior 2*. But as China butts heads with the U.S. and others... I often find myself going back to the late Qing, when China was part of a global marketplace of ideas but also racked by paroxysms of nationalism...

Just before the dynasty collapsed in 1911/1912, one scholar tried to save the country by combining Western models with traditional Chinese learning. He failed, but the lessons he learned are still relevant today.

Kāng Yǒuwéi (1858-1927) was not a stereotypical Confucian scholar. Though he did found his own Confucian academy in Guangzhou, his hometown, he rejected traditional Chinese pedagogy of "stuffing the duck" (tiányā shì jiàoxué), blindly following Mencius (Mèngzǐ), Zhū Xī, and other orthodox philosophers. Rather, at the beginning of his studies, he veered away from Confucian texts, instead dabbling in Buddhism and other types of scholarship (this is what qualified as teenage rebellion in the late Qing). Even when he returned to the traditional Confucian canon, he refused to be doctrinaire, incorporating Western elements into his teaching.

In 1895, Kang Youwei became involved in a student-led political movement that attempted to compel the Qing emperor to push back against Japanese demands in the First Sino-Japanese War. Politically, it was a failure, but the movement both launched Kang's career and presaged the 1919 May Fourth Movement.

In 1898, Kang briefly reached the pinnacle of political power during what was called the Hundred Days Reform (wǔxū biànfǎ). Kang was taken on by the relatively young Emperor Guangxu and tasked with using outside ideas to transform China into a modern country.

But as the English name indicates, these efforts were short-lived. Conservatives

worried that Kang's use of Western ideas might destroy the country, so they plotted against him and his reforms. After approximately 100 days in office, conservatives rallied, retaking the reins of government, virtually imprisoning the Emperor and forcing Kang to flee for fear of his life. His brother, another leader of the movement, was not so lucky, and was executed.

After Kang fled, he traveled a great deal. He lived in Victoria, Canada for a while, partnering with Chinese gangsters. He invested in property in Torreón, in northern Mexico. He founded the Society to Protect the Emperor, which was meant to restore the Emperor and Kang's Westernizing reforms.

During these travels, he worried about the nationalistic turn that China was taking, and the way it was weakening China. Just after he fled the country, the Boxers, a nationalistic populist movement, took over Beijing, killing foreigners and claiming to restore traditional China. Outside powers responded to the uprising by invading Beijing, sacking the imperial palaces, and sending the Qing government fleeing. As Kang traveled, he soon began to see looted Chinese treasures appearing in museums in Britain and France. Kang worried that nationalism was self-destructive and would become the death rattle of the Qing.

Even as he wandered the world, Kang's writing always turns back to China, but it does so in a way that uses the situation outside the country to think through questions inside it. One example is a strange poem that Kang wrote upon his visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The poem is long, almost 1,000 characters of dense, literary Chinese, but a short passage from it will give a sense of how Kang's thinking connected China's present situation with the history of other nations:

Rome rose in power,  
and many times it raised its whip.  
They killed 500,000, the city walls  
circled in blood...

I personally come to see the ruins  
of the temple, the Chinese should  
beware of the present state of the  
Jews.

Their precious treasures have been  
taken to Rome, the aching hearts  
are difficult to forget.

Kang sees the history of the Jewish people as a warning to the Chinese. After an intensely nationalistic uprising at Masada, the state of the ancient Israelites was destroyed and the Jewish people limped

on only as a diaspora. For Kang, the fate of the Jews foreshadowed the fate of China. The Jews had come to believe in their magnificence and were unwilling to look beyond their borders and recognize that the world around them was changing. They were too enamored with nationalism to recognize the threat of a growing Rome.

The Wailing Wall, where Jewish men pray around the dilapidated remains of a once-great temple built by Solomon, embodies the threats of nationalism. Kang has already seen China's imperial treasures scattered throughout Western museums, just as happened with the Jews. Kang worried that nationalism might continue to blind China to the threat that outsiders — both their military strength but also their ideas — might pose to the integrity of the Chinese state.

Reading about China's Wolf Warrior Diplomacy, I have been thinking a great deal about Kang Youwei. What makes China stronger: turning toward nationalism, or learning from the rest of the world? It is not hard to guess how Kang would have answered.

*Lee Moore is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Oregon and the co-host of the Chinese Literature Podcast. Lee's research is focused on Chinese museums, but he maintains a broad interest in Chinese literature, Chinese film and world literature.*

## The Jewish Photographer of New York's Chinatown

By Julia Gergely

Excerpted from *The New York Jewish Week*, 18 February 2022

Photographer Emile Bocian grew up the son of Polish Jewish immigrants in New York. But when he died in 1990 at 78, he left an unlikely legacy as a chronicler of Manhattan's bustling Chinatown.

A photographer by hobby, if not vocation, Bocian took some 80,000 to 100,000 photographs of the densely populated Lower Manhattan neighborhood throughout the 1970s and 80s, documenting everything from crime scenes to parades to celebrities. Dozens of these photos were published by *The China Post*, a daily paper that once had a circulation of 30,000. The rest, however, were left in disorganized, nondescript file boxes that were completely overlooked by his nieces and nephews when they cleaned out his apartment in the Confucius Plaza Apartment Complex — Bocian was one of the only non-Chinese residents during the

time he lived there.

But in a remarkable turn of events, the photographs were rescued by a longtime friend, Chinese-American actress Mae Wong. The Museum of Chinese in America partnered with the Center for Jewish History to display Bocian's work in an exhibit titled "An Unlikely Photojournalist." The exhibit opened in person in August and was recently extended until March 21.

"I was amazed by the amount of photographs he took in Chinatown and disconcerted by how little recognition he received," Kevin Chu, assistant director of collections at MOCA, told *The New York Jewish Week*. "We wanted to tell a story about Bocian and his relationship to the people and places he was documenting."

The partnership between MOCA and the Center for Jewish History emerged in 2016 as part of a grant project exploring intersections of the Jewish and Chinese immigrant and refugee experiences, which resulted in the digitization of MOCA's archives at the Jewish institution.

"For generations, Chinese and Jewish immigrants and refugees have lived side-by-side in Manhattan's Lower East Side and Chinatown neighborhoods," Rachel Miller, chief of archive and library services at the Center for Jewish History, told *The New York Jewish Week*. "Not only have these communities felt the familiar weight of American xenophobia, exclusionary practices and assimilation pressures, they have also followed similar labor patterns in the garment industry and have attracted the problematic stereotype of 'model minorities.'"

"Serious, comparative analysis of American Jewish history and Chinese-American history is hard to come by," she added. "But cross-community projects such as ours will encourage new investigation and facilitate greater awareness around all that connects us in our overlapping struggles and successes."

Throughout the digitization process, archivists at both museums were drawn to the photojournalism the bespectacled and bow-tied Jewish photographer had accomplished in Chinatown — despite his status as an outsider to Chinese culture, and the fact that he spoke none of its languages.



Bocian, whose day job was in public relations, may not have been in the business of "serious, comparative analysis" between the Jewish and Chinese communities (his interest in Chinatown was first piqued when he did press for a *Kung Fu* film). But through his photos, he immortalized quotidian aspects of life that immigrant communities throughout New York shared: —the communal celebrations, the pride and the fear of being "other," the small-town feel of ethnic neighborhoods that often provide a contrast to the anonymity of big city life.

Though Bocian was relatively unknown during the time he worked in Chinatown, his photos show an attention to detail and an enthusiasm for the vibrancy of New York's niche communities. Co-curators Chu and Lauren Gilbert, the senior manager for public services at the Center for Jewish History, were able to recover a few documents about his life that illuminate his character, including correspondence with mentalist and magician Chan Canasta, who was also from a Polish-Jewish family.

In his letters, Bocian explains that he fabricated a tale that he was born in Kaifeng, a city in China that was once home to a small Jewish community — as a joke, but also to win over the trust of local residents. "As a veteran PR man, Bocian never let the facts get in the way of a good story," the exhibit touts.

In a 1976 letter to Canasta, Bocian humorously compares his observations on Chinese and Jewish New Yorkers. "I've become something of an expert in Chinese affairs," he writes. "I know more Chinese groups than the average Chinese in New York. It's simple. I think Jewish. There are Fifth Ave, Park Ave, West Side, Uptown, Westchester Jews. The same for Chinese. The Fifth Ave Chinese don't talk to the 'downtown' Chinese. Just like the Uptown Jews don't talk to the Lower East Side Jews ... Anyway this is the first time that 'downtown' New York Chinese had a professional Press Agent helping them."

"An Unlikely Photojournalist" also saved Bocian's work yet again. On Jan. 23, 2020, MOCA's historic building at 70 Mulberry St. caught on fire. Hundreds of artifacts were damaged — but boxes of Bocian's photos were safe at the Center for Jewish History, where they had been moved as part of a digitization effort and in anticipation of the exhibit. (With community support and intense conservation efforts, 95% of the materials from the museum were eventually recovered, Chu said.)

The fire — and then the pandemic — delayed the exhibit's opening. But Chu and Gilbert produced an extensive, in-



teractive online exhibit and photo gallery in December 2020, which is still online today.

The co-curators said that, since coming online, dozens of people have reached out to them – some who had lived in the neighborhood, some who were relatives of those in the photographs, and some who were in the photographs themselves.

“It was incredible,” Gilbert told the New York Jewish Week. “So many more people were able to access these photos than if they had only appeared in person, and we were able to fill in so many gaps in our knowledge from people reaching out to us”...

“It makes me wonder how many other materials and collections are lost forever because no one thought to save them,” said Chu. “I hope that this show has inspired people to document their own communities.”

*Julia Gergely is a reporter for the New York Jewish Week. She joined the team after internships at The Forward and Betches Media.*

## Two Shuls, Taipei, Taiwan, Tàì Duōle?

By Jordyn Haime

Excerpted from Tablet, [www.tabletmag.com](http://www.tabletmag.com), 12 December 2021

Jeffrey Schwartz, 70, likes to say he is more Chinese than American. Raised a Conservative Jew in Cleveland, his Mandarin is perfect, but his Hebrew could use some work. His children, who are half-Taiwanese, are proud of their Jewish roots. For the past 50 years, he has made his home in Taiwan, where he made his fortune distributing retail products to American superstores through the Fourstar Group, a merchandising and product development company he founded in 1975. But he also wanted to be remembered as more than just another businessman. He wanted to give back to his community.

The result is the Jeffrey D. Schwartz Jewish Community Center...The \$16 million complex will serve a community of fewer than 1,000 Jews on an island of over 20 million people. The building, which will feature a 300-person banquet hall and a synagogue, was designed with influences from the Middle East. Classes will be held and kosher meals will be served in elegant spaces filled with Schwartz’s vast personal collection of Judaica. The center’s mikvah has gold-plated ceilings, its walls adorned with prayers in Hebrew, Chinese and English and a mosaic mural of Moses splitting

the seas.

But beyond the initial excitement, Schwartz’s project has intensified a familiar Jewish conflict. A group within Taipei’s tiny Jewish community says it refuses to be part of the community Schwartz is hoping to create; they believe it will become “the hub of Jewish life,” as the website bills it, only for a select group of people, because of the new synagogue’s Orthodox nature. Schwartz chose Chabad Rabbi Shlomi Tabib, who moved to Taiwan with his family in 2011, to lead the new center’s religious activities. Rabbi Tabib insists on strict adherence to Chabad’s Orthodox rules, including those concerning mixed marriages, conversions and b’nei mitzvah.

“I’ve heard criticism over myself, just because I’m here in Taiwan, why do I have ‘very low tolerance?’” Rabbi Tabib said. “It’s not about tolerance. It’s a part of our rules ... this isn’t my rules, I follow the authentic path that our forefathers went. And that’s what [has] preserved Judaism.”

The Conservative Taiwan Jewish Community (TJC), Taiwan’s only other recognized Jewish group, has been invited to partake in activities at the JCC and use its space for activities, but they cannot host their own religious services in the synagogue when it is being used for Chabad services [i.e., on Shabbat and holidays. Ed] ...

“To me, it has literally sliced the community in half,” said Stephen Schechter, who has worked in the garment industry in Taiwan and other countries across Asia for more than 20 years. “I think it’s wrong.” Schechter is a former supporter of Chabad in Taiwan, but his loyalties now lie with the TJC. He says he and his wife, who is Taiwanese, and their son have been “looked straight through” by Chabad rabbis in Asia throughout their search for Jewish life abroad...

Benjamin Schwall, current president of the TJC, won’t label Schwartz’s project a “community center” at all. “It’s for everyone except your children,” he says, if they’re not considered Jewish [by Chabad. Ed]. “It’s for everyone as long as you don’t want to have bar mitzvahs.” His wife, Emmy, whom he met in Taiwan as a young businessman in the 1990s, underwent a Conservative conversion to Judaism before the two married in the United States. Their four children have been raised Jewish in Taiwan. But children of mixed marriages, if both parents aren’t halachically Jewish according to a properly accredited Orthodox rabbi, won’t be able to be bar or bat mitzvahed in the new synagogue...

Taiwan’s earliest known Jewish community was made up of families of the U.S. Taiwan Defense Command and other foreigners who used the chapel on Taipei’s mili-

tary base starting in 1954. Services were mostly lay-led, with occasional visits by a regional traveling rabbi. When it looked like U.S. talks with the People’s Republic of China might lead to a loss of access to their military chapel, a group of Jews registered with the Taipei city government as the Taiwan Jewish Community (TJC) in 1978. A year later, the military chapel was closed, and the Jews took their Torah with them and began holding events in a series of rented spaces.

In 1975, a pivotal figure arrived: Rabbi Ephraim Einhorn, who created a separate religious congregation that met at the President Hotel in Taipei. Einhorn, who died [last] year at the age of 103, at first kept his flock separate from TJC activities, but in 2001, the two groups finally merged.

Einhorn remained the island’s only resident rabbi until 2011, when Tabib arrived. Originally, Tabib’s intention was to assist Einhorn, but Einhorn remained the star of his own show: Much to the surprise of many, he continued to carry out his own services without missing a single Shabbos well into his late 90s...

Taiwan’s Jews, like Schwall and Brett Aaron, an American founder of a food and beverage company who has lived in Taiwan since the 1990s, were hungry for more Jewish life, especially as they began to start their own families. So Tabib set up a Chabad house.

“There was nothing here,” Tabib remembers. “The Jews used to congregate twice a year at Passover and Rosh Hashanah. But Purim, Hanukkah, Shavuot, Sukkot ... nothing was really here.”

“I remember [Tabib] coming,” Aaron said. “And I remember him being very passionate. Also very excited to be here, and I figured, oh, this is great, you know?” Aaron helped Tabib where he could, serving on Chabad’s board and offering accounting help through his company. Tabib filled a major gap: He opened a Sunday school, imported more kosher meat, and brought Jews out of the woodwork for Shabbat services.

When Aaron’s son was born, in early 2019, he wanted the boy to have a ritual circumcision. His wife wasn’t a Jew, but he had hoped Tabib might help him find a mohel in the area. When Tabib said he didn’t know anyone who could help, Aaron said he went through contacts in Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong until he found someone to conduct the ceremony who, it turned out, had known Tabib. Aaron was upset: “I said to him, ‘I do not believe I could ever be part of your congregation, because you would never recognize my wife, and you will never recog-

nize my son.” Tabib declined to comment on Aaron’s situation.

Aaron stepped down from Chabad’s board that same year. By this time, Schwartz had already started making preparations for the new center, partnering with Tabib as its rabbi. Schwartz didn’t have much choice, since there were no other rabbis living in Taiwan, apart from Ephraim Einhorn, who was by that point 100 years old.

“I really thought I’d be the last guy promoting Orthodoxy,” Schwartz told me when we met at his office, surrounded by eclectic Jewish artifacts that would soon be housed in the new building. “But I feel better building a center where I hire somebody, and he’s gonna be here for the rest of his life.”

Like Aaron, other Jews who ventured over to Taipei’s Chabad have found that their non-Jewish partners sometimes felt unwelcome, or the burden of proving one’s Jewishness to attain a religious ceremony was too heavy. So a small group decided to revitalize the TJC and create a place in Taiwan where diverse families would feel more comfortable to observe. Through Aaron’s new mohel contacts, they found Leon Fenster, a British hazzan who was in Beijing at the time. His personal style, according to Schwall—as well as added events with more food and a welcoming environment—brought new life to the community.

Today, the TJC serves a larger base than Chabad’s. About 200 people attended this year’s TJC Purim party, while at least 100 attended Chabad’s, community representatives estimate. Of married couples who attend TJC events, Schwall estimates that “about 85%” have one Taiwanese spouse, a figure that has grown significantly in the past 30 years; many of those converted to Judaism under Einhorn. “This is the Jewish community of Taiwan,” Schwall says. “The vast majority, or almost all of us, are intermarried.”

But not all intermarried families mind the rules of Orthodoxy. Steve and Taoyun Chicorel have split their time between Taiwan and the U.S. since 2000. Before their recent move back to the States, their daughter, Annabel, had been taking bat mitzvah lessons with TJC’s Fenster, while their son, Philip, had been studying with Tabib in preparation for a full conversion to Judaism.

The couple says they respect Chabad’s rules, and have supported Chabad financially and offered their school as a space for Chabad’s Sunday school classes in the past. “We help each other, we support each other,” Taoyun, a Taiwanese Conservative convert, said. “So I don’t feel like

I’m not welcome there”...

The fact that Schwartz’s own wife and children are not Jewish according to Orthodoxy—and, therefore, his grandchildren could not be bar mitzvahed there—doesn’t seem to bother him. “This whole thing, Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, I mean, that’s not my fight, that’s a worldwide Jewish issue, I don’t want to get involved in the middle of it, you can’t win,” he says...

Whether the TJC will remain totally independent of the project as leaders have promised (“a golden calf,” Schwall says), or whether the two sides still might find a way to bridge the divide, remains to be seen. Tabib remains optimistic. “It’s not going to make that separation within the community, like some people think it will,” he said. “Once it’s up and running, people will see that it’s feasible and doable. They’ll be happy to be affiliated with it.”

*Jordyn Haime is a freelance journalist based in Taipei. She spent the past year researching Judaism in Taiwan under a Fulbright grant.*

## A Rabbi Fights Jewish Stereotypes on China’s TikTok

By Jordyn Haime

Excerpted from the *JTA*, 2 August 2022

With two degrees in Asian studies and 15 years of his life spent living and working in China (everything “from acting to the diamond business to real estate”), Rabbi Matt Trusch has a lot of experience with China.

But antisemitism wasn’t one of those experiences until he began posting on Douyin, China’s TikTok, from his home back in Texas in 2021.

Speaking in fluent Mandarin peppered with Chinese idioms and filmed in front of a bookshelf lined with Jewish texts, Trusch passionately shares Jewish parables from the Talmud and the Tanya — a book of Hasidic commentary by the rabbi who founded the Chabad Orthodox movement — and the life and business lessons they may offer Chinese viewers. With nearly 180,000 followers, his videos have accumulated nearly 700,000 likes.

But the comment section under Trusch’s videos is revealing. In China, the line between loving Jews and hating them for the same stereotypical traits can be thin. On his most viral video, which has over 7 million views and explains how China helped give refuge to Jews escaping Eu-

rope during World War II, comments laced with antisemitic tropes seem to outnumber the ones thanking Trusch for sharing Jewish culture and wisdom...

The comments reflect the fact that in the minds of many in China, the Talmud is not a Jewish religious text but a guide to getting rich. The belief has spawned an entire industry of self-help books and private schools that claim to reveal the so-called money-making secrets of the Jews.

In his Douyin bio, Trusch appeals to this belief, describing himself as a rabbi who shares “wisdom of the Talmud,” “interesting facts about the Jewish people,” “business thought” and “money-making tips.” Trusch told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that appealing to Chinese stereotypes about Jews was a strategic decision meant to expose more Chinese people to Jewish precepts.

“We do sort of exploit the fact that [Chinese people] are interested in listening to Jewish business wisdom to get them to follow us. We have sort of played to that before,” he said, referring to himself and a Jewish Chinese-speaking partner in Australia who is helping with the project.

Appealing to Chinese interest in the Talmud as a business guide is strategic for another reason: Religious activity is complicated in China, where Judaism is not one of the five recognized religions, and proselytizing by foreigners is forbidden.

“Pirkei Avot and the Talmud do not mean religion in China, even though those are Jewish texts that we learn Torah from,” Trusch said. “If I were to say, ‘I’m going to teach Torah concepts in China,’ that will be forbidden, probably. But if I talk about things from the Talmud, then it’s not threatening.”

Trusch always had an interest in China. After getting an undergraduate degree in Asian studies at Dartmouth College and a master’s degree at Harvard University, he spent 12 years in Shanghai doing business in a range of industries. While he was there, he grew closer to Judaism and began flying to Israel every two weeks to study at a yeshiva there.

In 2009, Trusch moved back to the United States with his family and settled in Houston, where he is active at two Chabad centers. Still, he made frequent visits to China on business (including starting his own Chinese “white liquor” company called ByeJoe) until the pandemic struck in 2020. With no way to visit China in person, Trusch and his partner began making videos about Judaism on Douyin as a way to connect with people there...

Jews living in China are likely to tell you



that they've rarely experienced what they would consider antisemitism. As in any other country, young people on social media are being introduced to antisemitic ideas and conspiracy theories — such as a correlation between the Jews and COVID — that they would be unlikely to encounter elsewhere, said Simon K. Li, executive director of Hong Kong's Holocaust and Tolerance Center.

"I think that the problem of the Jewish conspiracies in our region persists and runs deeper than we think because it's expressed more openly in the anonymity of social media and web portals like Douyin/TikTok and Tencent QQ rather than in face-to-face interactions," he said...

Trusch's mission since he started posting on Douyin was to connect Chinese people with Jewish culture and wisdom, especially given China's ongoing COVID-19 restrictions that prevented cultural exchange. It's reflective of the Chabad movement, which often provides the only outposts of Jewish engagement in places with few Jews, including in China, where the movement operates in half a dozen mainland cities...

He and his Australian partner were at first reluctant to address the antisemitism he was getting on his videos.

"Initially I wanted to just ignore all these people and never comment about these things they're saying," he said. "But I think sooner or later, we did sort of say, 'listen, what they're saying is not right, it's not correct, and these people are being fed false news.'"

They've since begun responding to some antisemitic comments or making more videos that attempt to address and debunk common stereotypes or conspiracy theories...

Not all comments under Trusch's videos are negative; in fact, in recent weeks the antisemitism seems to "have quieted down somewhat," he said. A majority of commenters continue to express their support and interest in learning about Jewish culture and history from an actual rabbi — Trusch was ordained last year after many years of study — given that good information is limited within the confines of China's great firewall.

Those positive responses, and even the opposition, are what keep him going, he says.

"We do try to have a very positive message. We don't try to say negative things about other people in any way and we are trying to portray Jews in a very positive light," he said. "And because of the opposition, we're trying even harder."

## Call for Papers

The year 2023 marks the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Designated Area. Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, together with Shanghai University and Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, call for papers that utilize recently available materials, explore new pathways of research and present new perspectives concerning the Designated Area in Shanghai. We invite scholars and experts in related fields to submit papers and exchange ideas with colleagues both domestic and overseas.

- Submitted papers (in Chinese or in English) should be unpublished, original work, and should focus on subjects including but not limited to the following:
- The historical context of the establishment of the Designated Area
- The attitude of Japanese occupiers towards Jewish refugees
- The living condition of Jewish refugees in the Designated Area
- Jewish refugees and China's War of Resistance against Japan
- The lift of the Designated Area after WWII
- The regional and international relationship centering Shanghai during WWII

### Timetable for Submission:

1. Short bios (300 words maximum) and abstracts (300 words minimum) should be sent via email ([info@shjews.com](mailto:info@shjews.com)) before Dec. 15th 2022.
2. Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be notified before Dec. 26th 2022.
3. Full papers should be submitted no later than Jan. 5th 2023 via email ([info@shjews.com](mailto:info@shjews.com)). After peer review, we will send invitations to the final contributors within 7 days.

## A Traveling Torah Finds a New Home

By Rebecca Kanthor

Excerpted from *Tablet*, <https://www.tabletmag.com>, 17 September 2015

A well-traveled Torah relic rescued from Nazi Germany has made its way to China—via Brazil—to serve a lay-led liberal congregation in Shanghai, China, that was in need of a Torah in order to conduct Rosh Hashanah services. The Torah, which has seen several repairs over the years and dates back to 1939 Germany, was welcomed with open arms by members of Kehilat Shanghai during the fledgling congregation's Rosh Hashanah services—the first to be held in the former Ohel Moishe synagogue...in over 60 years. The Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum is now housed there...

In August, Kehilat Shanghai member Jeanine Buzali traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to accept the Torah donation from Reform congregation Associação Religiosa Israelita (ARI). Kehilat Shanghai's president Arie Schreier then carried the torah around the room, weaving his way through the crowd...

The Torah has now served congregations spanning three continents. It was smuggled out of Germany in 1939 by Siegfried Moses, a member of Berlin's Wisenstrasse Synagogue. Moses had been granted a visa to Brazil, so he agreed to carry the Torah with him, taking on a great risk as there were severe luggage restrictions in place for immigrants from Germany, according to Ricardo Gorodovits, President of ARI.

"It was one of our first Sefarim used extensively in all our ceremonies from 1942 till recently," Gorodovits wrote in an email. The community that attends ARI was founded by German immigrants. Today it consists of 900 families, making it the largest congregation in Rio de Janeiro.

When Union for Progressive Judaism vice president Rabbi Joel Oseran—who led Kehilat Shanghai's first High Holiday services five years ago—suggested to ARI that they donate one of their Torahs to a congregation in need elsewhere in the world, they chose Shanghai. The Torah donation was a way of honoring one of ARI's founders, Josef Aronsohn, whom along with his father, was a German refugee in 1940s Shanghai before finding his way to Rio.

"Aronsohn trained thousand of ARI kids in their Bnei Mitzvah, including Ricardo [Gorodovits] and myself," said Raul Gottlieb, an ARI board member. He added: "We have more Sefarim than we need for our daily use and it is a pity to keep them unused."

For Buzali, bringing the Torah from Rio to Shanghai marks an important step in Kehilat Shanghai's growth as a congregation. "I think this means we now have a responsibility to have a continued presence here," she said. "We need to always have a community around this Torah to support it and make sure that it is used. I think we can do it."

*Rebecca Kanthor is an independent print and radio journalist based in Shanghai.*

## A Movie that Moves from Argentina to Taiwan

By Simi Horwitz

Excerpted from The Forward, 28 July 2022

Making his narrative film debut with 'Shalom Taiwan,' Argentinian director Walter Tejblum has helmed an utterly charming, heart-warming and at moments laugh-out-loud-funny comedy about a feckless Orthodox rabbi in Buenos Aires on a quest to track down some deep-pocketed contributors in, yes, Taiwan. His picaresque misadventures, which, predictably enough, leads to more realistic ambitions and family affirming values has its share of sentiment and familiarity. Nonetheless it remains an unexpected delight.

Short of some oblique impulse to compete with his synagogue's former leader, a beloved big shot if ever there was one, it's not entirely clear why Rabbi Aaron (charismatically played by Fabian Rosenthal) has embarked on a massive synagogue renovation featuring a more functional soup kitchen, an expanded dining room and beautiful new state-of-the-art pews.

When the film opens, the remodeling endeavor has been an ongoing mess for several years and the rabbi's debt is mounting. The time to repay his major creditor Suarez (a top-notch performance from Carlos Portaluppi), who lent him \$150,000, is upon him. Although Suarez initially promised that he would extend the due date if need be, the economy has deteriorated, the peso is not worth what it once was, and he has no choice but to demand payment or seize the synagogue as the agreed-upon collateral. Suarez plans to destroy the building and convert the property into a big money-making venture. Though he is the villain here, it's not too difficult to see where he's coming from either...

So, off he goes to Taiwan, rumored to be a good place to find donors. Much of the comedy stems from the unlikely image of a bearded and black-hatted Orthodox Jew strolling through congested Taiwanese streets and interacting with various Taiwanese characters. He spends one afternoon with a potential donor and his 5-year-old son in a Taiwanese amusement park. Rabbi Aaron desperately and futilely tries to broach the subject of money, though eventually gives up and succumbs to spending the day on various rides — Ferris wheels; merry-go-rounds; bumper cars. In the end, the dad hands over a \$50,000 check with no fanfare and Rabbi Aaron high-fives the kid goodbye. But when they are out of sight, he runs amok in circles screaming, "Yes! Yes!" It's a hilarious, triumphant and moving moment.

The movie also works well as a travelogue. Even as our protagonist slogs through the mountainous regions of Taiwan, exhausted and weary, the viewer can't help but marvel at the lush, bucolic scenery. When he arrives at the home of his next potential donor, living off the grid and flanked on all sides by nature, he finds himself face to face with a spiritual guru who has given away all his money to be in harmony with himself.

Here there is plenty of time. No schedules, no deadlines. They eat noodles. They sleep. They don't speak. In response to the rabbi's growing exasperation, the guru hands him a dollar. "What am I supposed to do with this?" the rabbi asks, to which the master sagely, cryptically replies, "Start over" ...

Alone on a bench, heartbroken and beaten down, Rabbi Aaron has no idea what his next step should be when the hotel manager, the first person he met in Taiwan, surfaces and invites the rabbi to join him and his family for dinner. Yes, it's an

absurd coincidence, but it's forgivable here. The rabbi accepts the invitation and experiences an epiphany when he sees the loving, warm family preparing dinner together and having a fine old time, even though they live in near-poverty.

Spoiler alert: he flies home revived and rejuvenated. He knows what he has to do in connection with his family...and the synagogue. Taking the guru's words to heart he "starts over."

There are terrific performances throughout, but the film unequivocally belongs to Rosenthal, who brings to life a deeply sensitive and compelling figure, nowhere more poignantly than in the final moments when he can't help but smile. It's an expression awash in resolution and gratitude and evokes Charlie Chaplin in the iconic closing moments of "City Lights." But make no mistake — the character is uniquely his own.

*Simi Horwitz is an award-winning cultural reporter/features writer/ film critic whose work has been published in The Washington Post, Film Journal International, The Hollywood Reporter, American Theatre, Theatre Week, Moment and The Forward, among many other publications.*

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