Comic Strip Diplomacy
Sketching Chinese and Israeli history

Digging Out the Past
Quest to uncover Jewish Harbin
Asian Jewish Life is a celebration of the diversity of the Jewish experience in Asia as well as of Asian Jewry.

We publish a quarterly print magazine that is also available online that seeks to:

- Connect the separate pockets of Jewish life throughout the region by creating a contemporary creative outlet to share thoughts, ideas and promote unity through memoirs, poetry, short fiction, historical pieces, book and film reviews, viewpoint articles, artist profiles, photography and graphic art.
- Help preserve the long history that Jewish life has imprinted on the region.
- Break down common stereotypes about where Jews hail from or what we look like.
- Build bridges with local communities by sharing our celebration of Jewish life in the region with the aim of leading to a broader understanding of the richness of the Jewish tradition and culture.
- Help other Jewish non-profit organizations with a regional focus to grow along with us.

For more information, please email us at giving@asianjewishlife.org or donate online at http://www.razoo.com/story/Asian-Jewish-Life

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Dear Ms. Lyons,

The article on the Jewish Malida is a derivative and very simplified version used in Israel and recently in India. The picture shown of the Malida plate for example does not show either the myrtle leaves or Rose Petals normal to a Malida plate. Further it does not show The Liver & Gizzard on or in a separate plate next to the Malida plate. Further the requirement of a Malida service is that there should be at least five types of fruit (shown correctly in the Asian Jewish Article) with one new fruit of the year or season for saying the Shehianu Bracha. I am also happy to further explain the symbolism of the liver and gizzard if you would like.

Regards

Nissim Moses

Dear Erica:

I loved the photography in the Malida article and on Shulie’s site. I, too, included a “thick description” (to quote Clifford Geertz) of the Malida in my doctoral thesis and the plates looked exactly like Nissim’s photographs. I understand that Shulie’s pictures are a modern evolution of the Malida.

Nissim is entirely correct on the following points: there are always rose petals or at least myrtle leaves on the plate. There are always five types of fruits and one says blessings on each in turn. As for liver and gizzards, using this was quite rare even in the 1970’s.

Dr. Shalva Weil
Senior Researcher-Research Institute for Innovation in Education,
Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Dear Nissim & Shalva:

Thanks for the feedback – Shulie’s article on Malida was a clear reader favorite. I would be interested in printing a follow-up to explain the traditional ritual and its origins to contrast the modern interpretation provided. As the next issue is primarily focused on China, I would be happy to include an article by Nissim on Malida in Issue 10.

Kind regards,

Erica
Dear Readers:

Welcome to the 9th issue of Asian Jewish Life. We are commencing our third year, and we have experienced much growth in recent months. We have co-sponsored two events to kickoff our Speaker’s Series, bringing AJL writers, editors and topics off the page. In February, along with the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong, AJL presented a lecture by Xu Xin, Director of the Glazer Institute of Jewish Studies, Nanjing University, China.

The following week we co-sponsored, with the Jewish Community Center of Hong Kong a lecture by Michael Freund of Shavei Israel along with Jin Jin, a Kaifeng Jew who has made aliyah. You can read more about Shavei Israel, in this issue’s Best of Asian Jewish Life in Helping “Lost Jews” Find The Way Home by Gaby Wine.

This issue is primarily focused on China, to mark twenty years of diplomatic relations between China and Israel. The intersection between Jews in China and Israel and China though is a story that is not limited to twenty years, it spans centuries into the past and is one that enjoys a promising future.

SIGNAL has contributed an article, Herald in a New Era of Exchange - A review of China-Israel relations, that explores this relationship and also discusses some of the work they are doing to help further strengthen these ties in the academic arena. This will also be our first article available in Chinese on our website. Ultimately we hope to role out an online Chinese version of the magazine.

Speaking of translations, our cover story, Comic Strip Diplomacy — Sketching Chinese and Israeli history, reveals a new project in Chinese by Yaakov Kirschen, the creator of Dry Bones, which is now similarly focused on strengthening the relationship between Israel and China. Kirschen was coincidently a guest of SIGNAL’s on a recent visit to China.

In addition to these projects, we take you to Harbin where Professor Dan Ben-Canaan offers a glimpse of the history of the Jews in Harbin and discusses what his center is doing to help preserve this fascinating chapter in Jewish history in Digging Out the Past- Quest to uncover Jewish Harbin.

And, of course, the story of the Jews in China would not be complete without a story from Shanghai. This issue we have selected an unpublished memoir written by Harry Todtenkopf and edited by Howard Kleinmann. While Harry Todtenkopf passed away in 1985, I recently had the pleasure of meeting Howard Kleinmann when he was visiting Hong Kong’s Ohel Leah Synagogue. Over Kiddush lunch, he talked about the memoir and I was sold.

We also speak with a ‘local’ in Beijing, the host of the ever-popular internet show Sexy Beijing, Anna Sophie Loewenberg. In an interview by Jocelyn Eikenburg, we get a close up view Loewenberg’s show as well as her documentary work.

And Naomi Nason offers a personal reflection piece in our Travel Diary on being Jewish in China, titled You Tai Ren Zai Na Er? (Where are the Jews?)

Akira Ohiso, author of the book Surviving and one of Asian Jewish Life’s favorite Jewish Japanese Americans, has now taken his skills into the kitchen. Akira fixes up a kosher- Chinese recipe with a dash of nostalgia.

Last but not least, we have included book reviews by our Books Editor Susan Blumberg Kason and our poetry section presents the work of Bangkok-based, poet/ photographer Boaz Arad.

If you are wondering what we are up to between issues, in addition to the recent sponsored lectures, please follow us on Twitter and Facebook (@AsianJewishLife) for a daily dose of news on Jewish life in Asia, Asian Jewry and Israel-Far East relations.

And on a final note, I will also be giving a talk at TEDx Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong on May 18 entitled Cultural Heritage Tourism and A Minority’s Perspective, on how tourism can help preserve China’s Jewish history. Please be sure to check it out online.

In the meantime, enjoy reading through our Jewish tour of China.
My Life in Shanghai
The memories

by Harry Todtenkopf
edited by Howard Kleinmann
Shanghai
we took with us

The Shanghai Ghetto. Printed with permission from Yad Vashem The Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority.
First of all, I would like to warn you: If you are expecting me to deliver a learned treatise about Chinese culture and the various dynasties, you will be sorely disappointed. When we reached Shanghai in the beginning of 1939, we did not have the slightest interest in Chinese culture, and when someone would mention that its culture was thousands of years old, there was inevitably someone else who would remark, having the rather primitive hygienic conditions in mind, that in all that time it had not mastered indoor plumbing.

Contrary to the general assumption, Shanghai is not a seaport. It is situated at the shores of a very wide river, the Yangtze, from which the Huangpu branches off. The latter divides the City of Shanghai into two parts. The moist tropical summer heat does not cool off at all, and the climate becomes unbearable.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

One of the first impressions that struck us when we arrived in Shanghai was the sight of the coolies. Between two of them, they could carry loads of up to 270 kilos on their shoulders. They lugged such loads over considerable distances at a fast trot. The rhythmic sounds they produced, which could be taken for singing, were meant to coordinate their movements and thus distribute the weight evenly.

At the time of our arrival, the entire city consisted of so-called settlements, which were strictly separated as to their administration. There were five distinct precincts: the English, the French, the American, the Japanese, and the Chinese sections, each one with its respective police and with some military presence in the uniform of the country of origin. No Chinese policeman or civil servant had any kind of authority with respect to a foreigner.

The infamous signs in the parks, which at the beginning of our stay in Shanghai were still in place, were shocking, to say the least. They read: DOGS AND CHINESE NOT ALLOWED.

The English sector was the center, consisting of banks and hotels, stores, and offices, but no residential housing or movie theatres. The residential and entertainment areas, serving the upper European and the rich Chinese populations, were situated in the French and American sectors at the other end of town. For refugees like us, the rentals there were out of reach. We were glad that we were able to rent a small room – 12 square meters – in the Hongkou district without having to resort to communal housing. Hongkou is on the other side of the Huangpu Bridge and had been conquered and completely destroyed by the Japanese shortly before we came. Japanese guards were posted on the bridge. Every Chinese had to bow before them, and every vehicle had to stop and wait for permission to proceed. Once, when the Chinese driver of a bus started one second too early in the opinion of the guard, the latter grabbed his rifle, discharged it into the crowded bus, and killed one of the refugees.

This sector was being rebuilt, somehow primitively, by poor Chinese and by Russian and German refugees. A family would have one room, usually without kitchen, bath, or toilet. The lack of toilets was altogether the biggest problem and the cause of a great deal of disease and of the staggering mortality among the immigrants: about 33%. The Chinese, even the rich ones, would often not use toilets even when available: their contribution to agriculture. The cooking was done on a small open stove without...
exhaust. The fuel used consisted of so-called coal eggs, which consisted of coal dust mixed with mud and which had to be fanned continuously. On each block, though, there were hot-water stores, where boiling water was sold by the liter. Women would stand in line there early in the morning to get their family’s scoopful poured into the tea kettle, since it took hours to get the one pot for the daily midday meal to come to a boil on this little stove.

We were among the more than 20,000 Jewish refugees who arrived in Shanghai within a short time. Some had money, and I was able to join an already established brokerage house dealing in apartments and houses. I became the third partner in the business. In China land cannot be bought and sold, only leased, usually for 30 years and, if I am not mistaken, never for more than 99 years. We had a Chinese employee, and in the beginning we would look for properties in Chinese newspapers by having him translate the ads. Sometimes mishaps would occur, as when he mistakenly translated “garage” as “apartment,” and the client showed up in justifiable fury. In time, we built up a good name for ourselves, administered several properties, and had a growing clientele, including Americans and rich Chinese.

The German Consulate even rented the rooms right above us for the German School. It gave us very special satisfaction when we received the check for this commission. In this way I was able to support my family for four years and managed to have my parents and mother-in-law follow us to Shanghai. The British gave me the permit for their immigration, which by then had become mandatory, because I was able to prove my ability to support them.

In connection with this real estate business we were offered a photographic studio for sale. The owner was a Mr. Willinger from Vienna, whom my lodge brother Timar knew. We offered him a percentage of the turnover in return for the premises, and we decided to open a restaurant there. It was located right in the center, like the Ahumada in Santiago, Chile, and was strictly a daytime operation. We closed every night at 7 p.m., and also Sundays.

When everything was ready and furnished, personnel had to be hired. These were the operational steps:

First, the No. 1 Boy was hired. He was always very dapper and never did anything. He brought along whatever crew was necessary, and he was responsible for everything. He also received from each and every supplier his “Camish” – as it was called there – but one still got a much better deal than doing the purchasing oneself. He hired and fired entirely on his own authority, and if one failed to treat him with the greatest respect, so that, if, God forbid, he should lose face, he would walk out and with him the entire crew. This happened to us once, and all our friends and acquaintances had to help out for two days. It really was quite a crisis. This arrangement even required that no one other than the No. 1 Boy could give the crew any instructions. Everything had to be conveyed to No. 1, and he then passed on the respective instructions. It was a rather roundabout way of doing things, but it worked.

PICTURE A CHINESE STREET SCENE IN A MOVIE

You can all make yourselves a picture, more or less, of a Chinese street scene as you have seen it in the movies. But these teeming crowds of humanity, these colorful advertising banners, with music blaring full-blast form amplifiers in front of every store, all this is impossible to describe adequately. One peculiarity which immediately struck a newcomer was that each street represented a specific trade: fabrics could be bought only on Nanking Road, shoes on Peking Road, etc., with one store right next to the other. Each store was crammed full of goods, and whatever there was on display had been paid for in cash and was also being sold for cash. There was no such thing as a wholesale store. On the contrary, it could happen that the seller would raise his price for larger quantities. Bargaining went on with great relish, and the final price was reached only when the seller would wiggle his index finger. There was no such thing as to walk out at this point and come back later. If you did and then returned, it would cost three times as much. The seller would simply be no longer in the mood to do business with you.

The so-called signboards also took some getting used to. The Chinese dentist, for instance, displayed in his shop window a large pile of pulled teeth, and the gynecologist exhibited a big glass jar with an embryo in alcohol or a replica. In any case, it was so gruesome a sight that one had to avert one’s eyes.

Another custom hard for us to get used to was the hiring of women as mourners to weep when somebody had died. They were always eager to give good value for the money they received and yelled so terribly that it was impossible to close an eye at night if you lived anywhere in the vicinity. When you noticed that fake currency bills were being burned in front of a house in the neighborhood, then you knew what to expect at night.

It is, of course, general knowledge that Chinese children have great respect for and honor their parents. On the other
hand, at the time we arrived, parents still did not value their female children and sometimes dressed little boys as girls, with ribbons in their hair, so that the gods should not get jealous and take one of their boys. When a girl of a poor family died, she would be wrapped into a parcel and placed in the street – as it also happened with beggars and coolies – and often it would take days until the black handcart that was always patrolling the streets would pick her up. Thus, the greatest wealth and the most abject poverty were living next to each other, but not together.

Business connections with the Chinese were mainly built on trust and one had to be introduced into the right circles. You must keep in mind that we would get checks we could not read, so that one could not stop worrying until they were actually honored by the bank. The customary signature was a tiny square stamp every Chinese merchant carried in his pocket together with an inkpad. The fine nuances of color attested to its authenticity.

**AWAKENED BY THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE**

On December 8, 1941 we were awakened early in the morning by the sound of gunfire. It happened to be my birthday, but since we could hardly assume this to be the occasion, we were much upset. Also, on the day of the attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the Japanese in Shanghai crossed the bridge, placed the settlements under military occupation, and extended their control over all of Shanghai. On the Huangpu River which, as mentioned before, traverses the city, two gun boats had always been present, one American and one British, as symbols of protection for their citizens. The Japanese fleet, which until then had been stationed outside, now entered the river and, with its far superior forces, immediately opened fire. The Americans surrendered without a fight, while the British returned fire until their boat went down.

As mentioned previously, we had a restaurant in the center of town, where we served English style food, until one morning when I arrived there and found it surrounded by Japanese soldiers. Upon request of the German authorities, all European who had lost their citizenship - the so-called stateless refugees – were ordered to move to an assigned area, which then became a ghetto. No one was allowed to leave without a permit from the Japanese authorities, a permit that was hardly ever issued.

**THE GHETTO DAYS**

We lived in the most primitive kind of housing, together with the poor Chinese population, for three and a half years. Everybody was supposed to provide for himself with respect to food and clothing, but those who were not able to do that had the option of living in a kind of hostel, sharing a room with thirty or more people. Bread and one simple meal a day were also distributed to whoever was in need.

When we moved into this area, I again joined forces with my friend and partner, and we started a coal delivery business, supplying refugees and to a certain extent also the communal kitchens. It was a widespread custom in Shanghai to heat with so-called Waska stones, which consisted of compressed coal dust, were supposed to burn for twelve hours, and were used in specially designed ovens. We sold these stones in the summer for delivery in the winter and were, as it was the custom, paid at the time the order was received. The manufacturer, a Chinese, of course, had his factory outside the ghetto, that is, in an area where we were not allowed to go. He came to see us once a week, picked up the order that had come in, and received from us the money for the merchandise. He jotted everything down in his little notebook, and it would have been out of the question to ask for a receipt: One’s word was one’s word, and nobody dealt in any other way.

That year, inflation was rampant and coal went up to about three times the price quoted at the time of the first orders. Suddenly, towards the end of the summer, we read in the papers that the manufacture of these stones was to be forbidden for reasons of wartime economy. However, our supplier made no use of this opportunity to return the devaluated money. Rather, he began on that very day with his deliveries and within fourteen days he no longer owed us anything. The law was never enacted.

Another Chinese who lived in the same area was our source for coal. Since coal was scarce and expensive, it was being “stretched” with rocks which were broken in pieces, rolled in coal dust, and added to the delivery. Then we picked out the stones - or at least part of them – and sold the stuff at a slightly higher price to compensate for the loss. Toward the end of the season, I happened to mention to our supplier how many stones had accumulated on our premises during the year. The man asked the stones to be returned to him - it came to just short of a ton - had them placed on scales, and delivered to us the exact weight in coal. In contrast to these honorable merchants, who only agreed to supply people who had been introduced to them by other, well-reputed Chinese, there were also cases of shadier business practices.

A Mr. M. from Belgium had taken a lease on large business premises. There was a large and impressive front room, from which six smaller rooms fanned out and were sublet to various smaller firms.
as independent offices. The outsider would get the impression of dealing here with an important firm. For a short time we had rented an office in such a pigeonhole. The front room was always full of elegant Chinese in flowing robes who actually never did anything. Big black boards where hung on the walls, on which one could read for example, that the M.S. Chung Cha would lift anchor on September 8, and underneath there were written all sorts of Chinese characters. Two such ships were to sail in different directions.

GUESSING GAME, WAITING GAME

Shortly before September 8, the date was pushed back by a month. We used to play guessing games about which forthcoming sailing dates would be chalked up for the two phantom ships. This went on for several months until one day a different set of Chinese were sitting in the office. Soon thereafter, there appeared hordes of indignant Chinese with all their belongings. They had no intention of leaving the premises. They had paid for their return trip to the interior, had waited patiently for their departure with that patience which is proverbial for the Chinese, and had just realized that they had become the victims of fraud. Behind all this, of course, was the Belgian gentleman, but nothing happened to him. He was a Belgian citizen, responsible only to his Consulate, and he had seen to it that nothing could be brought up against him there. The salient point of the story, however, is this: The Chinese have a different concept of fraud. They shrugged and say, admiringly, “more clever.” What we call fraud is simply superior cunning to them.

The most terrible day of that period came shortly before the end of the war. It was the day of the American bombing raid. The Japanese had placed us in a part of the city where every third house contained a small munitions factory. Besides, there was also the broadcasting station, which transmitted all shipping traffic. They figured, it seems, that by placing the ghetto in this sector, it would be spared by the American bombers. The broadcasting station was the foremost reason why Americans could not or would not take this into consideration.

One day, at one o’clock in the afternoon, our shacks became targets for the bombers. Everything collapsed. There were many dead and injured among us and among the Chinese. Our family also lost its home, and by sheer miracle our little boy, who was an infant at the time, escaped being buried in his crib under the tumbling walls. We were among some 500 refugees who had been bombed out. We all moved into dormitories in a school building, and that is where we stayed until the end of the war.

“AT LONG LAST PEACE CAME.”

At long last peace came. For us too it was deliverance. A huge American plane flew over our camp. We ran to the schoolyard. The plane returned once more, flew very low above us, and showered us with fliers promising us that we would be liberated within a few days. We later found our children under the beds, where they were hiding in fear of air raids.

We stayed on in Shanghai for close to a year after the end of the war. From the very first day, we refugees were supplied with foodstuffs by the Americans. This help was given free of charge, most generously, and everything was of excellent quality. After all these years we again had butter and cheese and many things our children had never known.

In 1947 we made as quick an exit as possible from Shanghai. We took our memories with us, and were able to do so because we had survived this darkest period in history for the Jewish people. China and the Chinese people who suffered with us made our survival possible, and I am forever grateful for that.
Loewenberg
On Screen, Off Screen & Behind the Scenes

Sexy Beijing — Beijing’s own version of “Sex and the City” — turned Anna Sophie Loewenberg, the star and producer, into an internet celebrity. Since its debut in 2006, Sexy Beijing has become one of the most popular online TV series about China, and has been featured on the BBC, CNN, NPR and even the Today Show. But behind that success is Anna Sophie Loewenberg’s passion for making documentary films, and for telling stories about people on the margins. Besides Sexy Beijing, she produced China Pirates, her own 2003 documentary about punk rock and pirated media in Beijing, and also worked on the PBS documentaries Riding Rails in China and Sketching the Silk Road. She recently took time off from filming Sexy Beijing to produce The Siberian Butterfly, her new 30-minute documentary about a gay papercut artist in China. Asian Jewish Life sat down with filmmaker Anna Sophie Loewenberg to learn more about her documentary work, her inspiration, the future for Sexy Beijing, and more.

Asian Jewish Life (AJL): Your first documentary feature was China Pirates, a 2003 film about punk rock and pirated media in Beijing. How did you become interested in the documentary form?

Anna Sophie Loewenberg (ASL): I was never really in documentary, I was always in print. I was in the middle of getting my master’s degree in journalism [from Columbia University], and I had this opportunity to take this video editing class. They had these fellowships from the state of California, I was in San Francisco, and so I learned how to cut documentaries during that six-month fellowship. So that was what got me into that form. I thought it was great, because a lot of the things I cover are culture, especially music. I just found that it was so refreshing to be able to not be writing about it, but to actually be able to present the sound that I wanted people to hear.

There were some guys who, back in the nineties, did a lot of filming, a couple of Americans when I was living here and I played in a band. I remember it crossed...
my mind, I thought, I never really paint pictures or film anything, I always kind of write about it. But, you know, that was a little pre-the-mini-DV revolution... and also pre-Youtube. I think that one of the most defining things was Youtube. You know, China Pirates was just this one project I did, but I think that was the reason I became committed to production. It was sort of the whole beginning of our company and Sexy Beijing and all of that. I was working with Jeremy [Goldkorn] from Danwei.org and Luke Mines, and so they wanted to launch a show for Youtube. I think that kind of digital revolution in mini-DV, I think the fact that Youtube was there, so it caused a lot more people to film on DV. And for us, it was a reason to launch a show.

AJL: So, how has your newest documentary project, Siberian Butterfly, turned out for you?

ASL: I’ve been working on it for a long time, and it’s definitely one of my longest projects. Our [Sexy Beijing] pieces are usually very short form, only 10 minutes, so that’s a very different kind of energy; this is a half an hour. But I’m also trying to do something a little different and go a little deeper. So this was kind of my opportunity to go a little deeper. It’s been really challenging. I think it’s been a lot more challenging that I thought it would, because, for one thing, I’m not really using all of the usual Sexy Beijing structure and the Sexy Beijing tricks that help me to tell stories in a kind of lighthearted way. I had a few different versions of this piece but I really wanted it to be about his processes as an artist. So there are all of these different parts to his story — how he got to Beijing, and about his family. But I really wanted it to be this really intimate portrait of how somebody uses their creativity to express parts of themselves that, otherwise, they don’t have a place to talk about. I wanted it to be about that creative process. So that’s a very quiet and intimate thing to look at and solitary in a lot of ways. So I think the editing process, for one thing, I spent a lot more time filming. I tried to just spend a lot more time with him.

AJL: Where do you hope to screen Siberian Butterfly?

ASL: Well, actually, the artist was invited to an exhibition in Los Angeles, and in Sweden, so they’re going to take the documentary to those exhibitions. Those exhibitions are going to happen in late March. We’re going to screen it in Beijing for sure. But we’re also trying to see if we can put together some big, fabulous event. I don’t know, we’re still kind of working on it. It will screen in Beijing for sure.

We wanted to be able to do [a screening in Beijing] for him, because it’s this very establishment, traditional art form. So in some ways, it’s a lot easier for him to make that leap into shows with foreigners. I think that happens a lot in China, that maybe Chinese accept it a lot less quickly, especially if it’s a traditional form like this. Whereas, he said when he went to get his visa in the US Embassy, for example, he just basically showed them a couple of pictures and said, “This is what I do,” and they said, “Visa granted.” People see immediately that this is someone who is gay and has a different perspective, and what he’s doing is really unique, you know? So I
think we wanted to do something special for him in Beijing just for that reason too. I wouldn’t say Beijing is his home turf, but at least in his home turf of China, to give him a space to show his art.

AJL: So you still have plans to shoot more Sexy Beijing episodes in the future?

ASL: Yes, definitely. I think that with the momentum of the whole following on the Internet and all that, keeping that momentum was important for a certain period of time. But then it’s so difficult to monetize content on the Internet, not just for us but for most people. So at a certain point, I just had to reassess where I was putting my energy. I thought, well, we have this body of work and I just had to think about what is going to sustain Sexy Beijing long term.

But, ideally, I would like to. I don’t have any specific plans right now, but I definitely think about, after this project is over, maybe transitioning back into doing a shorter form and posting more regularly.

I think what’s interesting is that China is changing so fast as well, so the Beijing we were filming back in 2006 is such a different place. Now I’ll go out to shoot and it’ll be like, half the people on the street already know what Sexy Beijing is in certain neighborhoods. The mission then was that we were shooting things and telling stories that weren’t really in the news or on the Internet, and I think that’s a little bit different now.

AJL: Some of my favorite Sexy Beijing episodes explored the experience of being Jewish in China. Do you still hope to continue doing that in the series? And if so, what topics would you like to cover?

ASL: I have definitely talked around some different ideas with friends. One of the great things about Sexy Beijing is that we have our website, but we have some different shows within that, so not everything has to be a Sexy Beijing. We do that with music, we do that with The Hard Hat Show. One idea we had was to do one just about Jewish culture or Israeli culture even. We could do something that has recipes, or looking at the way Jews do business in China and stereotypes about that. And then just in terms of Sexy Beijing, the show, I think the next one I would do, if it had a Jewish theme, would be Jewish men and their Chinese wives.

AJL: Congratulations on getting engaged! Could you tell us more about your fiancee and how you met?

ASL: I met him through another friend of mine who is also from Venezuela, an artist who has helped me to shoot some of the episodes. We were at this bar called Punk in Sanlitun, and we had just been filming this fashion show. By this time it was about midnight or so, and this group of Columbian and Venezuelan guys, including this friend of mine, were going to some clubs. So I just saw this guy and said, “Hi, nice to meet you.”

So about three hours later, at about 3am, we ended up in this other club. I said hello and immediately saw his eyes light up. I was still carrying all my camera stuff, I had my big backpack and everything, but I could just tell he was totally into me. He was taken with me for some reason. I don’t know what kind of drug he was on, but he was really wanting to talk to me. So
we started talking. I was just immediately very impressed by how articulate he was, and just by who he was. His friends were all artists, his best friend was a chef in this famous restaurant in Beijing. And he said, “Yeah, what I do is not really as sexy as what they do.” And I said, “What do you do?” And he told me he was a scientist, a chemical engineer. And then we talked for a few more minutes, and then he told me that he just came back from Israel, because one of his best friends was married in Israel. And I was in Israel at the same time that he was, I was there for my cousin’s wedding. Even though he’s not Jewish or anything, he just happened to be there. I think we knew we were in love after talking for about half an hour.

For me, it’s not so much about if somebody is Chinese or where they’re from. I think one of the things that really brings us together is that we’re children of the world, that he really knows what it’s like to live outside his own country. For our generation, life is just becoming more of a global experience. It’s funny because, even if you look at our backgrounds on paper, it seems that we wouldn’t have a lot in common. And he never even lived in America, although he lived for a while in the UK. But I think this whole global experience, and the experience of being comfortable outside your own culture, is really what kind of binds us together. In a way, that’s more important. After all of the places I’ve lived in and everything I’ve been through — even though I really love China and I’m really interested in China — it’s more about being with somebody who can really understand the big picture.

AJL: What does your fiancee think of Jewish culture and Judaism?

ASL: It’s actually a big topic of discussion in our household. [Laughs]

As I’ve gotten older, I definitely see the value in my own traditions, and I do care about that. So it’s been a big topic for us from the beginning when we started dating. I remember it was so funny, we had only been on three or four dates, and he was like, “So what do I have to do to convert?” So I think that he already had this interest in Judaism, even though it was something he had very little exposure to, because he had these Jewish friends in Israel. That was a really formative experience for him.

So, yeah, it’s become a big deal now, I feel like we’re in the middle of some kind of a romantic comedy where we’re trying to figure out how to have a wedding and he’s not converted yet. My uncle is a rabbi, would the rabbi do it? How long would it take, what sort of things are involved? Or will the Chabad rabbi here do it? I think when you’re trying to prepare a wedding, all of that becomes a lot more real. You get your mothers involved, it’s kind of a big issue. The important thing to me is there are many different traditions in Judaism, and I definitely come from an Ashkenazi kind of German Jewish, very moderate background, you know. It’s much more important to me that somebody’s open-minded, that they’re willing to learn and all of that, rather than specific rituals, actually. That’s kind of where I’m coming from. But he has to figure out what it means to him. And if he’s going to convert, he needs to figure that out for himself. I need to give him space to do that.

AJL: Once you’re done with your current documentary, what’s next?

ASL: I started working with a group of university students from the People’s University on a series about the changing landscape of Beijing, actually looking at some of the monuments in the different neighborhoods — like, say, the neighborhood around the Drum Tower. What they were like 100 years ago, how they’ve changed, and how they’re changing right now. We’re actually looking for funding for that project. That’s something I hope to launch this summer.

AJL: There aren’t many women out there doing first-person documentaries, and certainly not Jewish women, so your success is truly inspiring. What advice would you have for women out there who are interested in doing first-person documentaries about Asia?

ASL: It was actually kind of a tough decision for me in the beginning — how much should I put myself into the work? That was a very ballsy decision for me because, like everyone else, I have my own ego and I don’t particularly like to hear my own voice on a recording, much less see my face. It wasn’t my dream to be on the Internet. I just tried to think about what would be the most meaningful for the work, and what would kind of set it apart. So I think if you’re doing something like *Sexy Beijing* where you put yourself in it, it’s really helpful to be able to laugh at yourself and just not take yourself too seriously. I’ve found that to be invaluable. If you can laugh, then other people will laugh. Also, consider what’s going to be the best thing for the work, especially if you’re going to put yourself in it, ahead of how you want to appear. You really have to feel what works in some ways. Sometimes there’s no way to have a prescription ahead of time.

I think sometimes with creative projects, looking back, I’ve learned that sometimes you take risks and it’s an unknown. And I think that with creative stuff, that’s a really good thing, when you don’t have a lot to lose and you’re just trying to have fun with something and take a risk and be creative.

Jocelyn Eikenburg is the writer and founder of the award-winning blog *Speaking of China*. She draws on her own marriage to a Hangzhou native to explore love, family and relationships in China through her writing. Her writing credits include *Matador*, the *Global Times* and the *Idaho State Journal*.
Message from the Chairman of the Israeli Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong

We are dedicated to promoting trade and development between Hong Kong SAR and Israel for mutual benefit.

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Rafael Aharoni

Tel. 852-2312-1111
Fax. 852-2311-6999
E-mail: iecc@netvigator.com

c/o The Jewish Community Centre, One Robinson Place,
70 Robinson Road, Mid-Levels, Hong Kong
I live in two separate worlds. The first involves my ingrained Jewish identity, the memories of celebrated holidays and Jewish education. My initial world has been everything to me since I was born: it was all I ever knew. The second world is a newer world, at least to me. It is filled with Asian culture and Chinese history. In my second world, I leave the restraints of my appearance as a simple white American. I surprise people. I surprise myself.

As a devoted Conservative Jew who speaks Chinese, I take considerable pleasure when my two worlds happen to come together, as they have on a few occasions throughout my time in China. It is such a nice release for me to not have to contain myself to either world, but to allow the two to coincide.

It was our final weekend in Beijing before we were to leave on a week-long excursion to other parts of China. My friend Miriam and I had been invited by Dini, the owner of the only kosher restaurant in Beijing, to attend Shabbat that coming Friday night. Unsure of what a Shabbat in Beijing would entail, but suffering a severe lack of Jewish influence in our lives (we had now been in China for a month), we decided to give it a try. We followed the address Dini had given us which was supposed to lead us to an apartment for Kabbalat Shabbat services. But upon arrival to the neighborhood we realized that the apartment was not so easily found. We wandered for what felt like hours before finally turning to the Chinese military guards who were serving as security for the gated community.

“You tai ren zai na er?” “Where are the Jews?” We asked them over and over, but our questions yielded little response. We were just about to give up and head back to our dorm when one of the guards made a stroking gesture, as if to show the presence of a beard. “Yes, Yes!” Miriam shouted, and soon we were on our way to services, being lead by 4 armed Chinese soldiers.

Kabbalat Shabbat was held in a tiny apartment, filled to the brim with chattering Jews. At the end of the service, the entire group walked to Dini’s restaurant for dinner. The dining room was packed with people who had come from the United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa, England, and Israel. Throughout the night we ate mountains of delicious food, sang Jewish
songs loudly (and off key), and shared the reasons which had brought us to Beijing. Miriam and I looked at each other and laughed because we knew that somehow in the world’s most populous country, we had found our home.

Though my experience at Kabbalat Shabbat services remains my favorite memory of Judaism and Chinese coming together, it is far from my only experience. In the fall of 2011, I studied abroad in Nanjing. I had been taking classes for over a month when the elevator in my dorm stopped briefly on a floor I had never been to. I caught a quick glimpse of the writing on the wall in front of my. “Nanjing University Institute for Jewish Studies” was displayed proudly in English, Hebrew, and Chinese. I was shocked. How could I have lived here for weeks and not even realized that people were studying Judaism right in my building?

So I made an appointment and went to meet with the head of the department. He showed me around their collection of Jewish artifacts and his personal photo album of the various Jewish holidays and celebrations he had attended. When I asked him how a man who had only ever lived in China and had never even met a Jew until he entered this field became interested in studying Judaism he responded, “Because you have been through so much and you are still here. You are stronger than any other people.”

I was stunned. It’s a message I had been told over and over again my entire life, and this man had picked it up entirely on his own. In that moment I was so proud to be Jewish and equally as proud to be surrounded by Chinese culture. My two worlds had come together so beautifully, they were almost indistinguishable.

It’s an amazing and comforting thing when I get to speak Chinese and simultaneously celebrate my Jewish identity. It doesn’t happen often, but when it does, I do my best to remember what it feels like to be completely at ease with both sides of myself. It feels wonderful.

Naomi Nason is currently studying Journalism and Asian and Middle Eastern History at Northwestern University. She spent extended lengths of time in China while on a summer program in Beijing in 2008 and while studying abroad in Nanjing in the Fall of 2011.
Comic Strip Diplomacy
Sketching Chinese and Israeli history

Yaakov Kirschen photographed by his wife, artist Sali Ariel.
I suppose I should not have been surprised to open my friend’s DIY child-friendly Haggadah and find a prominent Pesach *Dry Bones* cartoon. Though it did seem almost an extraordinary coincidence, a sign or an act of fate that *Dry Bones* made its way into this Haggadah in Hong Kong only hours after I touched base with *Dry Bones* creator, Yaakov Kirschen.

*Dry Bones*, a political cartoon from the Jerusalem Post, has been a Jewish household favorite since it first appeared in 1973. It has been reprinted or quoted in a myriad of publications including the *NY Times*, *Time Magazine*, *LA Times*, *CBS*, *AP* and *Forbes*. Kirschen’s graphic art has for decades provided an insightful, pictorial commentary on many of the most significant events of the day. Collectively, the *Dry Bones* collection reads more like an academic treatise than a comic strip offering distinct graphic perspectives and snapshots of time.

And even with all of these accomplishments, including the newly received Israeli Museum of Caricature and Comics’ Golden Pencil award, Kirschen commented, “I find myself totally consumed by a new and challenging cartoon project. And stranger still, it’s connected to China and the Chinese.”

Kirschen’s newest project, Project3500 or The Dry Bones China Project has transformed him from comic strip creator to diplomat. He has found a way to reinvent his work so that it can speak with a cutting edge different medium to an entirely new set of people, from a new generation who speak in Chinese and data bites. Kirschen understands the potential of *Dry Bones* to reach Chinese audiences and connect today’s generation with the past and two ancient peoples with one another. Specifically designed for today’s global and technologically savvy generation, the user will be taken on ‘trips’ through 3,500 years of Israeli/Jewish history while simultaneously journeying through the history of China during that same time period.

For nearly 40 years the *Dry Bones* cartoon has appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* and continues to engender a high level of enthusiasm among loyal readers. To reach this new generation, Kirschen understands the format must change lest they become impervious to the information and as a result his Project3500 is therefore designed for iPod, iPad, smartphone, tablet users in China. “I’m hoping to reach our 21st century globalized generations. Events in the 20th century crippled the natural continuity and growth of both Chinese and Jewish civilizations, now with the Internet we have an opportunity to reach that generation with the light and wisdom of their own fabulous, ancient civilizations, and with each other,” he explains. Kirschen understands that the events of the 20th century have been breaks in the normal process by which culture has been passed down through the generations in both Chinese and Jewish civilizations due to epically, tumultuous historic events. While the next generation, generally speaking, has been characterized as seemingly dispassionate about the past, there is a way to reach them. Instead of categorically dismissing the internet and technological globalization as a threat to ancient ways of life and our past, Kirschen has embraced this as a powerful tool to reach a large and broad audience in a language they understand. Furthermore, according to Kirschen, “the opportunity offered to both Jewish and Chinese civilizations opened up by globalization seems to be identical.”

This connection between the Jews and the Chinese is a motif that runs through many contemporary works connecting these
two civilizations as both trace their history back to ancient times, their modern states were born around the same time with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing on 1 October 1949 and the declaration of Israeli independence on 14 May 1948. The two civilizations’ histories juxtaposed against one another provide context and broaden the users’ understanding. Furthermore, Kirschen explains, “The danger to both Jewish and Chinese civilization posed by globalization and a cut-off from the past seems to be identical.” Kirschen plans to build on what he sees as a natural affinity between the two the groups and fondly refers to the groups as “sister civilizations.” He see both Israel and China as partners in an effort to counter their “demonization by the West.”

Likewise, the cartoon or comic strip genre is naturally quite suited to Asian audiences as evidenced by the overwhelming popularity of the Manga and graphic novel formats. It is a region with an overall proclivity towards this genre.

As to how Kirschen personally developed this China connection, a bit tongue and cheek, he explains, “I grew up
and went to school in New York City. If the best student in the class was not Jewish, he/she was Chinese. As NY Jews we were at home with chopsticks in the local Chinese restaurant. One of my closest friends in college was a guy named Calvin Wong who lived down the street from me. At his home I discovered that his mom was as controlling as mine. So in a city with people from all over the planet, I came to think of Chinese as the people most like my people.”

And while jokes about Jews affinity for Chinese food and images of matzah balls with chopsticks are funny to us as Jews, how will Dry Bones humor translate into Chinese? For starters, Kirschen, worked with Guan He, as a translator, a cultural consultant, and a social media advisor. Guan has collected a couple of masters degrees and has studied at institutions that include Fudan University, Shanghai, London School of Economics and Political Science, and is currently studying at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. “It is because of her that the material ‘feels’ Chinese, rather than as a translation,” says Kirschen.

As for whether humor translates (save often for the humor in the translations themselves) according to Kirschen, it actually doesn’t but Project3500 isn’t based on humor but rather “Dry Bones adventure and analysis.” For anyone that has ever tried to translate a joke, they understand that it is a daunting task, but images are powerful tools for conveying emotion and meaning, they are something universal and require no translation. Likewise, this actually isn’t a mere translation of Israel’s/ the Jewish people’s story, Kirschen has written it as a rather serious exploration of the history and lessons of our ancient civilization, from the point of view of Chinese civilization. To Kirschen, the 21st century’s apathy for their people’s history is no laughing matter.

And while transmitting history and infusing lessons from our past are certainly important, for a generation that Kirschen sees as cut off from their association with their own past and rather disengaged, how can a comic make an impact? As someone who takes this business very seriously, Kirschen explains, “Images are the most powerful communications tools we have. That’s why you cover your eyes at a scary part of a horror movie. Cartoons are the most concentrated images that we have, so yes, cartoons can make a big difference.” And tackling serious subjects in a comic format is not new; take Art Spiegelman’s Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, the biography of the author’s father, for example. The age-old adage that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ is not misstated. Kirschen has long ago clearly mastered the power of images to reach people and comment on serious events.

Project3500 is also a step to further developing the relationship between China and Israel by giving the next generation a context for better understanding these two civilizations.

As Kirschen explains, “my work at Yale [as Artist in Residence at YIISA, Yale’s Interdisciplinary Initiative for the Study of Anti-Semitism], investigating anti-Semitism in political cartoons brought me face to face with the fact that the Chinese were non-Jews who had not been infected with the behavioral virus that we call anti-Semitism.” Unlike European nations, they haven’t been tainted by anti-Semitism. In China, Kirschen sites the absence of preconceived prejudices against the Jewish/ Israeli story and an openness to further exploration and a general curiosity to understand this “Startup Nation”. To Kirschen, China’s next generation are ripe for this introduction to the history of Israel and Jewish people and his project affords a layer of protections against one of the great dangers Israel/Jews face, the rampant “willful rewriting of history”. Each Project3500 trip is a new educational opportunity and a way to reach this new audience.

“There is an obvious and natural economic fit between our two nations … but as bearers of ancient wisdoms our two nations, Israel and China, have a responsibility to do more. To bring civilization and stability to a chaotic world. My message, the message of Project3500, is about the importance of our civilization…and, if I do it right,” continues Kirschen, “the works should be exciting, fun, and a turn-on for a new generation.”
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Helping “Lost Jews” Find the Way Home

Freund with a Bnei Menashe child in Manipur, India
To suggest that one man alone is able to change the course of Jewish history may sound a little far-fetched, but Michael Freund is certainly making a valiant attempt to change the future of many.

Since founding the organization Shavei Israel 10 years ago, the former New Yorker has overseen the aliyah of several thousand “Lost Jews” from India, China and South America, as well as other countries. From northeastern India alone, 1,700 Bnei Menashe, who are descended from a lost tribe of Israel, have moved to the Jewish state and are now fully integrated into Israeli society. A further 7,200 are still hoping to make aliyah.

In 1997, Freund was working in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office as Deputy Communications Director, when he was handed a letter from the Bnei Menashe, asking for assistance. “The Bnei Menashe had been writing to Israeli Prime Ministers since Golda Meir, pleading to come home again,” recalls the 43-year old. “When I first read the letter, I thought it was nuts, but something about it struck me. Then I met them and thought: ‘If someone is crazy enough to join us, shouldn’t we welcome them with open arms?’”

Although the Jerusalem Post columnist peppers his conversation with light-hearted anecdotes, it is clear that he takes his work seriously. “Through no fault of their own, many Jews were taken from our people over the centuries as a result of persecution and exile,” Freund says. “I believe we have a historical, moral and religious responsibility to help them return.”

Whenever he hears about a community of “Lost Jews,” however, he approaches their claim “from a position of skepticism,” adding: “It’s easy to get swept away emotionally and to find Jews in all kinds of places. But we need to remain faithful to the historical record.” Thus, Freund researches the background of each claim before deciding whether or not to offer assistance.

“Some years ago, we received a letter from a community of Native Americans, writing to seek recognition that they were a lost tribe of Israel – a belief that some people held in the 19th century. It was clear that it was just fanciful. People of course are free to identify themselves as they wish, but that doesn’t necessarily obligate us. It is the facts that matter.”

In the case of the Bnei Menashe, Freund became convinced of their authenticity after going to India to meet them. “They are fully Sabbath observant, they keep kosher, celebrate the festivals and pray three times a day. You can walk into one of their synagogues, close your eyes and think you are in New York or even Hong Kong.”
Furthermore, DNA testing showed that they had genetic markers indicative of Middle Eastern origin, says Freund.

The belief is that the Bnei Menashe are descendants of the Tribe of Manasseh, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The Assyrian Empire sent them into exile more than 27 centuries ago.

Their ancestors wandered through Central Asia and the Far East for centuries, before settling in what is now northeastern India, along the border with Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bangladesh.

Freund says that there is evidence in the diaries of British missionaries and colonial military officers (written 100 years ago), that the community kept various Jewish practices in India. They worshipped one God and referred to him by the Hebrew word, ‘Yah.’ Though the missionaries converted many to Christianity, a core group held onto their Judaism. “They built dozens of synagogues and even set up an umbrella organization for their community’s institutions – which is a sure sign of Jewish DNA.”

Until the Christian missionaries arrived and started writing things down, the Bnei Menashe only had an oral tradition. “We might look askance at that, but they come from an oral tradition. If you ask a Bnei Menashe for a family tree, you had better pull up a chair, since they can name ancestors going back generations.”

Five years ago, the Israeli government under Ehud Olmert decided to freeze the aliyah of the Bnei Menashe. When the government changed, Freund, who moved to Israel himself 17 years ago, lobbied to restart the aliyah process. (At the time of going to print, the aliyah process was slated to resume after Pesach).

The Israeli government and Chief Rabbinate condition the aliyah of “Lost Jews” on their undergoing an Orthodox conversion when they move to Israel. “Ultimately it is in their interest, because then no one can cast doubt on their Jewishness, which allows them to integrate fully into Israeli society,” says Freund. “Indeed, their absorption has been a great success. Only four per cent of Bnei Menashe immigrants rely on social welfare benefits. Many of them go into higher education and several young men have already received Smicha (rabbinical ordination).”

Rather than live in concentrated communities, as was the case for Olim from Ethiopia and Russia in the 80s and 90s, the Bnei Menashe are encouraged to live in small clusters throughout the country. Initially, they considered opening their own synagogue, but the consensus was that it would hinder their integration.

Freund says that the Bnei Menashe
haven’t experienced racism from fellow Israelis, just curiosity. “Some people ask if they are from Thailand, since Israel has a lot of Thai construction workers.” However, Israeli society is very different today than it was 50 years ago. “Then, the cultural lines were very stark. Nowadays, it’s much more common for Ashkenazim and Sephardim to marry one another. It’s part of the natural process of integration.”

The case of the Bnei Menashe is part of a wider phenomenon, says Freund. “More and more people are looking to reconnect with their Judaism, with their roots. I consider it a blessed development, since it strengthens us spiritually and demographically.”

In addition to the Bnei Menashe, Freund has also helped a growing number of young Chinese Jews from Kaifeng, China, to make aliyah. Despite the valuable work he is doing, it is not without comment from naysayers but even Freund himself admits that at first, before investigation, he too had his doubts. Hearing from someone firsthand who Shavei Israel helped, like Jin Jin, a Kaifeng Jew who recently spoke at an Asian Jewish Life/ Hong Kong Jewish Community Centre event, however, melts away doubt. Some decisions are best made from the heart.

As Freund explains, “There is an awakening taking place among the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng, many of whom are looking to return to their roots... The continued existence of Kaifeng’s Jews is not only testimony to the power of Jewish memory, but also to the bonds of friendship that have existed between China and the Jewish people for well over a thousand years. We have a responsibility to them – and to ourselves – to reach out and help them.”

For his own part, Freund’s drive is hugely inspired by the work of his late grandmother, Dr Miriam Freund-Rosenthal. She was the national president of Hadassah, and helped facilitate the Aliyah of North African Jews during the 1950s.

“Reaching out to lost and hidden Jewish communities is essential to our future. We need more Jews. They are part of the extended Jewish family and wish to return to the fold. It’s not yet a mainstream idea, but it’s something I am trying to change.”

For further information, visit www.shavei.org or write to michael@shavei.org.
Since its foundation by Czarist Russia as a strategic railway town in 1898, Harbin was in its essence a foreign domain on Chinese soil. The contract signed in Berlin on September 8, 1896 by the representative of the Qing government gave imperial Russia an opportunity to annex a wide corridor of land inside China making it a territorial possession for its ambitions of expansion. Harbin thus became home not only to Russians but to many foreign ethnic groups who came to form new future roots here.

Harbin became a home to Jewish entrepreneurs, settlers and émigrés and to members of many other nationalities, ethnicities and religions. It was a space where cultures, traditions, commerce and politics converged and merged to form a unique town that made it international in her core.

Its inhabitants, Russians, Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Germans, Japanese, Americans, French, British, Tartars, Koreans, Chinese, and many others, saw their city as a microcosm of several connected universes. Most importantly, they participated in Harbin’s decision-making and planned its future.

It was a special international zone within a Chinese space that governed itself. Harbin’s early architectural heritage, and
the echoes of its complex social and cultural makeup – nationalities, people on the streets, goods, shops, workers, servants, interrelations, conflicts, and problems – is still visible today.

The past is a strange place to visit: you never know what will be found. The story of Jewish Harbin is alive and will keep its existence as long as it is being told and researched. It is the story of strong willed people who formed a vital Jewish community in a place far removed from global centers. By being here they created a legacy. And it is this legacy that is being unveiled and studied in its daily details.

Those who were born in Harbin or came from other places to live there are very old now. As a matter of fact not many Harbinskies are left to tell their stories. But those who passed away and those who still cling to their extremely old age had a rich history here, a past that was waiting to be deciphered and told.

In 2000 the Harbin Jewish community was present in the memories of its former members and in the imagined visions of their descendants only. The unique community that was established in 1903 came to a close in 1963 when its last family left China to find a new life in Israel.

In that same year the Harbin Huangshan Jewish cemetery was being renovated and cleaned from accumulated debris and overgrown weeds. Death provides one lasting monument of a community’s past and sometimes a future marker, as a Chinese proverb says “home is where your relatives are buried.” But some Jews who died in Harbin between 1903 and 1962 had a second burial. A 1958 decree issues by the city government ordered the relocation of graves from the old Jewish cemetery to a new one at the outskirts of the city. Out of over 3000 graves only one fourth of the tombstones were relocated. The rest were “deep buried”, a Chinese euphemism for “destroyed”, under what are now the Harbin Ice Palace and the Harbin Fairgrounds.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Jewish history of Harbin was considered a state secret and the very fine Harbin Jewish Archives were still closed to any inspection including academic investigation and research. The Jewish archives were shut down in the mid 1980s by an order from Beijing and every effort since then to reopen them for academic study has failed.

In 2000, the local authorities have rediscovered the Jews and although the Jewish archives of the city were to remain closed, the provincial and the
city governments were going to invest huge sums of money in renovation and preservation of Jewish communal buildings, including the two remaining synagogues, as well as private establishments that were constructed and owned by Jewish families but now were part of the state enterprises. They did so because they have adopted the old notion that all Jews are extremely rich and are very good in business, and therefore, Harbin having a Jewish history, will be an incentive to come here en mass and invest money in the hungry local economy.

The authorities entrusted the job with a newly created “Jewish Institute” at the provincial Academy of Social Sciences. The appointed director was brought from the general accounting department and her deputy came from another governmental enterprise because he studies Russian history and spoke the language. None of the newly appointed personnel had any knowledge of Judaism, what constitutes Jewish philosophy or Jewish history. Never the less, they were sanctioned to tell the Harbin Jewish story to the Chinese and the world. They wrote speeches for government officials, organized three conferences and published a photo album. Their high regard of Jews was proclaimed in a speech they wrote for Mr. Zhang Xiaolian, the Mayor of Harbin “the admirable entrepreneurial spirit and extraordinary wisdom of the industrious... Jewish nation has won them the reputation of ‘world's No. 1 merchant’ with their unique business skills and large number of successful entrepreneurs over the world... In today’s world there is a classic appraisal of the Jewish wealth, ‘the world's money is in the pockets of Americans, and the Americans’ money is in the pockets of the Jews’. This is the highest acclaim and praise to the Jewish wisdom...”

In 2000, very few foreign tourists came to Harbin. With the exception of Russians from across the Heilong River that serves as a natural border between China and Russia, most of the foreign travelers landed in Beijing and from there took trips to the south and the southwest of China. Almost no one made a detour to the northeast of the country. Harbin was not on the tourist maps, including those of Jews.

But two years later things started to change. The establishment of the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center (SIRSC) in 2002 at the Heilongjiang University’s School of Western Studies in Harbin, came to provide an independent alternative to the shut down Jewish archives, to find a way to reverse official and non-official ignorance, as well as to launch research projects that can benefit international and Chinese historians and former residents and their offspring.

Foremost in importance was a creation of a global family contact database from which information could be gathered, stored, and served for research.
The foundation of the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center carried several aims. Primarily, as referred to above, it was to create a Jewish archive that is independent of governmental considerations. Archives should belong to academia and to scholars for their research and studies and should be removed from any political considerations. It meant however that the research center would have no governmental funding and would depend totally on donations and contributions, something very unusual in China.

It also established certain criteria for the conduct of historical research on the Jewish community of Harbin, on general studies of the history of Harbin and its various foreign communities, historical studies about Manchuria (the northeast of China as it is termed today), and general studies of and about the presence of Jews in China.

In the ten years of its operation, the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center has become one of the leading independent research establishments of its kind in China. And its now extensive archives hold original documents, photos, memoirs, video interviews, taped interviews, historical films and personal relics donated by Jewish families who had roots in Harbin and who are now scattered all over the world.

Being an academic enterprise in its core, the research center caters to the growing numbers of international scholars who are engaged in research about Harbin and Manchuria. The center has made the students and faculty of the School of Western Studies at Heilongjiang University a prime target for broadening their intellectual knowledge and academic experience by engaging in research activities.

While learning to conduct research, the Chinese students have an opportunity to deepen their cultural, educational, social, and economic exchange with the Jewish people. This, in turn, provides a better basis for understanding cultural similarities and differences, thus creating a true and realistic image of the Jewish people.

In January 2003, the research Center established a cooperative relationship with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem creating a special program for the exchange of Doctoral candidates who will come and work on their research in Harbin.

The University of Heidelberg in Germany invited the Center in 2007 to create cooperation and exchange programs between the two universities, as well as to jointly work on a long-term international research project on the historical and cultural dimension and development of the city of Harbin between 1889 and 1949. It is an interdisciplinary, multi-country and multi-university long-range project that involves scholars and academic/
research institutions from China, Japan, Russia and the West.

The first joint international conference was held at Heidelberg University in Germany in April 2008. It was followed by the second international conference and summer school at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies in June 2009. The third international conference was held in Heidelberg University in November 2010.

A cooperation and exchange program between Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies and Bar-Ilan University was signed in November 2009 in Israel. The Center is working on setting an extensive Hebraic Institute within the School of Western Studies and is an editorial partner to the academic journal Mizrekh.

A joint conference was held in Heilongjiang University in September 2008. The unique meeting, the first of its kind in China, jointly organized by Bar-Ilan University in Israel and the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center in Harbin under the title “The 1st China-Israel Jewish Sciences Conference - The Jews of China – Past and Present. Their Uniqueness and Connection to World Jewry and Israel” brought to the city over 60 Israeli scholars, representing various universities and colleges in Israel.

The Center’s research projects vary in their scope and immediacy. Among the major on-going research themes are “The Chinese Perception of the Jewish People” in which we are looking for how, when and why the Chinese formed their attitude toward the Jews, “Occupying ‘the Other’: Japan’s invasion of Manchukuo, the occupation of Harbin, and the Japanese Unit 731 experimental camp”, “Jewish Cultural, Social and Economic Contributions to Harbin and China”, “Comparative analysis of war and peace themes as reflected in major contemporary Israeli and Chinese literary works”, “Study of Harbin as an Intersection of Cultural and Ethnical Communities in Conflict 1932-1945”, as well as “Time and Space in the History of Harbin and Northeast China”.

The Sino-Israel Research and Study Center owes its growing activities and collection of documents to the generosity and support of many people around the world who understand the importance of the past. Their support preserves the legacy of the Jewish people in Harbin and China, as well as bringing about a deepening of relations between the Jewish people, Israel, and the Chinese people.

In 2012 Harbin is known again and tourists as well as scholars from afar come to visit her past and present in growing numbers. ❖

Dan Ben-Canaan is a Distinguished Professor of Research and Writing Methodologies at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies in Harbin. He is the founder and Chair of the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center there.
During Israel’s second decennial, Israel’s alliance with the United States and the West was cemented. Consequently Israel’s relationship with China was largely subject to goodwill between Beijing and Western nations though Israel notably was the first country in the Middle East to recognize the People’s Republic of China. The pro-Western policies of subsequent Israeli governments contributed to the Jewish nation being the last country in the Middle East to establish bilateral diplomatic ties with Beijing, despite its early recognition of the PRC. China positioned itself in favor of the Arab bloc largely due to economic interests. Indicative of this affiliation was the PRC’s establishment of an embassy in the Palestinian Authority four years before it established one in Israel.

In January 1992, when Israel and China finally established official ties, the bilateral relationship focused on limited areas of cooperation. Business and trade emphasized Israel’s contributions in the areas of agricultural and water solutions, technologies of vital importance to China.

The evolution of the relationship between Israel and China has been characterized by general improvement with brief periods of frustration and misunderstanding. Relations between these two ancient peoples were historically dominated by geopolitical considerations and the influence of allied countries. The State of Israel was the first country in the Middle East and the seventh member of the United Nations to recognize the People’s Republic of China. Despite this, schisms developed between the leaders of the two nations. Israel tends to approach international relations through a Western lens. Meanwhile, China understood the early support of the former Soviet Union and Israel’s powerful socialist movement to be indicative of an Israeli departure from western political ideology.

The China-Israel Center for Training In Agriculture began bilateral collaboration in 1993. Within a brief period of time, Israeli technology and knowhow contributed to a significant increase in the milk production of dairy cows in China. Successful collaboration between the two countries laid a sturdy framework for future cooperation. Moreover, the ongoing introduction of Israeli technology in the fields of agriculture and water built Israel’s reputation in China as a nation of highly skilled innovators. China is now utilizing Israeli technology to build the world’s largest desalinization plant in Tianjin.

Trade between the People’s Republic of China and the State of Israel grew steadily until the mid-2000’s. In 2000 relations and trade suffered a serious setback when Washington interfered and compelled Israel to cancel the sale of four Phalcon Advanced Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to China. The political situation further deteriorated in 2004 when China sent the Harpy Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), which...
Utilizing Israeli Government backed loans, Jasmine International facilitated the building of two hospitals in western China, a region designated for development by the Chinese government. Jasmine International is also managing projects in wastewater treatment and education. In spite of great progress, “there still is a culture gap between China and Israel that mitigates progress” explained Ms. Tzur. “Israelis tend to be impatient seeking quick results. The Chinese have a long term approach that also applies to their style in closing a business deal. With more exposure to each other’s business practices the culture gap will narrow,” she continued.

Barry Swersky, Head of the Israel China Culture Exchange explained that cultural interchange over the past year significantly contributed to building bridges between these divergent peoples. Chinese artistic groups such as the Beijing Dance/LDTX and Shaolin Martial Arts Group performed across Israel. The PRC’s ambassador to Israel hosted a reception for the International Symposium for Women’s Architecture featuring Chinese Architects. Cultural interchange culminated in 2011 with the arrival of PRC Minister of Culture Cai Wu to Israel. Building on the 2011 successes of his organization, Mr. Swersky is already initiating new projects for 2012, celebrating the China-Israel 20th jubilee. Amongst his numerous plans is the development of an internet based telecast bringing Israeli culture to the computer screens of Chinese ‘netizens’.

Awareness of Israel among Chinese citizens is also rising. “The tripling of Chinese tourism to Israel in past year indicates that the growing interest is mutual,” it purchased from Israel in the mid 1990’s, for routine maintenance repair in Israel. For the second time in four years, Israel bowed to strong US pressure and impounded the drones. However, over time and with great effort by Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, valuable Israeli technology and businesses were introduced to China, re-opening the door for improved relations.

In light of this increased exposure to the Middle Kingdom, Israel and Israelis are beginning to appreciate the elaborate tapestry that is China. Chinese language courses were recently introduced in the academic curriculum in select Israeli elementary and high schools. Moreover, Chinese companies have been invited for projects in Israel and are in negotiations to build a high speed rail system from Tel Aviv to Eilat, and on the cultural side, the Shaolin Marital Arts Group is performing in Israel.

Despite a monolithic façade, China’s policy is influenced by a host of agents, from heads of state owned enterprises and national and local politicians, to scholars and other government advisors. Recently these multifarious leaders have shown increased interest in Israel from boardrooms to classrooms, indicating a window of opportunity opening that could prove valuable to both nations.

Solid returns are already being seen in the area of business cooperation. While the earliest foundations of the China-Israel relationship focused on business, in October 2011 cooperation reached new heights with the purchase of Makhteshim Agan by China National Agrochemical Corporation, a subsidiary of China National Chemical Corporation (ChemChina). ChemChina paid US$2.4 billion for 60% of the Israeli company. This marked the single largest corporate sale in Israel's history. Einat Tzur, former Director and one of the founders of the Israel China Chamber of Commerce in Beijing and current Jasmine International Head of Business Development China related that the “Made In Israel” brand is a powerful tool.
says Eyal Benner, Executive Director of Tao, a tour company for Chinese visitors to Israel. The increase in mutual interest between China and Israel is also reflected in the volume of official visits between the two countries.

Despite the impressive developments in mutual relations, Israel is still catching up with much of the rest of the world when it comes to engaging China. “Now is a crucial time to push forward the China-Israel bilateral relationship”, says Dr. Gedaliah Afterman, fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem based research center. “Israel is lagging a few years behind the rest of the world in developing a relationship with China”.

The breadth of interactions between Israel and China throughout 2011 is promising. A key cause of the leap forward in bilateral relations, especially in academia, is official sanction from both governments. Both nations acknowledge that academia is an integral catalyst for enhancing China bilateral relations. Guy Kivetz of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that because of Israel’s small size it will never be a strategic competitor with China. This disparity actually gives the diminutive Jewish nation certain advantages over larger countries. “The needs and capabilities of the two countries are very compatible,” Kivetz said. "Stronger China-Israel ties will result in a win-win situation."

A central reason for China’s increased interest in Israel in 2011 is the ‘Arab Spring’. As China adjusts to its evolving role in international geopolitics, it is responding to the perplexing instability in the Middle East by affirming the Middle Kingdom’s commitment to understand the region. China is looking towards Israeli scholars to assimilate a varied narrative into its decision making process as it relates to one of the globe’s most complicated and volatile regions.

In the view of SIGNAL (Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership) the dearth of high level scholarly interchange in the field of international relations greatly limited the potential to reach mutually valuable solutions. SIGNAL, established in 2011 to advance China-Israel relations through academia, conducted research showing that after 20 years of official relations, Chinese misconceptions about Israel and the Jewish people abound. SIGNAL further discovered that Chinese and Israeli academics were actively interested in advancing high-level scholarly interchange. To redress widespread misunderstandings, SIGNAL established the first website providing introductory to advanced essays and articles about Israel and its people in Chinese. Additionally, SIGNAL held the first China-Israel academic event focusing on geopolitics. In September 2011, SIGNAL and its co-host the Launder School of Government’s Center for Global Strategic International Research held its first annual China-Israel Strategy & Security Symposium. The event was carried out in affiliation with the International Center for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya. Perhaps the most promising outcome of the symposium was the agreement by scholars on both sides to continue the dialogue to gain greater shared understanding.

The impact of the personal bonds forged in the symposium were immediately felt when SIGNAL traveled to China to inaugurate the first Israel Studies Program (ISP) ever established at a Chinese university. During SIGNAL’s China trip, five additional ISPs advanced to varying stages of development. In Shanghai SIGNAL concluded an agreement with Shanghai International Studies University to launch the ISP in Jan. 2012. SIGNAL held meetings with the VP of Shanghai Jiaotong University (SJTU) and the Dean of the International Relations School to advance the recent establishment of the SIGNAL-SJTU Sino-Israel Research Center - the first in the world. The Center for Contemporary Sino-Israel Studies focuses on comparative politics and strategic analysis between the two nations.

The SIGNAL-Henan University ISP began in the Fall semester of 2011 when one of the Jewish Studies scholars received a SIGNAL scholarship to attend the SIGNAL-Bar Ilan University ISP training program. Also participating in this customized academic study program were two lecturers from Sichuan International Studies University (SISU) where the ISP was launched in the Spring semester of 2011.

In January 2012 SISU students working on major research projects concerning Israel traveled to the Jewish State to carry out in depth research. In February the SISU lecturers now studying at the Bar Ilan-SIGNAL ISP training program returned, well equipped to teach Israel studies.

The success of this historic academic cooperation in 2011 has roused the interest of scholars for further interchange. In all fields the bilateral relationship is expected to grow through a natural evolution and officially channeled resources. As the Israel China Culture Exchange founder, Barry Swersky, explained, there is massive potential for Israel-China associations outside of Beijing and Shanghai.

2011 saw significant expansion and deepening of interpersonal relationships in all sectors of society. The 20th anniversary of official bilateral relations, the growing network of connections in business, science, technology, culture, diplomacy and academia will surely strengthen the foundations of the China-Israel bond, creating a robust framework for 20 more years of flourishing relations. 

Carice Witte is the Founder/Exec. Director, SIGNAL and Jake Morrel is the Head of Communications & Strategic Development, SIGNAL
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Chords melting in diminished anger
sliding on a neck and strings
in nights of solitude enlightenment
of letting go of all that clings
of all the rut we gather through
the hours when the light is bright
bringing daytime to his knees
salvation of a smoke-filled night

In walking bass and standing note
transgression of an offbeat track
they walked that bass far too far
straddled on a bare blue back
remedy of sorrow known
an antidote from normal lines
when improvised

progression wanders
avoiding anything that it defines

The monk took the train
to know where
as miles blue his head off
every note
the porter hauled his joyful words
that in his hiding place
once wrote
no dukes or counts
were left to count
the treasures they
have left us here
as we are lonely with our records
eyes closed
as
God’s truth we hear

Samurai of Truth

When you move, move swiftly,
when you hide, hide deep.
When it’s time to show your face
your true nature keep.

The samurai of truth is damned
to live a life of pride.
And in that strength
the arrow flies
it’s height is not so wide.

The words of truth
are not allowed
to linger in the stagnant pool.
It’s not a privilege you hold
don’t be that hopeless fool.

The truth is known, but not to me
to no one I have met.
The fate of lies prevails until
you let go of regret.

Be not as soft as stone today,
be not as light as lead.
The water runs deep in your well
it will go to your head.

The strong are not
as brave as you,
the wise hold not the word.
Be what you were meant to be,
not slave and not a lord.

Be true to lies
and bad to good --
they taught you that in school
Your mind is empty as a drum,
your stomach, it is full.

Beware these words
I say today
for they are not the key.
I know not what I’m talking of
and you’re the same as me.
A Japanese flute
sent me back in time today
its lone cry has stirred in me
an old chord of forgotten way
I once knew love and this old world
and in its power learnt to run
in deserts of the lonesome flute
under the scorching sun.

A Japanese flute
over rippled ponds of koi
with long and winding road
through suffering, through joy
reminds me somewhat of that place
in deserts of the olden kingdom
where I grew up ‘neath cement
clutching for their freedom.

As song of flute
cuts through the air
like unseen razor’s truth sublime
I shave the truth in slices thin
of syllables and rhymes.

The Japanese flute
I heard today reminded me
where I came from
the same old flute sings
in the deserts
a place I once called home.
Those deserts I have left
knew how to tell the tale
of joys and hurt
of love and sorrow
of old wind rushing softly more
to rush again tomorrow.

Those deserts let
the flute caress them
in dark nights
underneath the stars
with coffee smell and cigarettes
and stories from afar.

The desert wind is not from here
Its nature’s own deep breath
the flute that cries is just a song
to try and ward off death.

Boaz Zippor, artist, poet, writer and photographer was born in 1972 in Tel Aviv, studied design in Milan where he lived for seven years, and now been a resident of the Kingdom of Thailand since 2003. His work has been exhibited in 14 exhibitions worldwide, 9 of them solo. He has contributed to newspapers and magazines and he now writes a bi-weekly column in the Bangkok Post on ethics and culture. His work can be found at www.boazzippor.net and his personal article reservoir is at www.bucketmoon.com
Lo Mein to Laksa

by Akira Ohiso

Japanese Chinese Kosher Chicken
As a child, I loved watching my Japanese father cook. He had a quiet and meticulous way of preparing each step. The vegetables were cut just so. He sharpened his knife and warned me not to touch. He prepped all components of the recipe before he turned on the stove. For this dish, timing is everything. A stir-fry cannot be overcooked or vegetables get soggy. The actually cooking time is very short in comparison to the prep time.

I learned this recipe by watching my father cook countless times. He cooked many Japanese dishes, but also cooked Chinese food as well. I found this interesting. I learned that prior to the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty of 1871, the Chinese were banned from entering Japan. However, many influential Westerners began bringing legally protected Chinese people to Japan in the mid-1800s to work as servants, clerks, and business translators. Chinese food thus became part of Japanese culture and cuisine.

My father was a man of few words, but when he cooked he didn’t need to speak because he translated passion and love. He wanted me to eat well. He has a survivor’s mentality, growing up in World War II Japan, where food was scarce. He was often hungry. Food means life to my father.

My father doesn’t follow a recipe. He cooks intuitively like many immigrants. If he doesn’t have an ingredient he substitutes. He makes do with what he has. As an adult in America, my father has had all the ingredients he needs, but a good meal still represents safety and freedom to him.

I sometimes take this for granted. My “Chinese Chicken” has been passed down to my three children. They lean on the cutting board, they asked many questions and I tell them it is “Ojichan’s recipe.” “Ojichan” means “Zaydie” in Japanese. I also tell them not to touch the knife. Tradition. The only difference – kosher chicken.

**Recipe:**
- 2 kosher chicken breasts cut into piece
- 2 sliced green peppers
- 1 cup of Duck Sauce
- 1 egg beaten
- 1/4 cup of cornstarch
- 1/4 cup of olive oil
- 1/8 cup of soy sauce
- 1/8 cup of rice vinegar
- 5 splashes of sesame seed oil
- 2 tablespoons minced or grated ginger
- 2 cloves of chopped garlic
- 2 diced scallions

**Sauce:** In bowl add 1 cup of duck sauce, 1/8 cup of soy sauce, 1/8 cup of rice vinegar, 5 splashes of sesame seed oil and stir. Set aside.

Beat egg in bowl and place cube chicken in bowl. Add 1 cup of cornstarch to a large zip lock bag, add chicken, and shake bag until chicken is coated. Place about an inch vegetable oil in deep pot and deep fry chicken until crunchy. Drain and set aside.

In a deep frying pan add garlic and ginger to a 1/4 cup of olive oil. Add sliced green peppers and stir-fry for one minute. Add chicken and lightly stir. Add sauce and stir. When ready to serve sprinkle two diced scallions on top of plated dish.

Serve over Japanese rice with a cold beer.

Jewish Heroes in Troubling Times

It's not uncommon to hear about heroic Jews who lived during World War II, but most of these stories focus on the war in Europe. This year, however, two new books take a look at Jews who made significant advances in Asia during World War II.

Daniel Kalla, an emergency room physician in Vancouver as well as a renowned author, has written his first work of historical fiction, *The Far Side of the Sky* (Tor|Forge, 2012). The novel tells the story of Franz Adler, a prominent surgeon and widower who flees Austria with his sister-in-law, Esther, and young daughter, Hannah.

Frantic to find passage on a ship out of Europe, Franz has no choice when a kind travel agent finds three berths on a liner destined for Shanghai. While the three Austrians have no idea what awaits them in China, they're relieved to find a city that will unconditionally accept them. After all, Shanghai was the only place in the world to do so at that time.

As soon as the boat docks in Shanghai, the Adlers meet Simon, a New York relief worker, who points them toward a Jewish agency that runs a free hospital for Jewish refugees. Fritz meets a British Jewish doctor who offers him a paying job at another hospital, but as his assistant, not as a surgeon. Torn between supporting his family and following his heart, Franz juggles both jobs, sometimes squeezing in only a few hours of sleep in the doctors' lounge.

In his work at the refugee hospital, he falls in love with Sunny Mah, an Eurasian nurse. But as with dramatic love stories, complications get in the way of the couple's happiness. Franz is also put in uncomfortable positions when senior German and Japanese officials ask him to operate on their colleagues or spouses.

Heroes like Franz and Sunny kept Shanghai afloat as tens of thousands of refugees flocked to the port city during the war. Kalla has a great knack for storytelling and his detailed descriptions of late-1930s and early 1940s Shanghai are vivid and colorful, complete with battle wounds and outbreaks of cholera and typhoid. It's one of the most comprehensive novels written about this era.

Tim Luard, a former BBC journalist, recently penned a historical narrative of perhaps the most thrilling escape in the Pacific theatre in *Escape from Hong Kong: Admiral Chan Chak's Christmas Day Dash, 1941* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

The book opens with the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong. After two weeks, surrender is inevitable, and certain people must leave the colony in order to protect Chinese intelligence. One of these people is one-legged Admiral Chan Chak of the Chinese Nationalist Navy. Never far from Chan's side are his bodyguard and his aide-de-camp, Henry Hsu. Because it's imperative that Chan and Hsu leave before the Japanese can capture them, the British Navy agrees to smuggle them out of Hong Kong.

Part of the British Navy team—which is also made up of nationals from Canada, New Zealand, and Australia—is one Monia Talan, also known as Emmanuel Moses Talan or simply John, formerly of Russia and Shanghai. While Talan's character is not a major one in this story, he does play a significant role in the escape team.

Talan left Russia just after the Bolshevik Revolution and fled to Shanghai. While author Luard labels Talan a White Russian, it's soon apparent from his background that he's Jewish. In Shanghai, Talan becomes “a lieutenant in the Jewish Company of the Shanghai Volunteers before moving to Hong Kong in 1934.” (page 35). During the Japanese invasion, Talan is one of the top intelligence officers in the navy and is known as one of the three ‘cloak and dagger boys’ (page 40).

Once he escapes Hong Kong with some sixty British and Chinese officers and enlisted men on Christmas Day, Talan leaves China in July 1942 to be stationed in India. After the war, Luard writes that Talan returns to Hong Kong as a distinguished MBE and works first for the government and then in the business sector. He also spends his free time at the Jewish Recreation Club and becomes a director of Jimmy's Kitchen. After failed attempts to gain British citizenship, he eventually immigrates to Australia. While Talan isn't well-known for his efforts during the war, his role in the Christmas Day escape can not be overstated.

Another Jewish character in *Escape from Hong Kong* is legendary Morris 'Two-Gun' Cohen, Sun Yat-sen's former bodyguard. Cohen left London for Canada, where he “learnt to ride, shoot and gamble.” After moving to China, he becomes a general in the Nationalist Army and later makes a living from “arms-dealing and all-night poker sessions at Short-Time Susan's in Shanghai before winding up in Hong Kong.” (page 37)

One of Monia Talan's intelligence colleagues pays Morris Cohen to gather information he might overhear at the Hong Kong Hotel, dressed in his “trademark white suit, shoulder holster visible beneath the jacket.” (page 37).

But that wouldn't be the last sighting of Cohen in *Escape from Hong Kong*. When the British Navy's and Chan Chak's two-car motorcade speeds away from the Gloucester Hotel for a pier near Pok Fu Lam to begin their escape, Morris Cohen appears on Queen's Road East brandishing two revolvers. A British naval officer offers Cohen a place in one of the cars, but Two-Gun wishes to stay in Hong Kong.

In a footnote, Luard writes that Cohen survives prison camp in Hong Kong and lived until 1970. After the war, he traveled to the People's Republic of China as a guest of Zhou Enlai and a liaison for several British defense contractors.

The story of the escape is fascinating in itself, but these Jewish characters add to the color of this death-defying account.

As books about Jews during World War II remain popular with readers around the world, we can only hope that we will see more set in Asia.
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