



## The Christian Search for China's Jews

By Noam Urbach

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In 1850, a radical change overtook Christianity in China. Setting foot on Hong Kong's Victoria Beach on March 29, Bishop George Smith established a new bastion of the Anglican Church, aiming to spread the gospel all over China and Japan. His efforts were made possible by the British Empire's victory over China's Qing dynasty in the First Opium War (1839–42), after which the Daoguang Emperor was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Nanjing. Great Britain thus gained permanent control of Hong Kong as well as free access to five other Chinese ports, including Shanghai. Foreign diplomats, merchants, clergymen, and missionaries could now visit and settle there at will.

Smith's small step soon led to the West's rediscovery of an ancient Chinese Jewish community. In fact, everything we know about Jews in China – including their origins – is based on Christian sources. Jesuits had first stumbled across the tiny Jewish presence in the city of Kaifeng in 1605. The community was culturally Chinese; documenting the rituals performed in its Temple of Purity and Truth, the missionaries concluded that this temple was the only one in existence combining Jewish customs with Confucianism and Chinese ancestor worship.

Jesuits maintained contact with the Kaifeng community until 1724, when the Yongzheng Emperor severely restricted foreign missionary activity. Yet word of these legendary Jews still resonated in Christian circles in Europe over a century later, when the Anglican Church arrived in China in the wake of the Opium War.

Six months after Bishop Smith set up shop, he dispatched two Chinese Christian converts from Shanghai to see if the Jewish community in Kaifeng still existed. Their mission was to observe any Jews and establish contact. This expedition was the Church's first foray into the Chinese interior, apart from the free ports. Why were the Anglicans so desperate to reconnect with a tiny, irrelevant minority instead of concentrating on what was surely their main task: the mass conversion of China's enormous indigenous population?

### Looking for Jesus in the Bible

Anglican curiosity about Chinese Jews dates back to the Hebraists, medieval Christians anxious to uncover Christianity's Jewish roots. The Hebraists studied Hebrew so as to read the Bible – and sometimes even the Mishna and Talmud – in the original, often with Jewish teachers, and were aware of

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## How a Brooklyn Dentist Tried to Create a Jewish Homeland in Yunnan

By Harry Saunders

Excerpted from *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>, 2 June 2024

In January 1934, a dentist from Brooklyn named Maurice William wrote a letter to Albert Einstein to present his idea for Jewish resettlement in China. "During a visit at the summer home of Judge [Louis] Brandeis last September we naturally discussed the plight of German Jews," William wrote. "He too feels that China is the one great hope for Hitler's victims."

"Your plan," Einstein responded, "seems to me to be very hopeful and rational and its realization must be pursued energetically." The more he thought about the plan, the more sense it made. "The Chinese and Jewish peoples," he told William two months later, "in spite of any apparent differences in their traditions, have this in common: both possess a mentality that is the product of cultures that go back to antiquity."

By the time that William wrote to Einstein, Jewish leaders in Europe had long been searching for a homeland outside of Palestine—"Zionism without Zion," as historian Gur Alroey put it. Russian activist Leon Pinsker crystallized the idea in his 1882 manifesto *Autoemancipation!*, writing that "the goal of our present endeavors must be not the 'Holy Land,' but a land of our own." Territorialists, as his followers came to be known, spent the next four decades trying, and failing, to achieve Pinsker's goal.

So there was nothing revolutionary about William's proposed settlement, except for its location. Previous plans, including the 1903 Uganda Scheme and the Zionist project itself, targeted areas within existing colonial territories. William was the first to suggest that China, a young republic still struggling to transform itself into a modern state, might be willing to make room for Jewish settlers.

William was an unlikely champion for the project. He had no formal education, no previous ties to territorialism, and had never traveled to China. But through a combination of bootstrapping self-promotion and good fortune, William became not only a well-known figure among the KMT elite, but also a respected U.S. authority on China.

In 1923, William's self-published refutation of Marxism,

(continued on page 6)

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Let us now praise Christian missionaries.

This issue features an article by the Israeli Sinologist Noam Urbach which offers an overview of his hopefully soon-to-be-completed PhD topic: the role Christian missionaries played in the survival of the Kaifeng Jews.

Although Urbach doesn't explicitly say so, we owe the Christian missionaries to Kaifeng a debt of gratitude for all they have inadvertently done to help that community. Without the Jesuits, we in the West would know nothing about the community in its prime—and maybe not even know about its existence. Without the Anglican missionaries, we would not have learnt about the impoverishment of the community in the 19th and early 20th centuries and its desperate plight. Without the Judeo-Christian missionaries (a.k.a. messianic Jews) in our own time visiting and teaching in Kaifeng, the Sino-Judaic Institute and Shavei Israel would not have intervened to provide our own teachers. Without all their unintentional prodding—because their intent always was proselytization—Jews in the West would never have tried to connect with and revitalize the Kaifeng Jewish community.

So, thank you Christian missionaries for giving us the opportunity to do the mitzvah of helping our fellow-Jews in their time of need!

Also in this issue, we continue our coverage of the arts as they pertain to our fields of interest, in this case a musical composition that fuses Chinese and Western classical music traditions to relate the Jewish refugee experience from Shanghai to America, a forthcoming film on one man's Shanghai story, and two theatrical pieces, one dealing with the Jewish immigrant experience from China to America and the other exploring the Jewish Asian-American experience.

Lastly, I pray that the new Jewish year 5785 will be better for one and all!

**Anson Laytner**

## Points East

Anson Laytner, Editor

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

### A story about Flori Cohen:

I am Faith Goldman, a longtime member of the Sino-Judaic institute and the Igud Yotsei Sin. I came into both organizations through my late husband Robert Goldman. Rob was born and raised in Shanghai 1940-1958. He had just about opened up to sharing his past when he passed away suddenly in 1994. Much of my research, interviews, presentations, and writings have been about his life in Shanghai. Wanting to learn more, I went to Israel in 1999 and used my chutzpah to make a connection with Teddy Kaufman, then head of the Igud.



I was a stranger in a new land and I was so warmly received in their office by none other than Flori Cohen. Within minutes, Flori engaged me with Teddy, the social group that met for lunch, and was ready to go through the files I had asked for. Others had shared with me that if you meet Flori once, it was forever. Her background, mentioned in the obituary, added to her desire to keep the research and connections going. I was scheduled only for two hours but that turned into seven, including my sharing Robert's story with the seniors at lunch. They were very engaged after I told them that I found, met, and interviewed 5 of the 7 Russian Jewish kids who also stayed in Shanghai until 1958. After I left to go back to my tour group, I was floating for days.

Flori and I talked by phone, emailed, etc. as my travels took me to Shanghai to retrace Rob's steps. In 2006, I went with the Rickshaw Reunion and found everything I needed, including Rob's Chinese neighbor for 10 years who now lived in his old home. Flori did

more in her years than most. She will be missed but not forgotten. I thank her and all of you for opening doors. I believe Robert "knows" about our findings and connections.

Thank you one and all.

**Faith Goldman,**

faithnamdlog@aol.com

### Dear Rabbi Laytner,

When I was a graduate student at University of Hawaii Manoa during the early 1990s, I made two photocopies of Donald David Leslie's monograph, "The Survival of the Chinese Jews" (Brill, 1972). I would like to make these two copies available to scholars or anyone interested who might be able to put them to good use. Please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

**David Lippmann**

djlippmann@yahoo.com

## In the Field

### The Back Story to the Film "Gary's Letter"

The Spungen Foundation was making a book about Operation Bernhard—the Nazis' large counterfeiting scheme during the Second World War and SJI Board member, Dr. Kevin Ostoyich was brought into the project to interview Charlotte Krüger, the granddaughter of Bernhard Krüger, the Nazi after whom the scheme was named. Ms. Krüger is a journalist, and she had written a book about her grandfather.

At the time, Ostoyich was working on a chapter about Gary Sternberg. The Sternberg family fled Germany for Shanghai, where they lived from May 1939 to July 1948, before finally immigrating to the United States. Eventually Gary and his wife moved to Las Vegas, NV, where he worked as a blackjack dealer at Caesars Palace for nearly 32 years. [See Sternberg's story elsewhere in this issue. ED]

Krüger was intrigued by Sternberg's story and asked to be told when Ostoyich finished it. After reading it, she immediately said that she wanted to make a film about his story. Ostoyich agreed and sent her all the interviews he had done with Gary Sternberg and Dörthe Lindemann.

Using Ostoyich's unpublished chapter "Dear Occupants of Dohrmannstrasse

1": A House, a Stream, and Two Telephones as a guide, the film was made. The Sino-Judaic Institute gave Krüger a grant of \$5000 in 2023, and then acted as an intermediary to pass on an additional \$4100 from the Spungen Foundation in 2024.

The trailer for her film Gary's Letter may be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/953647441/de651bd0e0?share=copy>. Krüger may be reached at [charlotte-krueger@web.de](mailto:charlotte-krueger@web.de).

### Oral Histories from Long Ago (the 1980s)

Shanghai-based filmmakers Christian Petersen-Clausen (<http://memostothe future.com>) and Wu Yuxiao have just released the first installments from their "Living History--Stories from the Opening of China" series. These are interviews from the "old guard" who were around in the early days of China's opening, including a video of Roberta Lipson, founder of the Beijing Family United Hospital—and co-founder of Kehillat Beijing. All in all, the project has conducted around 30 interviews so far and is releasing new videos regularly. If you think this is a project worth supporting, please leave a comment at the Living History website (<https://www.youtube.com/@LivingHistoryChina>).

### 23 and Me and \$30 Million

The genetic testing company 23andMe has agreed to pay \$30 million to American plaintiffs to settle a lawsuit over a data breach last year that specifically targeted customers of Ashkenazi Jewish and Chinese ancestry. The breach, which occurred last October, affected more than 6.9 million customers and included users' personal details such as their location, name and birthdate, as well as some information about their family trees. In total, 999,998 individuals with Ashkenazi heritage were included on the list, which also contained data from another 100,000 people with Chinese ancestry. The hacker also claimed to possess the data of 350,000 users with Chinese heritage and offered to sell data from both sets of information for a fee.

### Transitions

*Mazal tov to Jeremy Goldkorn on his becoming Editor-in-Chief of the SJI website, and to our former long-time editor and website creator, Wendy Abraham who, with a sigh of great relief, moves on to serve as the Editor of our Links & Archives section.*



**Search, continued from page 1**

missionary activities in China, including with Jews.

In the 17th century, the Jesuits developed a conspiracy theory to explain why the Old Testament includes no clear prophecies regarding the advent of Jesus: With the birth of Christianity, rabbinic Jews had carefully erased all such predictions in order to prevent the spread of this rival religion. The Jesuits hoped that the original Bible, predating such malicious editing, had been preserved among a group of Jews who'd been out of touch with other Jewish communities for many centuries. The Kaifeng contingent seemed a perfect example of such an isolated tribe, so the Jesuits were eager to examine its Scripture and discover lost references to Jesus and his return at the end of days.

Today Kaifeng's Jews are generally assumed to be descendants of Persian-speaking merchants from Central Asia who traversed the Silk Road in the 10th century. But the Jesuits thought otherwise in the 1700s, when monk Jean Domenge visited Kaifeng repeatedly in search of the missing prophecies. Domenge painstakingly compared the community's Scripture with his Hebrew Old Testament but found no traces of Jesus or the Second Coming.

In the early 19th century, non-Jesuit Hebraists also took an interest in the Kaifeng congregation. They were headed by Benjamin Kennicott, an Anglican theologian from Oxford specializing in biblical criticism. Far from seeking proof of anti-Christian editing, he wanted to lay hands on a Kaifeng Torah scroll or even possibly a Bible, looking for earlier and perhaps more accurate versions of the biblical text. Research by Prof. David Katz of Tel Aviv University has shown that Christian Hebraists weren't the only ones pursuing Kaifeng's Jews in search of a more authentic version of Scripture. English Jews wrote to their brethren in China with similar purposes in mind, but as long as China was closed to westerners, there was no hope of anything more concrete than correspondence.

Then in 1809, the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews was founded. Although the organization was initially busy providing for penniless Jewish immigrants in London's East End, its long-term plans were activist, ambitious, and far-reaching – and sometimes contradictory. Alongside converting the Jewish mass-

es in order to hasten the Second Coming, the society saw the Jews' physical return to the land of Israel as a harbinger of that event. In addition, members felt that Christians should learn about their Jewish roots while also cultivating Christian Hebrews – groups of Jewish converts who eventually became the Messianic Jews or Jews for Jesus we know today.

**Fervent Supporter**

The London Society included Anglican priests, the intelligentsia, and government officials such as James Finn, later the second British consul appointed in Jerusalem. Originally an Irish Catholic, Finn had converted to Protestantism. He had no formal schooling but was a phenomenal autodidact, widely read with a particular talent for languages.

Finn's interest in Jews went much deeper than most of his colleagues'. Aside from studying Hebrew and Yiddish, he produced a book on the history of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry. While working on this project, Finn came across the writings of 18th-century Jesuits in the British Museum archives. Here he found detailed reports of missionaries' visits to a small Jewish community in Kaifeng. This esoteric subject piqued Finn's curiosity, resulting in another volume, *The Jews in China: Their Synagogue, Their Scriptures, Their History, Etc.*

Before Finn's book came out, awareness of Chinese Jews had been vague and limited to a few intellectuals. Finn was the first to publish a full account, academically well written and bolstered by his position as a government official. Most of the book just restates the information collected by the Jesuits – e.g., how the Kaifeng community was discovered, and how contact was established – and describes the city's synagogue and Torah scrolls as well as the stone tablets erected by the Jews there. The introduction and final chapter, however, include a call to action. Castigating the Jesuits for merely observing the community without attempting to proselytize, Finn's "Reflections" outlined a practical conversion program for the Chinese Jews, although their existence was still no more than a rumor:

The Hebrew scriptures have too long remained unfruitful in China [...] It is now time that our whole revelation of God be sent freely forth in that widely spread language; and that the Israelites, [...] being taught the truth of Messiah, should begin to fulfill in reality their own destiny to be "a kingdom of

priests." (Finn, *The Jews in China*, pp. 78–79)

No mere dream, this plan was rooted in political processes already afoot. Finn described the Treaty of Nanjing and the historic opportunity it presented to rediscover the Chinese Jews, rescue them from oblivion, and return them to the bosom of their nation – perhaps even to the land of their ancestors – while enriching them with the messianic message of Jesus. In Finn's vision, not only would the Jews of Kaifeng accept the Christian truth as soon as they could hear it (living as they did among "heathens"), but they would join the Anglicans in spreading the good word throughout China:

The Jews there will be unimpeachable witnesses to the truth of the Old Testament, – the New Testament and our scriptural Liturgy are already rendered into Chinese by English predecessors in the field, – and we may rest assured that the Divine blessing will not be wanting to sanction every effort made in promoting the spiritual good of China. (ibid., p. vi)

Four years after publication of *The Jews in China*, Finn became the British consul in Jerusalem and moved on to other adventures, but copies of his work reached British diplomats in the Chinese free ports (including Hong Kong), setting the stage for Bishop George Smith's arrival.

**Mystery Mission**

One enthusiastic reader of Finn's work was Jane Cook, a generous backer of the London Society who financed Jerusalem's first Anglican church. Cook gave Bishop Smith five hundred pounds sterling to support the search for the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng. Rising to the challenge, Smith sought out Rev. Dr. Walter Henry Medhurst, a British missionary in Shanghai. Medhurst had just completed the first translation of the New Testament into Chinese. Together, they devised a plan. As foreigners were forbidden to visit the Chinese interior, Smith and Medhurst decided to send two Chinese Christian converts to find and contact the fabled community.

Qiu Tiansheng and Jiang Rongji set out from Shanghai on November 15, 1850, reaching Kaifeng on December 9. George Smith's book, *The Jews at Kae-fung-foo: Being a Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry, to the Jewish Synagogue at Kae-Fung-Foo, on Behalf of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*, is the sole record of their journey. Published in Shanghai in

1851, this volume basically comprises the diaries of these two messengers, one of whom actually wrote in English, the other in Chinese. Much of the work is devoted to the journey itself: the scenery, weather, conditions, and challenges encountered. Occasionally, the pair handed out Christian propaganda leaflets in Chinese.

This unexpected focus calls the entire purpose of the mission into question. Was its primary object the revival of the Kaifeng community, as Finn had hoped, or its conversion, creating a spearhead of Chinese Christians who could then spread Christianity all over China? Or to discover an ancient, more accurate version of the Bible, as the Hebraists and Jesuits had envisioned? Or was there a hidden agenda: to map out the Chinese continent and the general population's openness to Christianity? Though perhaps much less interested in Kaifeng and its Jews than either James Finn or Jane Cook, Bishop Smith may have adopted their cause in order to fund his own mission.

### Textual Tourism

On arrival in Kaifeng, the two scouts went straight to the sacred precinct identified by the Jesuits two hundred years previously as the Temple of Purity and Truth (a Chinese term also applied to mosques). There, Qiu and Jiang documented tragic neglect, miserable poverty, and no ritual or leadership. By their estimate, roughly two hundred Jews lived in Kaifeng. Of about seventy extended households once belonging to the community, only seven remained. The last rabbi had died fifty years before.

The messengers were most excited by the community's texts, which included Torah scrolls, five-volume Pentateuchs with additional readings from the Prophets, and a ledger listing generations of local Jews. Most impressive were steles inscribed with the congregation's history and core beliefs, which the Jesuits themselves had recorded and were now duly recopied.

Despite a friendly reception, the two Chinese also met with suspicion. Smith conjectured that had they not presented a letter in Hebrew from a Shanghai Jew named Isaac Faraj, requesting Hebrew manuscripts, they'd have been rebuffed as spies. The Jews of Kaifeng couldn't read Hebrew, but the similarity between the characters in the document and their own holy books was enough to guarantee the visitors a

warm welcome.

Nevertheless, on Qiu and Jiang's fifth day in Kaifeng, the Jews became wary, forcing the two to leave with only eight tattered excerpts from the Pentateuch, which they'd managed to purchase. Smith pointed out – perhaps to satisfy the curiosity of Hebraists past and present – that these texts were identical to those known in the west.

The most exciting discovery occurred only when Smith's book had already gone to press, necessitating a two-paragraph addendum to every copy. On a second visit to Kaifeng, Qiu and Jiang had acquired six of the Jews' twelve Torah scrolls as well as a haggadah and other documents, now preserved in prestigious archives in England and the United States.

The new paragraphs likewise mentioned that three hundred local Jews had attended the sale of the Torah scrolls, suggesting a community considerably larger than previously supposed. And members apparently still circumcised their male children, although they had no idea why.

Most important, the messengers had brought two representatives of the community back to Shanghai with them: brothers Zhao Zhin-ch'eng and Zhao Wen-k'uei.

### Question Marks

News of the renewed encounter with the Jews of Kaifeng spread swiftly, reported in Jewish and Christian journals in the west and arousing enormous interest. Yet Smith's report raised questions.

Zhou Xun, a British scholar of Chinese origin, has even denounced the rediscovery of the community as a fraud. She points to Smith's display of the two Kaifeng natives in Shanghai almost like circus animals, as was typical of anthropological "curiosities" in the colonial age. Though Xun has no concrete proof of a hoax, her suspicions are not without grounds.

There has been inadequate research regarding Smith and his colleagues' motives and methods. No one examining the Torah scrolls and the haggadah in Chinese has proposed that Smith procured them from somewhere other than Kaifeng. Yet such objects could have been obtained from Judaica traders in central Asia; the two messengers' testimony is the only basis for the assumption that they originated in Kaifeng. That testimony, too, deserves closer examination.

In 1866, when foreigners were allowed to wander more freely in China, Presbyterian missionary William Alexander Francis Martin traveled from Beijing to Kaifeng to convert its Jews. He found the synagogue in ruins. Locals claiming to be Jews told him they'd sold off its stones and wooden beams. All that remained in the desolate courtyard was a stele from 1489. Did Smith's representatives and their purchase of the Torah scrolls cause the breakdown of the community? Or was it already disintegrating when the pair arrived?

### Between Jews and Anglicans

As British consul in Jerusalem, James Finn was involved in a range of initiatives designed to support Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, whether or not the settlers were British subjects. Some Jewish leaders applauded these efforts, but others suspected that his long-term interest was to convert the Jews involved. Dismissed from his position in 1863, Finn returned to England and to his previous obsession – the Jews of Kaifeng. In 1872, shortly before his death, he published a second book on the subject, *The Orphan Colony of Jews in China*. Despite lamenting the dissolution of the community, the work concluded hopefully:

Our present desires may yet be cherished, that these representatives of Jerusalem in China may prove, like the mother city herself, entitled to the happy names of sought out and not forsaken. (James Finn, *The Orphan Colony of Jews in China* [London, 1872], p. 119)

Finn's interest in Jews, whether in Jerusalem or in China, reflects the ambivalence of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. On the one hand, the society contributed to Jewish identity and welfare; on the other, its members hoped Jews would embrace Jesus. Thus, inasmuch as all the information we have regarding the Jews of Kaifeng in this era has been obtained through this organization, their mixed motives must be taken into account as we try to reconstruct the community's story.

*Noam Urbach, a member of SJI's International Advisory Board, researches Chinese politics and religion and comments regularly on events in China. Previously a university lecturer in China and Israel, he owns the Shoket Fine Art Gallery in Zikhron Yaakov, Israel. This article is based on research Urbach is doing for his PhD.*



*Dentist, continued from page 1*

The Social Interpretation of History, found its way into the hands of Nationalist Party Premier Sun Yat-sen (Sun Ke's father), who was in the process of articulating his economic vision for the country. Sun drew heavily on William's language in a series of lectures that he delivered the following year. At one point, he mentioned the Social Interpretation by name. When the KMT published a book based on the lectures after Sun Yat-sen's death a few years later, it catapulted William from unknown foreigner to philosophical luminary.

Americans first learned about William's achievement from a 1927 article in *Asia Magazine*, which declared that Sun Yat-sen "bases his anti-Marxian position almost verbatim upon a little-known work from the pen of an American author." William soon found himself in contact with some of the United States' leading intellectuals, including not only Einstein and Brandeis, but also John Dewey and the Columbia historian James T. Shotwell, both of whom would later express their support for his Jewish settlement plan.

The Chinese government proved less receptive. Before writing to Einstein, William had discussed his plan in depth with Ambassador Alfred Sao-ke Sze, who agreed that importing German Jews could be a boon for the Chinese economy. Sze's superiors in the KMT valued William's opinion. But not as much as they valued their relations with Germany, which had stepped up its military and economic aid to China soon after the Nazis took power.

Constructing a settlement for the exact people that Hitler reviled was sure to offend the German government, the KMT leadership figured. Several years would pass before they became desperate enough to reconsider.

## II

On Christmas Eve, 1938, Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) Secretary G. Godfrey Phillips sent an urgent cable to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee: "Shanghai is gravely perturbed by abnormal influx of Jewish refugees," he warned. "Shanghai is already facing the most serious refugee problem due to Sino-Japanese hostilities. It is quite impossible to absorb any large number of foreign refugees."

Shanghai enjoyed an unusual status in the early days of World War II. Japanese forces captured the city in November 1937, but they left control of the International Settlement in the hands of the SMC. Under its multinational leadership, Shanghai remained one of the few ports in the world that would allow stateless persons entry. From 1937 to 1939, more than 20,000 Jewish refugees, mostly from Central Europe, flooded into the city.

Over that same period, China suffered a string of devastating military defeats at the hands of the Japanese. After capturing Shanghai in November, the Imperial Army marched on Nanjing, forcing Chiang Kai-shek and his government to flee. By January 1939, the Japanese controlled nearly the entirety of China's eastern seaboard. Chiang's forces had halted the Imperial Army's advance, but Chinese pleas for U.S. and British military support continued to fall flat.

Soon after Phillips sent his cable, Sun Ke learned that SMC officials planned to restrict the flow of refugees to Shanghai. Resettling Jewish refugees in Yunnan suddenly seemed to him like the perfect solution to the joint crises facing his country. He began drafting his dispatch to the Civil Affairs Office the next month.

[Sun Ke believed that a more suitable refuge could be found in his own country. Not in Shanghai... but in the Himalayan foothills

of China's hinterland. With Laos to the south and what was then called Burma to the west, Yunnan was a border province with an unusually temperate climate, staggering natural beauty, and enough uncultivated land to accommodate 100,000 Jews fleeing Nazi persecution...]

The logic behind Sun Ke's proposal was simple: If China offered refuge to the persecuted Jews of Europe, then their co-religionists in the United States and Britain might convince those governments to support China against the Japanese. "British economic support was in truth manipulated by these large merchants and bankers," Sun Ke wrote, "and since many of these large merchants and bankers are Jewish, therefore this proposal would influence the British to have an even more favorable attitude toward us."

In addition to their propaganda value, Sun Ke believed that Jewish refugees had something to offer a Chinese province lagging in economic development. In the short term, the symbol of Jewish refugees could help China win the war. In the long term, the refugees themselves, with their "strong financial background and many talents," as he put it, could help China develop into a great nation.

His reasoning echoed that of Einstein, who told William back in 1934 that his settlement project would "place at the service of China the beneficent aid of Western skill, knowledge and science." The historical record reveals no direct link between the plan that William presented to Einstein in 1934 and Sun Ke's proposal in 1939. However, William's renown in the KMT and his correspondence with Sze, the ambassador, both suggest that the similarities between his idea and Sun Ke's proposal were the result of influence, not coincidence.

Some within the Chinese government doubted that engaging with the thorny issue of Jewish refu-

gees would be worth it. The Foreign Ministry warned that governing Jews in China would only be tenable in the short term, before their demands for autonomy became too difficult to control. China's Interior Ministry went further. "The enemy and fascist countries are constantly alleging that we are a communist state," ministry officials wrote, "and at this time to take in a large number of Jews will make it difficult to avoid giving the enemy a pretext for propaganda. In general, in fascist theory, communism and the Jews are frequently mentioned in the same breath."

But the promise of potentially attracting Western military assistance proved stronger. In March 1939, the KMT approved Sun Ke's proposal and began publicizing the Yunnan plan in the Chinese and U.S. press. That they lacked a clear plan of execution made little difference. Since Jewish settlement's primary appeal lay in its propaganda value, merely declaring support for it could be enough to win the sympathy of the Americans.

When William heard about Sun Ke's proposal, he burst into action. His peers in the United States had given him nothing but positive feedback, and with the KMT on board, it looked like his idea could finally become a reality. But the moment William started to ask for government money, things started to look different.

In response to polls revealing an electorate preoccupied with domestic issues, the Roosevelt administration's foreign policy took a distinctly anti-immigration turn in the run-up to the 1940 presidential election. After Hitler annexed Austria in March 1938, the State Department maintained its quota of 27,730 visas for Germans, even as applications soared. By June 1939, the waiting list had grown to more than 300,000. That month, an ocean liner called the St. Louis carrying 937 mostly Jewish refugees from Hamburg got within

sight of the Miami harbor. U.S. immigration officers sent the ship back to Europe, where hundreds of its passengers were later murdered in the Holocaust.

It was against this nativist backdrop that William began holding meetings with State Department officials in August 1939. They referred him to a committee that advised Roosevelt on refugee affairs, but no records of any further meetings survive. For a project that would involve transporting 100,000 refugees from central Europe to China, the U.S. government's refusal to provide funding represented a death blow.

The exact circumstances in which the KMT abandoned the project are similarly murky. But this much is clear: In the archives of the year 1939, there was a cacophony of discussion surrounding the Yunnan settlement plans. Press conferences in Shanghai, dispatches from Chongqing, meetings in Washington. Objections, assessments, retorts. By 1940: nothing.

In the end, it was Pearl Harbor, not the sympathy of prominent Jews, that drove the United States and Great Britain to support China. The ensuing Allied-backed counteroffensive vanquished Japan, but it left the KMT severely depleted. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seized on this weakness to relaunch its own campaign to control the country. In 1949, Mao Zedong established a new government in Beijing while Sun Ke and his comrades fled to Taiwan...

*Harry Saunders is a graduate of Princeton University, where he studied history. He spent one year living in Yunnan province.*

## Playing the Hand Life Gives You: Gary Sternberg's Story

By Kevin Ostoyich

Excerpted from <https://americangerman.institute/2019/04/the-dealers-cards-how-gary-sternberg-has-made-the-best-of-them/>

[Gerd "Gary" Sternberg's] father, Hermann, was born...in Wetzlar an der Lahn. Gary's mother, Auguste, was born...in Lengoven, in present-day Poland. Hermann and Auguste had come from very different worlds: Hermann from a wealthy family of cattle farmers, Auguste from a modest family of Polish farmers. The more consequential difference between them, and one that would greatly complicate their lives, was that of religion: Hermann's Jewish faith meant that Hermann and Auguste's two children, Gary and Ruth, increasingly encountered discrimination even though the children were being raised in Auguste's Protestant faith. Gary insists, however, that religion was never a point of dissention or disagreement within the family. The Sternbergs celebrated Easter, Passover, Chanukah, and Christmas...

Hermann had been a medic during the First World War and had been awarded the Iron Cross for having crawled out of a fox hole in order to save the life of a wounded officer. In Cuxhaven, Hermann maintained an orthopedic practice that he ran out of the house. Gary remembers his father's workshop, where his father and an employee "would make arch supports, Hernia trusses, artificial limbs, braces, and a whole array of medical appliances. It was such a fun place; there were machines, tools and all kinds of materials to make all these things." [3]

Gary remembers life in Cuxhaven in idyllic terms...The Sternbergs lived on the first floor of a two-story house at Dohrmannstrasse 1, which was just a block away from the North Sea. [4] "There was a big back yard and the side of the house had a flower garden and next to the garden there flowed a creek, it was called 'Die Wetter,' the water was usually shallow, very clear and cool, but the current was swift, we had so much fun there, wading bare-footed in the

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cool water with the mud squishing between the toes, a net in one hand and a tin can in the other we would catch little minnows..."[5] Often Gary and Ruth would walk to the beautiful beach along the North Sea and gaze at Cuxhaven's famous Kugelbake (a tall structure used by seafarers for orientation)...

Storm clouds started to appear on the horizon as the 1930s progressed, however. Gary vividly remembers the problems that he encountered in school as anti-Semitism increasingly spread throughout the curriculum. Particularly painful for him was being forced to watch anti-Semitic films, which invariably depicted Jews as criminals and often contained scenes of violence. After one extremely explicit film that ended with townspeople beating up a Jew, Gary went home crying. When he explained the film to his father, Hermann said, "Don't say anything about it." Gary remembers his school cancelling all lessons in order to walk to the dike and greet Adolf Hitler as he sailed by Cuxhaven on a yacht: "I would guess that all the schools in town were on that dike. After a while the teachers were going around passing out paper swastika flags. It made quite a sight, the whole dike was bathed in a sea of red, black and white flags. It seemed like we were sitting there for a long time until Hitler's ship finally appeared way off in the distance. Everybody was disappointed because they expected to at least get a glimpse of that German God. As the ship appeared, we were told that everybody jump to their feet waving their flags and arms and hollering 'Heil Hitler,' it was a typical Nazi propaganda spectacle." [8]

The storm finally hit for the Sternbergs on the early morning of June 14, 1938. Members of the Gestapo banged on the door and carted Hermann away before he even had a chance to say goodbye to Auguste and the children. Gary remembers, "My Mother was hysterical, and my sister and I were crying with all the commotion." [9] It would be weeks before the family learned that Hermann had been sent to Sachsenhausen.

Although Gary and Ruth were being raised Protestant, they were still viewed by others as racially Jewish. Gary says that he was shunned a lot by the other children. He started to feel this acutely

after Hermann was sent to Sachsenhausen: "In school not a lot of kids wanted to befriend me. Because they knew that my father was Jewish. Especially when he went to the concentration camp, that was 'He's a Jew. He's horrible. He's got horns growing out of his head.' Yeah, that was hard." Gary says that up to that time in school he was thought of as being half-Jewish, but after his father was sent to Sachsenhausen, "then the half didn't count that much; I was just Jewish, and that's it."

While Hermann was in Sachsenhausen, men simply showed up at the house and took all of Hermann's orthopedic equipment, machines, and tools. They claimed they were not stealing the items, but merely "buying it from the Jew, Sternberg." After loading everything on the truck, "the guy in charge put some papers on the table saying, 'this is the inventory of all things we bought, sign here' and with that he threw a few Marks [...] on the table and left." [10] Hermann was released from the concentration camp on January 28, 1939. [11] He and Auguste then tried to figure out what to do. Gary remembers his father saying that the family would have to leave Germany. As he thinks back to his father making that painful decision, Gary is reminded of the similarities of his family to that of Anne Frank. He points out how Hermann Sternberg, like Otto Frank, was a World War I hero, and how both men had to tell their families that they had to leave Germany in search of a haven: "Families being uprooted from beautiful towns and familiar places, leaving friends and possessions behind and becoming refugees overnight. These scenes like the Frank's and the Sternberg's were played out thousands and thousands of times, all for the same reason, yet each a completely different story." [12]

Hermann and Auguste were able to find one first-class ticket for Shanghai. Auguste implored Hermann to go, because, as a Jew, he was in the most danger. Somehow Hermann and Auguste scrounged up the money for the expensive ticket, as well as for new clothes that would be suitable for Hermann in first-class passage. During the months in Sachsenhausen, Hermann had lost a tre-

mendous amount of weight and none of his clothes fit him anymore. On May 15, 1939, he left Germany for Shanghai. [13] Auguste then looked for a way to get herself, Gary, and Ruth to Shanghai as soon as possible. Through the generosity of a rich client of Hermann's, Auguste got a job at a restaurant, and thus managed to provide sustenance for her children as she continued to search for a way out of Germany. [14] Gary remembers that as his mother struggled to make ends meet, money and food were in short supply. [15]

In September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland, thus starting the Second World War. During the next year, Auguste, Ruth, and Gary experienced British bombing raids of Cuxhaven... "The bomb shelter was a cement thing and was cold and damp. It was not good... Sometimes the bombs got so close that it broke out the windows in the house"...

Auguste continued to work on getting her, Gary, and Ruth out of Germany and on the way to Shanghai. This proved difficult in Cuxhaven, so the three of them moved in with Auguste's sister and brother-in-law (Annie and Kurt Kasulke) in Berlin. While waiting, the family often had to go down to the basement bomb shelter of the apartment building. Gary remembers that in the shelter people often told jokes that were critical of the Nazi regime. The Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment and governing official (Gauleiter) of Berlin, Joseph Goebbels, was particularly singled out for ridicule: Gary remembers people calling Goebbels "Halb Sieben"—indicating the hands of a clock at six-thirty—to mock the Minister's clubfoot appearance. Auguste was shocked at such brazen displays of criticism of the Nazis, but Annie assured her that no one was going to say anything because they were all of like mind. [17] Eventually, in Berlin, and with the help of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Auguste was able to finalize the arrangements for the trip to Shanghai. [18]

Auguste, Ruth, and Gary departed from Berlin and travelled by train through Poland and Russia. Gary remembers going to Moscow, where they stayed in the luxurious Metropol Hotel, and they saw all the sights of the city. They then boarded the



Trans-Siberian Railroad at Moscow and continued their long journey. Gary remembers the train being very comfortable with amazing food in beautiful dining cars. His breath was taken away by the scenery of Lake Baikal as the train curved around the lake: "My pastime was to count all the tunnels [that were dug through the mountains], and I counted 53 of them!" His memory of Siberia: "Trees and trees and trees." When they crossed the border from Russia to Manchuria (at the time, the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo), Japanese soldiers boarded the train, and two soldiers stood guard with fixed bayonets in each car. Gary was frightened and thought they would be arrested. All the shades were drawn and an announcement was made that no one was to look out the windows: "We figured that there were a bunch of Japanese military installations that they didn't want us to see." The train took them to Harbin, which Gary remembers being called "Little Israel," given its large Jewish population.

In Harbin they boarded a Chinese train. The conditions onboard were dirty and the smell overwhelming. Sanitation conditions were deplorable, and there were people infested with lice. This was a "total switch" from the conditions they had experienced up to this point on their journey. On the Chinese train, Auguste, Gary, and Ruth first realized what their new lives were going to be like in China. Gary remembers his mother, whom he describes as "a neat freak" being "in total horror." Gary also remembers that on the train all the signs were in Chinese and English, "which of course we couldn't read but Muttie [Mommy] had the foresight to bring a little pocket dictionary from German to English and English to German." [19] The train took them to a port on the Yellow Sea. At the port they boarded a dirty Japanese steamer. Gary remembers they spent three days on this "rusty out rust bucket" to journey to Shanghai. Upon arriving in Shanghai after the long journey, they were greeted by Hermann, who informed them that he had not secured a place for them to stay. Suffice it to say, Auguste was not pleased to learn this. Fortunately, they were quickly able to find a one-bedroom apartment.

The apartment was on the second floor of the building and had a balcony that overlooked a Japanese garrison. From

the balcony they could watch the Japanese soldiers doing their exercises with bamboo sticks. Overall, Gary says their relations with the Japanese were favorable, and there even was a Japanese soldier who sometimes brought fruit and meat to Gary's family.

Given that Gary and Ruth were Christian, they attended a Christian missionary school. Gary says the missionary school placed too much emphasis on religious instruction at the expense of secular subjects, and thus, when he and his sister later had to attend the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, they were very far behind the other children in their respective grades.

In 1943, the Japanese set up a "Designated Area" in the Hongkew district. This meant that Gary and his family had to move from their one-room apartment into a camp within the Designated Area. Gary explains, "Shanghai for the most part—pardon the expression—is a shithole, and Hongkew is the shithole of Shanghai." The camp they moved into was the Chaoufoong Road Camp, which used to be a former Chinese university. Gary and Hermann slept in bunks in the men's dormitory, and Auguste and Ruth in a large hall. Gary explains the effect on his mother: "My mother went hysterical. There were bedbugs and lice, and it stunk. She went crazy." A few weeks later, Hermann was able to find a space in a building that was called the "hospital building." They moved to the third floor of the building. There they lived with four other families in a large room that was only separated with bunk beds and sheets. They only had recourse to communal toilets and cooking facilities. Gary remembers it not being easy, with families bickering and kids screaming all the time.

Gary fell in love with football (American "soccer") and ping-pong. He explains how if a kid had a football or a ping-pong ball, that kid was popular. "When the ball broke, his popularity waned. So, that was the culture of the camp. [He laughs.] The children put picnic tables together and put bricks on them to serve as the ping-pong "net." It did not matter to them

that the planks of the tables were all warped. They played football on the field of the former university and had organized teams. The football league was actually quite large...

The kids improvised when it came to toys and games. They played a game called "Packs" which was like Marbles but with cigarette packs...After the war, the kids added Marbles to their repertoire of games. (They simply could not afford the marbles during the war.) They often made footballs out of rags because actual balls were rare. "Any kid who had a ball was the most popular kid on the block"...

Auguste took the children to church in Shanghai, and it was in Shanghai that Gary was confirmed. Gary explains, though, that he was never really religious. He says there were a lot of mixed marriages among the refugees, but there were also a lot of Christians who had been established in Shanghai well before the refugees arrived. Gary remembers the church not looking much like a church, but just a regular building with services in it. Not being very religious, Gary remembers liking to go to the church simply because he could get cookies there...

Gary remembers being bullied by the Jewish children in the camp. He says, "in Germany I was persecuted for being a Jew, and in Shanghai I'm being persecuted for being a Christian." He was singled out and called "Jesus Christ." Thinking back, Gary says, "Kids are kids."

After the war, Hermann rented a little storefront on Chushan Road. The family moved out of the camp into a room in a house on Tongshan Road. The lanes stunk and had garbage strewn all over the place, but Gary points out, "that, by comparison, was luxury." They applied to come to the United States, and "it took us three years total from the time we applied." In June 1948, the family received visas to go to the United States. One memory stands out prominently for Gary about this process: When it was time for them to go to the American Consulate General to pick up the final documents to travel to the United States, they went by taxi cab. This had become somewhat of a tradition for families to do in celebration of finally getting to leave for the United States. When it was time for the Sternbergs to do this, however,

Hermann wavered, saying it was simply too expensive. But Ruth begged and begged until Hermann finally relented. Gary laughs when he points out that the taxi cab did not come to them; rather, they had to walk to the taxi cab and then take it the few blocks to the American Consulate General...

The Sternberg family then embarked on their journey to the United States. They first set foot on American soil in Honolulu, Hawaii, and the Jewish Community Center there treated them like kings. Gary glows as he remembers, "We couldn't believe just how they treated us, we felt so important, here little refugees from Shanghai, and they made us feel so important. And they sent each one of us off with a great big bag full of little Hawaiian oranges. Real thin-skinned oranges. And they were like sugar... The amount of fruit that we had had was almost non-existent"...Gary says his trip on the "slow boat to the United States," took about two or three weeks.

When Gary thinks of his arrival in San Francisco, he chokes up: "That was such a transformation. It's like coming from Hell into Heaven." He remembers when the ship approached the Golden Gate Bridge: "It's enormous. And I'm looking around, I'm asking everybody. And one of the crew from the ship comes up and I asked, 'where's the Statue of Liberty?' And he starts laughing, and I felt like an idiot. He says, 'You're in the wrong place. You're on the opposite side of the country.' I didn't know! [Gary laughs.]"

The Sternbergs were admitted into the United States on July 22, 1948. They stayed in San Francisco for about three months. They had two rooms in a hotel: Hermann and Gary in one, Auguste and Ruth in the other. The family then moved on to Cleveland, Ohio. Gary laughs and says, "For me 'Ohio' meant 'good morning' in Japanese. But it was Cleveland, Ohio, never heard of it." On the block to which they moved, they were surrounded by other families of refugees from Shanghai. He recalls, "It was like little Jewish Germany." Everybody knew everybody else and were generally friendly to one another. One day, Gary ran into Hen-

ry Litmanovitz [a former friend from Shanghai], although Henry's family had Anglicized their name to Littman. The Littmans moved in two doors down from the Sternbergs. From this point on, Gary and Henry were inseparable. They double-dated and went to parties together...Gary remembers that all he and Henry wanted to do was lose their German accents and become Americans...

Gary had always been good with his hands, so he got a job with a locksmith and an electrician, who shared a store. Under their tutelage, Gary learned about electricity, radio, locks, and more. Then Gary took a job at a factory that made aircraft parts. Gary started doing backbreaking work carrying long, heavy sheets of steel. He then moved into the inspection division and started taking trade school courses.

In 1952, Gary was drafted into the service. Given his electrical experience, he was put into anti-aircraft radar. After basic training, he was shipped to Korea. At the time, he figured this would be fine, because there were no enemy planes in Korea. The problem, though, was that when he arrived in Korea, he was assigned to the First Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Gary soon found that this "is not a fun job...Your life expectancy is not very good." Gary explains, "We had a big radar stand sitting right behind the front lines with everyone looking down our throat and shooting mortars at us and we had nothing to shoot back with." His unit's job was to figure out the trajectory of mortar and artillery shells, plot them out on the map, and then call that information back to an artillery unit, which would then fire on the area. Gary's unit was sent wherever there was the most artillery fire on the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) that stretched all the way from the west coast to the east coast of the country. The unit was often exposed to the enemy for long stretches of time...

Upon the conclusion of his service in Korea, Gary reflected on how miraculous it was that he had survived bombing raids in Germany and China and then serving in a "four-point zone" (the most dangerous) in Korea. Through it all, the worst injury he sustained was a cut on his leg from

running into barbed-wire when he and his friends were fleeing a mortar attack while returning from a movie at Battery Headquarters...

In order to marry Noreen Gottlieb, whom he met on a blind date, Gary converted to Judaism. He laughs and says, "Her grandmother didn't want her to marry a Goy"... In 1964, Gary, Noreen, and their daughter, Pammy, moved to Los Angeles with Hermann and Auguste.[21] Not too long after this, Hermann passed away of lung cancer and Auguste died of a heart attack. Gary breaks up when he thinks of the problems he encountered when he tried to have Auguste buried next to Hermann in the Jewish cemetery. The hatred that had flared over the union between a Jewish man and a Christian woman that Gary had witnessed in Germany and China now reared its head again in Los Angeles. Gary stayed his hand and he ultimately was able to prevail in having his parents laid in rest together...

Having experienced one too many California earthquakes, Gary and Noreen decided to move to Las Vegas in 1969. The following year Noreen gave birth to the second of their two children, Adam. In Las Vegas Gary opened his own appliance service business. Not too long afterward, he enrolled in Michael Gaughan's card-dealing school. During the day, Gary ran the business; at night, he learned the art of the deal.

Gary notes that, at the time, to become a dealer at a major casino, one first had to break in downtown, where one did not make much money. Usually, to get a job at Caesars Palace—the greatest casino in the world at the time—one had to work first for about four years downtown. "Obviously, I wasn't going to go that route," Gary explains. Instead, Gary played his Ace card: table tennis...In Las Vegas he pursued this passion by starting a table tennis club with students at UNLV. It just so happened that an executive at Caesars Palace, named Neil Smyth, also had a passion for table tennis. Gary said nobody wanted to play with Neil because he had a weird style, but Gary did. Gary asked Neil about working at Caesars Palace, and Neil said that if Gary got a little bit of experience dealing, he could have a job at Caesars Palace.

Gary then proceeded to go from casino to casino downtown looking for a job, but only found rejection.

Next thing he knew, he got a call from a man by the name of Dick Nee about a busted washing machine. It turned out Dick also had a hot-water heater emergency. Gary fixed both the washing machine and the hot-water heater (despite having little experience working on the latter). Dick was a dealer. Gary asked him if he could help him break in downtown. Dick made a phone call to his friend Marv, a pit boss at the Bonanza Casino. Marv took Gary to see his friend, a casino manager at the El Cortez Casino, who gave Gary an audition and hired him...

After Gary worked at the El Cortez for seven months, Neal Smyth carried through on his promise and Gary was granted an audition at Caesars Palace. He passed. He laughs and says, "So, now I'm a big shot dealer at Caesars Palace!" Gary recalls the stress of the first day: "I'm on the game for about two seconds, a guy [sits] down [at my table and says] 'Let me have a ten-thousand-dollar marker.' [Gary starts laughing hysterically and shakes to show how nervous he was at the time.]" Gary's boss came up to him and said, "Gary, if you can't handle that action, I'll put someone else on." Gary said, "No, sir, I can do it, and I dealt away." For the next 31 years and one month, Gary handled the action. In 2005, at 74 years of age, he put down his dealer's apron.

Gary says he is very proud of the prestige of having worked at Caesars Palace. He explains, "To some people this may seem like a very minor thing, but to me, a little Jewish boy from China—a little refugee boy—this was a big thing [...] to get the best job in a town like Las Vegas"...

Although Gary Sternberg spent close to 32 years cleanly distributing the cards in Las Vegas, it is clear he has spent his whole life as a dealer. He has always been shuffling the cards, going from Cuxhaven to Berlin to Moscow to Harbin to Shanghai to Honolulu to San Francisco to Cleveland to Los Angeles to Las Vegas. With his trained hands he has shuffled employers countless times: ranging from an aircraft manufacturer, Sears Roebuck, Caesars Palace, and several

others. He has dabbled in the worlds of washing machine repair, interior design, and fashion accessories. He has been through bombing attacks in Germany, China, and Korea. He has seen just about every hand imaginable in Las Vegas. Many more articles could be written just on his brushes with Frank Sinatra, Telly Savalas, David Hasselhoff, and many others over the decades. In fact, the transcript of Gary's interview for an oral history project conducted by UNLV for the history of Las Vegas spans several hundred pages.

Looking back at all the hands he has dealt and has been dealt, he offers two bits of advice for new players to the table: First: "If you would take religion out of the human equation there would be a lot less death, a lot less killing, a lot less dissension. But this is how things are, so you have to make the best of it." Second: "The moral of the story of me and so many like me, is, that if you are dealt a bad hand you don't have to play it, you certainly don't double down on it or keep on whining about it, you fold or pass and go on till [you] get a good hand and then double down or raise." [23]...

Kevin Ostoyich is a non-resident fellow at AGI. He is associate professor and chair of the Department of History at Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, IN). His research on the history of the Shanghai Jews has been sponsored by the Sino-Judaic Institute, the Wheat Ridge Ministries – O.P. Kretzmann Memorial Fund Grant of Valparaiso University, the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences, and Dean Jon T. Kilpinen of Valparaiso University's College of Arts & Sciences. He is currently trying to interview as many Shanghailanders as possible. If you would like to be interviewed or know someone who might want to be interviewed, please contact Professor Ostoyich at [kevin.ostoyich@valpo.edu](mailto:kevin.ostoyich@valpo.edu).

## Notes

[3] Gary Sternberg, Unpublished memoir, "The Kid from Cuxhaven: An Autobiography of Gerd (Gary) Sternberg: A Holocaust Survivor's Story," (September 20, 2014), 5.

[4] *Ibid.*, 2.

[5] *Ibid.*, 2-3.

[8] *Ibid.*, 9.

[9] *Ibid.*, 10-11.

[10] *Ibid.*, 12.

[11] *Ibid.*, 15. Gary says that later he talked to his father about the latter's experience in Sachsenhausen. After recounting some of the stories that his father had told him about Sachsenhausen, Gary tears up and says, "It's unbelievable. Normal, civilized people turned into absolute savages. Savages. Unbelievable." (Ostoyich interview of Sternberg, March 10, 2019).

[12] Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 17.

[13] *Ibid.*, 18.

[14] The client, Mrs. Reinecke, also sent presents so the Sternbergs could celebrate Christmas with Hermann away in Shanghai: "It was a couple of days before Christmas, Mrs. Reinecke's limousine pulls up to the front door, her chauffeur comes in with his arms full of packages, after his second trip he tells us that Mrs. Reinecke and her staff wish us a Merry Christmas while Ruth and I are standing around open mouthed. My mother hugged and thanked him all over the place and [said] also to thank Mrs. Reinecke." Others also helped the Sternberg family. Gary remembers a baker, who gave Gary a small green wreath along with Christmas wishes for Auguste and Ruth. Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 14.

[15] Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 11. On Auguste Sternberg's efforts to keep her family alive, see Kevin Ostoyich, "Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht."

[16] Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 19.

[17] The description of the bomb shelter experience and criticism of Goebbels is based on the interviews as well as Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 24.

[18] On Auguste Sternberg's efforts to get the family to safety, see Kevin Ostoyich, "Mothers: Remembering Three Women on the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht."

[19] Sternberg, "The Kid from Cuxhaven," 35.

[21] Pammy was born in 1958.

[23] E-mail from Gary Sternberg to Kevin Ostoyich, March 17, 2019.



## The Genetic Origins of the Jews of Kaifeng, China: Preliminary Findings

### CORRECTION

[After we published Kevin Brook's article "Genetic Confirmation" in Points East 39:2, July 2024, we were contacted by Adam Brown from Avotaynu and asked to reprint the following article, upon which Mr. Brook's article was based but without his attribution. ED]

Reprinted from: <https://avotaynuonline.com/2024/07/the-genetic-origins-of-the-jews-of-kaifeng-china-preliminary-findings/>

Filed Under DNA Studies By Adam Brown, Michael Waas, Harold Rhode, Myrna Gabbay, Danil Shimonov, Aaron Pinkhasov, Bennett Greenspan, Wim Penninx and Raquel Levy-Toledano on July 15, 2024

[This subject matter of this announcement is presently in the pre-publication process and will be published in full with accompanying data following peer review.]

The Avotaynu DNA Project is pleased to announce that its advanced genetic testing of men from the Bukhari and Kurdish Jewish communities has unexpectedly shed light on the origins of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng, China. The Jewish community in Kaifeng, greatly diminished by centuries of assimilation, has a unique and fascinating history that has intrigued scholars, historians, and researchers for centuries. Several theories have been proposed about the origins of the Jews of Kaifeng, offering different perspectives on how and why a Jewish community established itself in this ancient Chinese city (Laytner and Paper 2017[1]; Leslie 1972[2]; Qianzhi and Des Forges 2018[3]; Shapiro 1984[4]; Sharot 2007[5]; White 1966[6]).

Fortuitously, independent researcher Harold Rhode tested male members of four surviving paternal lineages of well-researched and pedigreed Jewish clans of Kaifeng in 2013 and enrolled his participants in the Avotaynu DNA project which undertook advanced Next Generation Sequencing of their samples in 2019.

One of the four lineages of the Kaifeng Jews discovered by Rhodes

carries Y DNA haplogroup O-M175 (Avotaynu AB-881) a common east Asian haplogroup with no known Jewish associations in other communities. A second haplogroup N-M231 (possibly Avotaynu AB-768) has an indeterminate connection to Jewish communities in Iraq and is undergoing advanced testing.

Two further lineages discovered by Rhodes in Kaifeng have incontrovertible matches to individuals tested by the Avotaynu Project from historic Jewish communities in Bukhara and Kurdistan which were recruited to our study by Avotaynu investigators Aaron Pinkhasov, Danil Shimonov and Myrna Ovadia Gabbay.

### The Kurdish-Kaifeng Lineage Avotaynu AB-370 J-FTF9916 (NEW)

According to dating[7] provided by FamilyTreeDNA, the mean dating of the newly discovered Kurdish-Kaifeng lineage is 1,482 years before present (YBP) with a range of 904 – 2,296 YBP (95% CI). Avotaynu has identified additional men from the Kurdish Jewish community that belong to this haplogroup. The STRs are divergent, suggesting that the shared ancestor of the Kurdish Jews is also quite old.

FTDNA: <https://discover.familytreedna.com/y-dna/J-FTF9916/story>

Yfull: <https://www.yfull.com/tree/J-FT41076/>

### The Bukharin-Kaifeng Lineage Avotaynu AB-514 R-FT14557 (NEW)

The Bukharan-Kaifeng lineage is 1,312 years before present (YBP) with a range of 778 – 2,074 YBP (95% CI). Avotaynu has identified additional men from Bukhara and Baghdad that belong to this haplogroup in our study. With further NGS, refinement of age of the haplogroup and its development will be better understood. In addition, a Chinese sample tested on 23MoFang, a Chinese genetic testing company, appears to match Avotaynu's Kaifeng sample from AB-514 800 YBP according to public data on YFull. If that is indeed the case, that would suggest that the Kaifeng community is indeed older than the archaeological record currently indicates, discussed below.

FTDNA: <https://discover.familytreedna.com/y-dna/R-FT14557/story>

Yfull: <https://www.yfull.com/sc/tree/R-Y168245/>

## Discussion

While the dating of the lineages does not necessarily indicate the antiquity of the Kaifeng community, it does however tie in to developments in the Babylonian and Persian Jewish worlds. The 8th-10th centuries CE were a time of trade expansion along the silk road and the sea spanning Iberia and Morocco in the West to China in the East. A group of little understood Jewish merchants known as the Radhanim (Radhanites) were multilingual Jewish merchants that traveled a large global network as reported by the Persian geographer Ibn Khordadbeh in his book *Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik* (Book of Roads and Kingdoms) which was written around 870 CE.

It is entirely possible that the Kaifeng Jewish community dates to this time period. However, no physical evidence has been uncovered in the archaeological record yet that dates to this time period. Certainly, by 1489, the Kaifeng Jewish community was well-established as one of the *steele*[8] that was erected in the courtyard of the synagogue is dated to then. The result from AB-514, if the public sample is confirmed to date to between 800-950 YBP, would support that the Kaifeng community was already established well before the 1489 *steele*.

The Persian connection is clear from the historical record. Manuscripts found globally from the Kaifeng community attest to the use of Judeo-Persian.[9] There is evidence [1] that the ancestors of the Jews of Kaifeng were traders, diplomats, or refugees from Persia (modern-day Iran) or Central Asia who settled in China and integrated into Chinese society.

Whether it was Radhanim or Jews from the Persian-Babylonian spheres, it is clear that the Silk Road is key to the settlement of Jews in Kaifeng. The Silk Road, a network of trade routes connecting Asia and Europe, played a significant role in facilitating cultural and religious exchanges between different regions. Jewish merchants or travelers who traversed the Silk Road may have introduced Judaism to Kaifeng and contributed to the formation of the Jewish community there.

The presence of a Jewish community in Kaifeng highlights the cultural

and religious diversity of the city and its interactions with foreign traders, diplomats, and immigrants. Over time, the Jews of Kaifeng adapted to Chinese customs, language, and traditions while maintaining their Jewish identity and religious practices. The rare manuscript Ms. 926[10] of the Hebrew Union College, is a memorial book with prayers for Sabbath Eve. It is exceptional for showing both its Judeo-Persian speaking roots as well as its integration into the Chinese community as names in the memorial book are written both in Hebrew and Chinese.

As time passed, the size of the Jewish presence in Kaifeng became greatly diminished. In 1642, a catastrophic flood of the Yellow River reduced the Jewish community to fewer than 200 families from seven clans with the surnames Li, Zhao, Ai, Zhang, Gao, Jin and Shi. It is believed that intermarriage with local Chinese residents and other forms of assimilation into Chinese society, as well as migration to other parts of China had reduced the population such that by 1980, the number of Jewish descendants in Kaifeng had declined to 79 families with six surnames (Zhang was no longer found in the community).[11]

The Avotaynu Project: The Genetic Census of the Jewish People is an independent team of academics and community historians that has compiled over 10,000 donated DNA results largely from the Ashkenazi community since 2000 and has methodically sought out and tested 2,000 individuals from far-flung non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities since 2016. Active testing continues. As part of its process, the Avotaynu study starts with an initial Y37 panel on each of its participants in an effort to detect possible new lineages and then re-runs representative samples within each prospective lineage utilizing NGS to define ancestral connections with specificity.

All of the Avotaynu Project's DNA samples were processed at the Houston, Texas laboratory of Family Tree DNA; Goran Runfeldt, Michael Sager, and Paul Maier of the FTDNA staff participated in the identification and dating of Y chromosome variants. Further information about the study can be found at [www.AvotaynuOnline.com](http://www.AvotaynuOnline.com); The study administrators welcome inquiries via [Adam.Brown@AvotaynuDNA.org](mailto:Adam.Brown@AvotaynuDNA.org)

A Final Note from Adam Brown: There are a number of paternal Kaifeng lineages whose descendants we have not had access to. If there are any Kaifeng descendants living in the West, we would be very pleased to sample them and add them (anonymously of course) to our study.

### Notes

[1] Laytner, Anson H. and Jordan Paper, eds. *The Chinese Jews of Kaifeng: A Millennium of Adaptation and Endurance*. Lexington Books, 2017.

[2] Leslie, Donald. *Survival of the Chinese Jews: The Jewish Community of Kaifeng*. Vol. 10. Brill, 2023.

[3] Qianzhi, Wei, and Roger Des Forges. "An Investigation of the Date of Jewish Settlement in Kaifeng." *The Jews of China: v. 2: A Sourcebook and Research Guide*. Routledge, 2018. 14-25.

[4] Chen Yuan, "A Study of the Israelite Religion in Kaifeng", found in Shapiro, Sidney. *Jews in Old China: Studies by Chinese Scholars*. Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1984.

[5] Sharot, Stephen. "The Kaifeng Jews: A reconsideration of acculturation and assimilation in a comparative perspective." *Jewish social studies* (2007): 179-203.

[6] White, William Charles, *Chinese Jews: A Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of K'ai-Feng Fu*. 2nd Ed. University of Toronto, 1966.

[7] For a description of the methodology used to date the sample described in this study, see Begg T, et al., *Genomic analyses of hair from Ludwig van Beethoven 2023 Current Biology* 33(8):1431-1447.e22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.02.041>

[8] "Rubblings of Steles from the Synagogue in Kaifeng", accessed on <https://tealtld.ds.lib.uw.edu/exhibits/show/kaifengjews/rubbings-from-the-jewish-stele>, last accessed July 14, 2024

[9] See <https://www.posenlibrary.com/entry/judeo-persian-haggadah-kaifeng#:~:text=Jews%20first%20settled%20in%20Kaifeng,worked%20as%20cotton%20dye%20and%20E%80%A6>

[10] See [https://mss.huc.edu/phpviewer/index.php?path=MS\\_926](https://mss.huc.edu/phpviewer/index.php?path=MS_926), last accessed July 14, 2024.

[11] Wang Yisha, "Descendants of the Kaifeng Jews", found in Shapiro, pages 167-186.

## A Different Chinese Jew

By Erin Levi

Excerpted from *The Bukharian Times*, 21 August 2024, <https://www.bukhariantimes.org/2024/08/21/from-guangzhou-to-queens-the-unbelievable-tale-of-a-chinese-jew/>



Cormac Uriah Lee is an anomaly. Born and raised in China, the 24-year-old claims to be one of China's last remaining Bukharian Jews.

Growing up in a predominantly homogenous Han Chinese environment, he always felt a sense of difference—and was even singled out by classmates for having a "big nose." His family observed Jewish traditions like salting meat and lighting Shabbat candles, though they didn't fully grasp their significance.

I spoke with Lee following his recent visit to the Bukharian Jewish community in Queens. Our conversation delved into his unique journey, including the challenges he faced during his conversion to Judaism and his experiences growing up with Bukharian Jewish roots in China. Despite language and cultural barriers, Lee feels a profound connection to the community and its history, with the visit deepening his bond with his roots and highlighting the importance of preserving Jewish heritage.

Read our conversation, which took place during Cormac's road trip through Charleston, S.C.—his final cross-country journey before relocating to Israel.

**Erin Levi: So, you're moving to Israel! Have you been before?**

**Cormac Uriah Lee:** Yes, I have. I actually lived in Jerusalem for seven months in 2022 while interning at the Knesset. The government collapsed during that time, and I had to come back.



**EL: What a fascinating time to be there. Can you tell me a bit about your background? I understand you were born in China?**

**CUL:** Yes, I was born and raised in Guangzhou until 2019, when I was 19.

**EL: Where exactly?**

**CUL:** Guangzhou is a coastal city north of Hong Kong, but my family's history is tied to Western China. According to our oral history, we arrived in Kashgar from Central Asia about 250 to 300 years ago, and then moved to Qapqal, Bortala, which used to be part of the Ili Governate. My Bukharian ancestors married into the Sibe tribe, a Tungusic-speaking ethnic group in Xinjiang (it's a whole story unto its own). After my family married in, a descendant married into the Qing Dynasty ruled by the Manchurians.

In the 1980s, northwestern China was very impoverished and politically unstable so people, including my own mother, migrated to bigger cities in coastal/capital regions of China like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. That's how we ended up there.

**EL: What a story! Were you raised with any specific cultural or religious traditions?**

**CUL:** Yes, although we didn't know any other Jewish families outside of our own. I never came into contact with Jews, secular or religious, until I arrived in the US in 2019. When I was little, I was always told that we were different from our neighbors and friends.

**EL: How else did this cultural difference manifest in your daily life?**

**CUL:** The cultural differences were significant. For instance, the food we cooked at home was different from the Han Chinese majority. My family, for example, cooked dishes like Baksh, which were unusual in the major Han Chinese territories. Also, despite looking Chinese to Westerners, in China, I was never recognized as Chinese and was even called "the big nose" when I was younger.

**EL: Ha! Sorry, I shouldn't laugh. It's surprising that the stereotype knows no bounds. Did your family practice any Jewish customs?**

**CUL:** We kept some traditions, though we didn't always understand their origins. For example, we lit candles on Shabbat, but we weren't observant in a formal sense. My grandmother lit the candles, and though my mother was a single parent working around the clock, we still maintained some traditions like washing hands

in the morning, even if we didn't know the prayers. We also salted meat before cooking it, which was a tradition passed down from my grandmother, but we didn't know why we did it until I learned about kosher practices later in Israel.

**EL: That must have been quite an enlightening experience. Was your grandmother Jewish? How about your grandfather?**

**CUL:** According to our family history and self-identity, yes, my grandmother was Jewish. My grandfather, on the other hand, looked very Central Asian. Halachically, we can't be certain, but we hold onto our family's traditions and identity. My family has always maintained a connection to our Jewish roots, even though, historically, many of our records might be lost [due to the Cultural Revolution] or mythologized.

**EL: Did Kashgar have a synagogue, and if so, what happened to it?**

**CUL:** Yes, there was a synagogue in Kashgar. According to family history and what I've learned recently, after we migrated from Kashgar, we kept some connection with Central Asia through trade routes. Kashgar was the only major trading depot in the region and the last remnant of memories with a Jewish community that my family could recall. However, due to events like the Little Ice Age (this ended in the 1850s) and social upheaval, our connections weakened, and by the early 20th century, we lost touch with the wider Jewish world.

**EL: Growing up in China, what did you know about Jewish people and Israel?**

**CUL:** My mother raised me to be a proud Jew and Zionist. We were aware of major historical events like the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. My family has always been patriotic to China but also emphasized our roots and connection to Israel. We served in the military almost every generation through the imperial period to the revolutionary period. The sad part is we fought on all sides against each other during the civil wars. My mother taught me that while we could be proud of our Chinese identity, we should not forget our Jewish heritage. We chose not to assimilate because the non-Jews will remind us that we are Jewish in the most sobering way.

**EL: How did you end up in the US?**

**CUL:** It was a series of so-called coincidences, which I believe were guided by Hashem [God]. A college in Washington State offered me a full scholarship, and before I knew it, I packed up and moved to the States five years ago.

**EL: Are you finished with college now?**

**CUL:** Yes, I graduated a year ago. I spent

three and a half years in Walla Walla, Washington, majoring in Politics and German Studies, with a stint in Jerusalem.

**EL: That's quite a diverse background... So, tell me more about your conversion process. Was it easy?**

**CUL:** [No.] We had a lot of books and family records, but those were mostly destroyed or lost during the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s. The Ashkenazi Haredi community said they wanted to recognize me but didn't know how to help, while the Sephardi community was more stringent on me having to go through conversion.

**EL: How did you proceed from there?**

**CUL:** I decided if I wanted to become religious, I needed to study. So I chose the Sephardi path, despite the challenges along the way. I eventually met a rabbi in Seattle [Rabbi Benjamin Hassan] through a rabbinical connection in Jerusalem. He told me to find my way to Seattle. So, I moved there on the day of my graduation and started working as the office manager for a Turkish synagogue there. Later, I worked as a policy associate for public safety and transportation in Seattle.

**EL: How long did the conversion process take?**

**CUL:** For Seattle standards, it was quite fast. Some people take up to 12 years to convert, but because I attended yeshiva and pushed myself hard, it took me exactly one year. I went to the mikvah on Yom Yerushalayim [this year it fell on June 5].

**EL: Mazel tov! How did your mother react to your conversion? Was she there with you?**

**CUL:** My mother still lives in China. I managed to buy her tickets to visit in October, right after October 7th. She saw firsthand how the Jewish community coped with the tragedy and rose from it. I'm incredibly grateful that she is 100% supportive of my decision to convert and move to Israel. On the day of my conversion, she said it was the proudest day of her life.

**EL: That's so moving. Tell me about your recent visit to Rego Park and Forest Hills. How did it come about?**

**CUL:** I had wanted to visit the Bukharian community in New York for years because of my Bukharian lineage, but I didn't feel entitled to claim the title of Bukharian Jew myself. We just had family memories, and we didn't know any traditions or people in the community. When I moved to Seattle, I made friends with a Bukharian Jew who had moved



from Rego Park. Ahead of a recent Shabbat, my host in Teaneck, NJ canceled last minute, so I reached out to my friend's family, who welcomed me...

Arriving in Rego Park on Erev Shabbat, I felt a strange familiarity. Although I had never been to Queens before and didn't speak Russian, the atmosphere felt oddly familiar, like forgotten childhood memories. Walking the streets and seeing the community was overwhelming. When Rafael took me to the Bukharian Jewish Museum on Shabbat (the door was left open for me), I was astonished by the warm hospitality and the exhibits. The artifacts and displays, like the old bread ovens and wooden carts, reminded me of Kashgar and my grandparents' home. It was like a time capsule of my early memories.

**EL: Did you manage to keep any of your grandparents' items or photos?**

**CUL:** The photos are still in my grandparents' old home in China. My grandmother has passed away, and my grandfather is in poor health. The photos were already in poor condition when I last saw them, so finding them now would be difficult.

**EL: I'm sorry to hear that. May her memory be a blessing. So, why did you choose to convert, especially with the rise in antisemitism post-October 7th?**

**CUL:** I grew up believing I was Jewish. Even in China, during events like the Squirrel Hill shooting, I felt that hiding our identity was not a solution. I began openly wearing a kippah and speaking about Jewish identity in my online platform in China. The rise in antisemitism only reinforced my decision to convert. It's about bearing the suffering of Am Israel and contributing to the Jewish community. I feel a sense of duty and responsibility to be involved and serve the Jewish people.

**EL: Do you envision yourself moving to Israel for the rest of your life?**

**CUL:** After the pandemic, I've become less focused on long-term goals because things can change unexpectedly. I hope to live in Israel and serve the Jewish community, but my skills and understanding of Chinese and American systems may allow me to contribute to Israel and the diaspora in various ways.

**EL: Are you surprised by how China has become pro-Hamas?**

**CUL:** Not at all. Even when I was in high school, I warned that China's subtle philo-Semitism would shift once nationalism took hold. China's current stance aligns with that shift.

**EL: Is there anything else you'd like to add about the community or the museum?**

**CUL:** The Bukharian Jewish community in Rego Park and Forest Hills is incredible. It embodies the rich history of Bukharian Jews from Central Asia and has a unique strength and character. The community should be more widely known. The Bukharian Jewish Museum is an important part of telling the Jewish and Israeli story, offering valuable context often overlooked by mainstream academia. I hope to return and learn more in the future.

## Something Ventured, Something Gained

By Moshe Yehuda Bernstein

Excerpted from his paper *The inventiveness of Sino-Judaic heritage: opportunities and limitations of cultural activism in Kaifeng* delivered at the ASAA Biennial Conference, July 8-10, 2014.

### Introduction

...While political agendas or tourist revenues often motivate the activism of minority groups in China, the Kaifeng Jews share both of these motifs and yet another overarching theme: the reconstruction of their forgotten cultural heritage. Unlike the fifty-five acknowledged ethnicities in China, in 1953 the Kaifeng Jews' bid for official recognition was rejected by the party leadership.

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel, which determines Jewish status strictly through matrilineal descent, likewise denies their assertion of a Jewish identity. Yet, in spite of these limitations, the policy of "Reform and Opening" and the consequent effects of globalization, have also created new opportunities for the traditions of this community to be reinvented in novel configurations.

At the onset of "Reform and Opening" there was no cohesive Sino-Judaic community in Kaifeng. With no tangible heritage for more than a century, Sino-Judaic identity had retreated to the confines of the family unit, defined only by clan lineage, the Confucian tradition of ancestral veneration and the scriptural prohibition of the consumption of pork and shellfish (Abraham 1999; Ehrlich and Liang 2008). Many scholars then studying the group's history predicted its ultimate demise (Leslie 1972; Löwenthal 1971). Never numbering more than five thousand at its apex during the Ming Dynasty, today there are

approximately one thousand Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, with around fifty families which actively pursue some form of cultural identity...

This presentation explores how such a negligible group has managed to negotiate the ambiguities of government policy to reconstruct its historical cultural identity...With that introduction, I will now begin by outlining the official policy of the Communist Party of China. This will be followed by a brief historical overview of the Kaifeng Jews and then the associated issue of Jewish tourism in contemporary Kaifeng. Finally, I will discuss three NGO's, with disparate and often contradictory agendas, that have interacted with the Kaifeng Jews and influenced the dynamics of their cultural identity:

- 1) The Association of Kaifeng Jews, a Christian organization based in Hong Kong
- 2) The Sino-Judaic Institute, an academic group from the United States
- 3) Shavei Israel, an Israeli NGO loosely affiliated with the National Religious movement.

### Official policy of the Communist Party of China

An official 1953 document from the United Front of the Central Committee of the CPC—approved by Mao Zedong and the Party elite—rejected the Kaifeng Jews' appeal to become one of China's recognized minorities. With only the slimmest markers of a cultural identity, Kaifeng Jews bore little resemblance to China's established minorities, who conformed to the governmental criteria on ethnicity imported from Stalinist Russia (Mullaney 2011). Yet, this same policy also mandated a nebulous "... caring for them in various activities" as well as a caveat against any discrimination towards them. In a response to a later 1980 query by the local United Front put forth in the wake of Deng's reforms, the Central Unity Front again rejected Sino-Judaic ethnic status but reiterated the notion of giving consideration to the community's customs and to prevent discrimination against them. The general policy towards Judaism in China became known as The Three No's (sān bù yuánzé): Judaism is not one of China's officially recognized religions; there is no Jewish ethnicity in China; and, consequently, there are no Jews in Kaifeng (Xu 2008).

Ambiguities were further reflected in the status listed on their household registration cards, or hukouben. Unlike the Han status listed in their national identity cards, the locally-issued hukouben recorded them as "Youtai", or Jewish...In 1996 three Kaifeng Jews caused a diplomatic tumult

at the Israeli Embassy in Beijing after an unsuccessful attempt to utilise their local status to be granted immigration to Israel under its Law of Return. Within a month the Kaifeng police issued an order revoking Jewish status for the entire community and reissuing replacement hukouben with the option of Han or Hui ethnic status (Urbach 2008)...

### **The city of Kaifeng and Jewish tourism**

In recent years the government has invested heavily in developing the historical Jewish infrastructure of Harbin and Shanghai, two cities that in the 20th century hosted relatively large numbers of European Jewish refugees. The dearth of such infrastructure in Kaifeng, today one of China's poorer cities, was first noted by the vice-manager of Kaifeng's China International Travel Service in 1990. In response to his report, The Society for the Research of the History and Culture of Chinese Jews was established in 1992. Its name notwithstanding, this agency served primarily as a means for a trickle of foreign tourists to meet selected members of the Kaifeng Jewish community in encounters carefully scrutinized by the CITS. In January 1993 the mayor announced the launch of the Construction Office, a project approved by Beijing and backed by wealthy Jewish American donors to restore the ancient synagogue in the form of a museum of Jewish history. The Municipal Order announcing this project expressed the hope that it would promote tourism and the economic advancement of the city. However, this project was scrapped three years later in the wake of local rumours and foreign press reports suggesting that a restored synagogue would usher in a renewal of Sino-Judaic religious culture. The issue of Kaifeng's inadequate tourist infrastructure persists until this day (Urbach 2008).

### **The Association of Kaifeng Jews**

In the 1980s Chinese Christians were among the first to arrive in Kaifeng. They began organising Saturday Bible readings in some of the descendants' homes. In 2003 Timothy Lerner, an American-Israeli exchange student at Henan University, founded the Yiceleye, or Israelite, School. Although a self-proclaimed Jew-for-Jesus, Lerner states his task consisted solely of reacquainting the Kaifeng Jews with their lost heritage. To that end, he began organising the first communal Shabbat gatherings on Friday evenings as well as celebrations for the major Jewish holidays. As these

get-togethers were sometimes the object of police surveillance, Lerner was cautious to conduct them in relative secrecy, a curtain draped over the entranceway of the second storey storefront of the old complex where the school was located. In 2004, together with a group of Hong Kong evangelists, Lerner established The Association of Kaifeng Jews (Ehrlich and Liang 2008). This group adhered to the eschatological view that only the return of worldwide Jewry to Zion would initiate the Second Coming. Utilising the talents of other exchange students in Kaifeng, Lerner organised classes in Hebrew for different age groups. In 2005, he made contact with Michael Freund, CEO of Shavei Israel, and successfully coordinated the immigration of a dozen young men and women to Israel.

### **The Sino-Judaic Institute**

In 2009 American exchange student Eric Rothberg, while volunteering at the Yiceleye School, claimed to find evidence of Christian literature. He proceeded to found a breakaway movement, the Beit Hatikvah, or House of Hope, receiving support from a California-based organization, the Sino-Judaic Institute. Established by a group of scholars and activists in 1985, its leadership, including its current president Arnold Belzer, has been associated with Reform Judaism. Unlike Jewish Orthodoxy, the Reform Movement employs bi-lineal descent to determine Jewish status. Given the political sensitivities, the SJI has limited its activities in Kaifeng to discreet assistance of grassroots initiatives only. Its objective is to support the preservation of Kaifeng's autochthonous Sino-Judaic culture and history. SJI has coordinated a number of weekly Hebrew and Jewish Studies classes via Skype. Significantly, the Beit Hatikvah has served as an incubator for a revival of shared ritual, with the community conducting its own traditional Friday night service using a mixed Hebrew and Chinese liturgy. Furthermore, the SJI, in conjunction with Shavei Yisrael, has over the years sponsored Jewish Studies seminars for the descendants at Henan, Nanjing and Shandong Universities. The SJI has also donated a considerable sum to refurbish a dilapidated exhibit in Kaifeng's Millenium Park on Jewish life in the Song Dynasty; [but] the exhibit still remains closed to the general public.

### **Shavei Israel**

Although the Shavei mission statement refers to a renewal of links to the people of Israel, its primary mission is aliyah, or

immigration to the State of Israel. CEO Michael Freund, a syndicated columnist for the Jerusalem Post, previously served as Deputy Director for Communications & Policy Planning of the Prime Minister's Office during Benjamin Netanyahu's first term...Shavei has so far facilitated student visas for the 12 Kaifeng immigrants, who first underwent three years of religious instruction prior to formal conversion, which only then qualified them for Israeli citizenship...

In August 2013 Shavei rented out a house in downtown Kaifeng to serve as a Jewish cultural centre, effectively unifying the Yiceleye and Beit Hatikvah Schools. Freund, an experienced communicator, has generated considerable international publicity on his projects. In March of this year he arrived in Kaifeng together with three orthodox rabbis. In a rented hall with over a hundred Kaifeng Jews in attendance, they conducted a panel discussion on the prospects for aliyah, advocating for increased collective religious practice. Later that month, Shavei sponsored a communal Passover Seder for similar numbers in the plush Grand Century Hotel. News of this event was broadcast in both the international press and online media. A month later, due to complaints by the neighbours at the noise level, the group had to terminate its lease and evacuate the premises. However, Shavei has recently rented a new building in the same bloc where Beit Hatikvah was once located to serve as an interim site.

### **Conclusion**

These three NGOs have stimulated the cultural activism of the Kaifeng Jews and the transmission of a revived Sino-Judaic cultural identity. In spite of restrictive government policies, Sino-Judaic heritage has over the past decade reinvented itself to now include communal activities, the revival of Hebrew, celebrations of Jewish holidays, aliyah and formal conversions, domestic seminars in Jewish Studies, grants and scholarships, shared ritual of the traditional prayer service, adult education via online classes, Sunday school classes for children...

Through their linkage to transnational networks, the Kaifeng Jews have contested the geographical borders of China and its policy restrictions on their ethnic status. External transmissions through the international media have further enhanced a viable sense of their Jewish legacy. Finally, the engagement



of transnational NGOs with Kaifeng Jewish activism has blurred their conflicting ideological boundaries and translated into a unique amalgam of cultural identity. In spite of sporadic constraints enforced by China's governmental agencies and state security, the Kaifeng Jews have successfully negotiated the ambiguities inherent in these limitations and continue to uncover novel opportunities to reaffirm and reconstruct their remarkable heritage.

*Moshe Yehuda Bernstein is a native of Quincy, Massachusetts, and has resided in Perth, Australia since 1996. His specialty is the study of kabbalah and the traditions of the great Jewish mystics and he is well acquainted with Sufi, Buddhist, Hindu, Daoist and other Eastern wisdom traditions and how these compare to esoteric Jewish philosophy. He has a BA in Asian Languages and Cultures from Curtin University, majoring in Mandarin Chinese, spending a semester enrolled in Beijing Language and Culture University on the International Exchange program. In 2017 he was conferred a doctorate from University of Western Australia. He is the author of Globalization, Translation and Transmission: Sino-Judaic Cultural Identity in Kaifeng, China (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).*

## Prof. Song Lihong Dares to Go "Where Angels Fear to Tread"

Excerpted from his chapter "A Homeless Stranger Everywhere: The Shadow of the Holocaust on an Israeli Sinologist," in Kathryn Hellerstein and Lihong Song, eds., *China and Ashkenazic Jewry: Transcultural Encounters* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), pp. 317-335.

To probe the interrelation between individual experience and academic choice is a worthwhile and even scintillating project, although it is not immune from justifiable qualms. On the one hand, applying the views, perspectives, and emotions formed by personal experience to the object of study has undeniable legitimacy, and may even play a pivotal role in opening up new vistas. On the other hand, highlighting these points of connection may create the impression that subjectivity trumps objectivity, thus not only affecting the credibility of the research, but also unavoidably touching upon the initial motivation and ultimate concern in the spiritual journey of

scholars. Therefore, once the personal is involved, one would rather be reproached for hesitancy than for boldness.

The above observation may be offered to answer a question: Given the disproportionately high number of Jewish scholars among Western Sinologists, or scholars of China studies, why is the research on the impact of Jewish identity on the scholarship so bewilderingly scarce? An exception to the rule is a recent study on Joseph R. Levenson (1920–1969) which argues that Levenson's understanding of Jewish tradition plays a crucial role in his analysis of the history of modern China.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as early as 1972, the great Arnaldo Momigliano was convinced that had Levenson lived longer he would have reinterpreted Judaism in terms of what he had learned from the Chinese historiographical tradition.<sup>2</sup>

In another memorial essay, the eminent Harvard intellectual historian Benjamin Schwartz (1916–1999) alluded to his and Levenson's Jewishness as a key to their deep empathy with China:

His interest in the relationship of modern Chinese to their cultural heritage was intimately tied to his undisguised concern with his own Jewish past. It is a concern which I share with him and which made me feel very close to him. Far from impairing his objectivity, it seems to me that it lent an honesty and authenticity to his thought which is not readily found in the writing of many supposedly objective scholars who vainly fancy that they are leaving themselves outside of their work.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, due to his premature death, Levenson's own testimony to his Jewishness can be measured only tantalizingly from an unfinished draft entitled "The Choice of Jewish Identity." The cluster of tensions – between history and value, cosmopolitanism and provincialism, separation and assimilation, authenticity and artificiality, continuity and change – that characterizes all his historiography also informs this vignette. Nonetheless, not a few felt it was "incongruous" with the rest of his writings.<sup>4</sup>

Almost thirty years after its appearance, the specter of Levenson's "choice" manifested in the title of a truly inimitable memoir of the Holocaust, *The Choice: Poland, 1939–1945*.<sup>5</sup> Irene Eber (1929–2019), its author, who was also a renowned Sinologist and, in my eyes, the high priestess of China studies in Israel, obviously felt an intellectual affinity with Levenson's magnum opus *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, which she cited in the memoir.

It seems almost certain that the paths of the two Sinologists crossed. In 1966, when Eber received her PhD from the Claremont Graduate University in California with a dissertation on Hu Shi (1889–1962), the leader of China's New Culture movement, Levenson was already Sather Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley. And when Levenson drowned in a canoeing accident in 1969, Eber had just ensconced herself at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she would eventually retire as the Louis Fieberg Professor of East Asian Studies.<sup>6</sup>

In any event, the memoir, which is overtly incongruous with the rest of her writings, offers an unparalleled opportunity to unravel how China is understood by a Jewish Sinologist haunted by an all-pervasive mood of subdued obsession and inner wrestling with her memories of the Holocaust, as well as an irresistible temptation to rush in where angels fear to tread – that is, to explore the nexus between her Jewish identity and her academic vocation.

Song Lihong is a faculty member of Religious Studies at Nanjing University.

## Notes

1 Madeleine Yue Dong and Ping Zhang, "Joseph Levenson and the Possibility for a Dialogic History," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 8, no. 1 (2014): 1–24.

2 Arnaldo Momigliano, "Tradition and the Classical Historian," *History and Theory* 11, no. 3 (1972): 292–93.

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5 Irene Eber, *The Choice: Poland, 1939–1945* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

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## Hello Gold Mountain Illuminates Shanghai's Jewish History

By John Pitcher

Excerpted and updated from *the Nashville Scene*, 14 February 2019

Classical requiems are typically solemn affairs, musical works most often associated with death and mourning. But in the hands of Nashville-based composer Wu Fei, this darkest of forms has been transformed into a multicultural song of life and hope.

That, at least, is the impression one gets upon hearing *Hello Gold Mountain*, Wu's new requiem, which premiered Feb. 23 [2019] at Vanderbilt University courtesy of the alt-classical group chatterbird.

Arranged for a small ensemble of 15 musicians, singers and a conductor, the work celebrates the lives of Jewish refugees who fled Europe during WWII and found sanctuary in Shanghai, China.

"This is one of the lesser-known stories of the Holocaust," says Celine Thackston, chatterbird's artistic director. "The strict immigration policies of the 1930s made it difficult for Jewish refugees to emigrate from Germany to other countries, including the United States and Britain. Shanghai was one place where these refugees were welcome."

In Shanghai, a city divided into various international zones and threatened by the Imperial Japanese army, one only needed to show up...many of these refugees [eventually fled] across the Pacific to San Francisco, a city often referred to in China as Gold Mountain.

Wu, a renowned virtuoso on the guzheng (a kind of ancient Chinese zither), was born and raised in Beijing, but she had never heard of Shanghai's Jewish refugees until she moved to the United States nearly 20 years ago. She was perusing the video collection at a public library one day when she happened upon a 2002 documentary film titled *Shanghai Ghetto*.

"I grew up in China, but I knew nothing of this history," Wu tells the *Scene*. "I was utterly stunned, and as I watched the film I began crying like a baby. I didn't know it at the time, but the seed was planted at that point for *Hello Gold Mountain*."

The idea for the requiem began taking tangible shape shortly after Wu moved to Nashville in 2015. She was looking for opportunities to compose and came across a grant from The MAP Fund, earmarked

for new works. Leonard Bernstein once said that to achieve greatness, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time. Wu had to come up with an idea and complete her grant application in a little more than two weeks.

In the end, she created an evening-length work that fuses Eastern and Western styles. The piece seamlessly blends folk music with classical forms. For a classical piece, it also includes an unusual amount of group improvisation.

Wu suggests Jewish and Chinese voices through her choice of solo instruments. A prominent part is arranged for the oud — a short-necked, pear-shaped lute that is commonly heard in the Middle East. Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz, whose credits include work with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, [was] on hand to perform that instrument. Wu play[ed] the guzheng.

Not surprisingly, *Hello Gold Mountain* comes across as a deeply moving celebration of multiculturalism. But the work also serves as a warning.

"The kind of tragedy that Jewish people faced is not just a thing of the past," Wu says. "The world's refugee crisis continues."

## What Do I Do With All This Heritage?

By Sam Lin-Sommer

Excerpted from *The Forward* ([www.forward.com](http://www.forward.com)), 10 June 2024

As four other performers took their seats behind her, an actor dressed in all black stood at the bima at Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles. "I've got a lot to hold," she sang. "The question's age-old: 'Am I just parts of a whole?'"

Over the next hour, these five Asian American actors jumped from monologue to monologue, portraying a Jewish Korean adoptee on a return visit to his birth country; a Chinese American man who finds love on JDate; and a young Indian woman studying for a joint Jewish-Muslim coming of age ceremony.

### Welcome to Asian Jewish America.

What Do I Do With All This Heritage? is a new salon-style show by The Braid, a Los Angeles-based Jewish theater company. It weaves together 13 monologues about

Asian American Jews making sense of hybrid identities. It's produced in collaboration with the LUNAR Collective, ([weareasianjews.org](http://weareasianjews.org)) an organization focused on supporting and creating media about Asian Jews.

As the show's competing voices make clear, the community that LUNAR organizes is vast, diverse, and tough to categorize. But it is proud, and it has a lot to say...

Producer David Chiu, The Braid's Communications and Marketing Manager and a Cantonese-Litvak Jew, has dreamed of a show like this since 2019, when he wrote a monologue for *True Colors*, another Braid salon that featured stories of Jews of color.

A couple years later, soon after the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings that left many Asian Americans on high alert, Chiu was looking to organize an event about Asian Jews, and a friend told him about LUNAR. Soon, Chiu started organizing events for the group alongside Vanessa Bloom, a Chinese adoptee from an interfaith household.

The project finally materialized in 2022 when The Braid and LUNAR won a grant from the Jews of Color Initiative. Bloom, who is a filmmaker and a writer, and LUNAR's executive directors, Maryam Chishti and Jenni Rudolph, served as co-producers of the show alongside Chiu.

The team sent out a call for submissions to members of LUNAR's network, which numbers over 1,000 people across the United States and Canada. They also held a series of storytelling workshops where participants could submit their pieces to be performed by The Braid.

For some stories, like Lulu Fairman's "An Indian Jew," producers interviewed storytellers and adapted the interviews to the show. "Our house is always open," says actor Victoria Rani onstage, recalling the warm, generous spirit of Fairman's Orthodox Jewish community in Calcutta, India. The story centers on a moment when Fairman wants to help a homeless family on the streets of Calcutta, but her friend stops her...Years later, living in England, she meets another destitute woman on a street corner. This time, she gives her money and her sweater, and realizes that generosity is how she honors her upbringing as an Indian Jew.

LUNAR co-Executive Director Maryam Chishti, who interviewed Fairman and helped prepare her story for the stage, said that Fairman's background in a deep-rooted, vibrant Indian Jewish community was "interesting in contradiction to my Indian Jewishness."

Chishti grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to a Kashmiri Muslim father and Ashkenazi Jewish mother, and was raised both Jewish and Muslim. "When I would go to India, I would be like a fully-fledged Indian girl, and my Judaism wouldn't really exist," she said. "Then I'd be on the Upper West Side and my Indianness didn't really exist."

For *What Do I Do With All This Heritage?* Chishti contributed a monologue about how she underwent a joint Muslim-Jewish coming-of-age ceremony. After much studying and writing about the two religions, the 13-year-old Chishti thinks, "Am I missing something, or are these religions the same?" and then rattles off all of their similarities. "They are one Jewish-Muslim faith snuggled tight in the very core of my being," she concludes.

As Muslim-Jewish tensions rise because of war in Israel and Gaza, Chishti said that she hopes that her story "gives people a different narrative about Muslims and Jews."

Audiences seem to be excited about this fresh take on Jewish Asian identity, which just finished a tour of temples and JCC's across California, along with two Zoom screenings. The show earned the highest opening-day revenue of any salon in The Braid's 16-year history, and the highest revenue of any first-run Braid show. Chiu attributes its early success to curiosity about Asian Jews, along with the fact that the show is both moving and joyful — there's even a K-Pop dance number at the end of one piece.

Even though the show is celebratory, it doesn't shy away from discussions of racism. "Do Not Stand Idly By" tells the story of a Chinese Jewish girl at a Jewish day school in Boston whose classmates tell racist jokes. "I come home from school de-

spising the world," she says. But she writes her feelings about discrimination down in an essay contest in sixth grade and ends up winning. She transfers to a more diverse, non-Jewish school, and doesn't let her experiences deter her from getting bat mitzvahed.

Director Susan Morgenstern, who is an Ashkenazi Jew, said she felt that it was important for Chiu and other Asian Jews to play central roles in the production process. When actors rehearsed "An Indian Jew," Morgenstern and Ronda Spinak, The Braid's artistic director, asked the actor playing Fairman's father to portray warmth when delivering the line about Fairman not giving the shirt off her back. But Chiu and the two Asian actors pushed back, saying that their Asian fathers would strike a decisive, or even harsh, tone when giving life advice like that.

The production team and cast of *What Do I Do With All This Heritage?* Clockwise from top left: Susan Morgenstern, Vanessa Bloom, Jenni Rudolph, David Chiu, Ronda Spinak, Victoria Rani, Kimberly Green, Kaitlyn Tanimoto, Lillian McKenzie, and Kenzo Lee. Courtesy of The Braid

"Ronda and I looked at each other and we were like, 'sold,'" Morgenstern said. "You guys have authentic experience. It would be crazy to lay my experience on top of that."

Though *What Do I Do with All This Heritage?* respects the boundaries between authentic and inauthentic, insider and outsider, it's not afraid to poke at them. In another story, a Chinese American divorcee joins JDate because he wants "to be with a Jewish woman who wants to change the world." He meets a woman with whom he shares "profound similarities of values." They both grew up in restaurant-owning

immigrant families that wanted their children to be academically successful, and both cared deeply about social justice. They fall in love and get married, and the speaker converts to Judaism.

Another monologue, "How to Raise a Jewish Child," shares the story of Chelsea Eng, a Jew-by-choice of Chinese, Danish, and Polish descent. In her piece, Eng prays at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, grieving that she won't become a mother. When she returns home to San Francisco, her parents take an interest in Judaism. They enroll in introduction to Judaism classes and start attending Shabbat services. "They don't feel a need to 'make it official' by converting like I am," actor Kimberly Green says at the end of her monologue as Chelsea Eng. "I might never get to raise a Jewish child, but I like to think I may have helped spark two Jewish souls."

Green, who is Korean, Puerto Rican, and Jewish, said that she relates to Eng's story on multiple levels. "We're both dancers, and I don't have children," she said. "I went through that struggle." She added that, as a fellow convert, she shares Eng's sense of "connection to God and the Jewish religion."

Chiu wants stories like this to shed a positive light on a community that is too often greeted with an eyebrow raise. "When I was growing up, people would say, 'Oh, you're Chinese and Jewish — you must be very confused.' Or, 'How does that work?'" he said. He hopes that after seeing the show, people who hear the mention of Asian Jews instead think, "Wow — what a wonderful, vibrant, joyful, creative group of people."

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## Shanghai Angel: Finding Rosa

By Heather Klein

Excerpted from *Hey Alma*, [www.heyalma.com](http://www.heyalma.com), 10 July 2024

...It all started in early 2015, when my dad Googled his mom's name. She had died more than a decade earlier, and his search produced something he never could have imagined.

An article said she had been detained at an immigration station off the coast of San Francisco. The story was published by the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation and sought more information from any family of my grandmother, who was born Rosa Ginsburg in Vienna.

My dad showed the story to me and my mom. We were stunned.

We knew my grandmother had escaped Nazi-occupied Austria during World War II. But I certainly didn't know, as the article revealed, that she had fled to Shanghai before immigrating to the U.S. as a teenager and had been detained for weeks before entry.

My parents flew to San Francisco, where I had been living for years, to meet with the Angel Island staff. They had asked us to bring her passport or any other documents we had. They already had a copy of her interrogation transcript, which they shared with us.

My family and I were speechless. After looking for answers about my grandmother's past, we now had so many more questions.

The only thing my grandma told me about her escape from Vienna was that her neighbors betrayed her. I wanted to know more, but she told me that it was all too sad.

I was now determined to fill in the missing pieces and tell her story...

Once I began to look into her story, I met

Man Li Ho, who closely examined my grandmother's documents. Man Li is the daughter of the courageous Chinese diplomat Feng Shan Ho, who saved thousands of Jews from the Nazis in Vienna. He helped bring them to Shanghai and was known as the "Chinese Schindler."

Man Li had performed this kind of research for numerous other Jewish families, but even she wasn't able to pin down exactly how my grandmother got out of Austria.

We never found evidence showing Feng Shan Ho helped my grandma's family escape to Shanghai. But the transcript of her interrogation on Angel Island revealed she arrived in California broke.

A big thing that struck me in the transcript was how alone she seemed in detention. Having an immigration officer — in a country she'd never been to and now wanted to live in — ask dozens of questions that seemed designed to trip her up must have been terrifying.

Usually, when people think of Jewish immigrants coming to the U.S., thoughts turn to Ellis Island in New York. Angel Island was the Ellis Island of the West Coast, but it was mostly a port of entry for Asian immigrants. Jews came through there, but it wasn't too common.

But my grandma was far from the only one to be detained there. I've learned about Asian immigrants who were held on Angel Island for a year or more. I can only imagine what it was like for them, sleeping in the barracks every day, not knowing if or when they could start a new life in the U.S. or if they'd get sent back to the country they had left, if not fled.

Having learned all this, my plan was clear: I decided to write a one-woman show. I wanted to imagine myself as my grandmother, experiencing the chaos and fear of her escape

from Europe to China with her family, and then her solo voyage to California with only \$2.50 in her pocket.

With the help of two of my longtime collaborators, Bruce Bierman and Josh Horowitz, we premiered the show in 2017 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. We have performed at other locations in the Bay Area since, including the Chinese consulate in San Francisco, and we were filmed by PBS as part of a documentary on Jews' escape to Shanghai during the war.

When the Angel Island staff suggested we perform the show on the island itself, I got chills just thinking about it. Performing where my grandmother was actually detained is a full-circle moment and prompted me to re-imagine parts of the show, including adding scenes where I play myself as the narrator explaining my discoveries. "Shanghai Angel: Finding Rosa" is now scheduled to premiere on Angel Island on July 14.

My grandmother was the strong but silent type. She never told me she loved me, though I could feel it through her actions. She had a thick accent. I always remember her green eye shadow, her red lipstick on thin lips and her smoker's cough. She cooked goulash and baked sweets every time I saw her.

When I started writing this show, I desperately wanted to learn more about my grandmother. Today, I still have many questions about her life that I doubt I can ever answer.

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