

**A Report of Presentation by Teresa Sun
at The AJL Conference, June 19th (with slides #)**

Jews in China is a widely speculated topic and attracting more and more attention among Chinese as well as the world community. It has been researched and updated continually by Jewish people ever since the 2nd World War and in a few books have published in recent years.

I highly recommend that a long scroll painting named “Spring Festival” be presented to the audience before the talk. It is a realistic record of the capital city scene of the Song Dynasty (960-1279) where a Jewish community was established. Chinese history is not only well recorded by intellectuals throughout the ages, but by artists in paintings and carving as well.

The Jewish migration and assimilation in China, geographically and historically can be categorized into four periods. The four waves of Jewish immigrants to China are: 1) the ancient Kaifeng Community from the Tang (618-907 AD) and Song (960-1278 AD) Periods, 2) the Sephardi Jews since mid-1800s, 3) the Russian (Ashkenazi) Jews since 1900, and 4) the Jewish refugees of World War II.

The Ancient and Tang (618-907 AD) and Song (960-1278 AD) Periods.

In the ancient period, a Chinese source claimed that as early as (11th – 8th Century BC) of the Zhou period, Jews already appeared in China. In the years 34 AD and 73AD, after the persecution of Jews by the Babylon and Roman Empires, Jews came to China for trade. However, no archeological evidence can be found.

The migration of Jews to China took two routes, one through Iraq, Persia, and Pamir's Plateau to China's Xin Jiang area, and then followed the Silk Road to central China. The other way was through the South Sea by India to coastal cities in South East China. (#2)

Two archeological findings traced the Jew's travel to China back in the 8th century of the Tang period.(#4). One is a Persian letter in Hebrew script and the other a Hebrew prayer. Both were found by archeologists from Europe, Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot.

There are also pottery figures excavated from Tang tombs. The Tang Emperor granted seven family names to eight Jewish clans. It was considered a great honor. During the Tang period, people of all countries and religious beliefs, including Jews, were welcomed to China, to live and trade. But the Chinese failed to distinguish Jews from other foreign and religious groups, especially those from Muslims countries.

The settlement of Jewish people gradually formed a large Jewish community during the Song Dynasty china in the capital city Kai Feng. They are identified as Kai Feng Jews and completely assimilated into Chinese culture. In 1163 AD the first Jewish synagogue was built in the heart of the city. (#5) During the following Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368

AD), Jews were regarded by the Mongolian authority as “colored eyes” people and treated as people of higher class. They enjoyed tax exemptions. It was said that Marco Polo saw the Jewish people in China.

Later on in the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1466 AD), there were 500 families or 4000-5000 Jewish people in Kai Feng. Isolated from other Jewish groups, they gradually assimilated into mainstream Chinese culture and could not explain their cultural roots. Ming was a period of prosperity under the stronghold of the Chinese Han both politically and economically. A synagogue that was destroyed by a flood of the Yellow River in 1642 was rebuilt in 1633 (#5). By the late 17th century, the number of Jews decreased to about 2000. They became lost to their own traditions, no rabbi had come to visit and there was no Hebrew learning. They used Chinese names, spoke Chinese, and took the Civil Examination to serve the public. Occasionally they will show a sign of Jewish tradition in tomb stone names and in dietary habits.

The two stone tablets recorded the rebuilding of the synagogue and the history of the Jewish community in Kaifeng in Chinese (#6). Both pieces paid tribute to the Ming Emperor and subjected the Jewish community to the Ming Empire as local residence.

The drawing of the Kaifeng synagogue was by French Jesuit, Jean Domenge in 1722 (#7) and a model is kept in Beth Hatefusoth Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Israel.(#8)

Documents saved from the flood and kept today in Kaifeng are pages of the New Year Prayer, a section of a 15th century Torah scroll, the Book of Exodus (9), the first page of Genesis (10), and a page of Jewish memorial book in Chinese and Hebrew. (#11)

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), was an Italian priest who came to China in 1587 and was allowed to go to Beijing in 1601. He accidentally met a young Jewish man, Ai Tian who passed the Civil Examination of the county level and served as a government official in 1573. Ai Tian told Matteo about his Jewish traditions. Mattei sent his missionary to Kaifeng and copied a few sections of the first five chapters of the Torah kept in Ai Tian's home, and which were identical to his in Old Testament. Matteo then wrote to the Pope in July 26, 1605 reporting the discovery of Jews in China (#12, #13).

In the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911AD), it remained not clear for the Chinese if the Jewish people and their religion were Catholic or ????. Chinese only knew that the Jewish “mosque” did not serve pork and believed in one “God”. Besides racial names listed above, Jews were also called Seven Clans Muslim. As the door of Imperial China opened to the West, Jews outside China learned of the Kaifeng community. The Society for the Rescue of the Chinese Jews was established in 1900 to restore the Jewish community. , A portrait of Jewish Chinese in Shanghai remains (#14). Canadian Bishop, William White, wrote a book, Chinese Jews in 1919 and took picture with a group of Chinese Jews. (#15). David Brown, an American businessman and publisher of New York Weekly American Hebrew also took a picture with the Kaifeng Zhao clan (#16).

During the whole period of Jewish migration to China, Jewish people and their religion were not quite understood by the Chinese. At different periods of history, the Jews were referred by Chinese as Blue Muslim, Blue Hat Muslim, Old Muslim, De Ya Muslim, their religion as Moses, “pick-muscles”, Tian Chu (ancient India) , Xi Ye (Israel), and their synagogue as Mosque.

The Sephardi Jews and Their Experience

Sephardi Jews arrived at China as a result of the Opium War (1839-1840) and the subsequent upsurge of commerce and trade with Britain. They came from Baghdad, Bombay, and Singapore. The Sassoon family was the first to establish business in Hong Kong and Shanghai, for example. The slides show David Sassoon and three sons in 1832 (#17), and the Sassoon family building in Singapore 1830s (#18). Sir Jacob Sassoon donated the Ohel Leah synagogue in Hong Kong in 1902 (#19.#20) . In Shanghai, they built The Metropole Hotel (top), Broadway Mansions (#21), and the Sassoon Building (#22).

Silas Aron Hardoon, the Real Estate King, was another influential Sephardi Jew (#23). The Marble Hall was built by Sir Elly Kadoorie in 1924 (#24). The local Journal (#25) reported the visit of Albert Einstein in 1923 (#26). Reverend Mendel Brown and family were invited to Shanghai (#27) .

The Russian (Ashkenazi) Jews in China

The Russian (Ashkenazi) Jews came to China as political refugees, because of rising anti-semitism in Russia and Eastern Europe. Tens of thousands of Jews crossed Siberia and reached Inner Mongolia and Northeast China. They went through the Russo-Japanese War and two Russia revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Harbin was the city that hosted most of the Jewish immigrants. Slides show the community leaders in Harbin (#28), the synagogues they built. (#29) and delegates to the first regional conference of the Zionists in the Far East, March 25-29, 1919 (#30). In Harbin, there were general stores for Jews and streets full of Jewish goods (#31, #32). Skidelsky Talmud Torah School was set up in 1920 (#33). Slide show youth athletes (#34), the director and control committee of the Jewish People’s Bank in 1923 (top) and the member of the Maccabi Sports Association (#35), The Balalaika Orchestra of Commercial High School, 1930 (#36), pianist Simon Kaspe, son of Joseph Kaspe, was murdered in Harbin 1933 (#37), and a license to practice pharmacy given to Nachum Losser by the local government, Harbin 1949 (#38).

A large number of Jews moved downward to South China after the Japanese invasion

to Manchuria. They settled first in coastal cities, Tianjin, Qingdao, and finally to Shanghai. Slides show the dedication of Tianjin Synagogue in 1939 (#39), the Tianjin Jewish School in 1923 (#40), Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi in Shanghai (1926-1949) (#41), Boris Topas, leader of Shanghai Ashkenazi Jews communal Association and founder of Shanghai Zionist Organization (top left), David Rabinovich, founder and editor of Jewish magazine, "My Life" in Russian, English, and Yiddish) (top right), Judith Ben-Eliezer, active leader of Zionist movement. (bottom left) and subscribers (#42). Other slides show the Shanghai Betars (#43), the social life in Shanghai (#44), Jews with Chinese colleagues in the 1930s (#45), Jewish composer, Aaron Avshalomov, who lived in Shanghai 30 years (#46), a certificate of membership of Jewish community in Qingdao (#47), and a Jewish fur shop in Shanghai (#48).

Shanghai as Haven for Holocaust Victims from Nazi Europe

The Jewish refugees came to China to escape the Nazi terror in Europe. Shanghai gave shelter to 20,000 – 25,000 Jews while almost all countries closed their doors to the desperate Jewish refugees. Shanghai took in more Jews than Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and India combined. In May 13, 1933 Madame Sun Yat-sen headed a delegation which lodged a strong protest with the German Consul in Shanghai (#49) and was reported in Israel's Messenger (#50). In 1939, the Chinese government planned to set aside territory in Yunnan for the settlement of Jewish refugee from Europe (#51). For various reasons, the plan was not carried out.

Two Asian diplomats in Europe, Japanese consul to Lithuania Mr. Chiune Sugihara, and the Chinese consul general in Vienna, Dr. He Fengshan, assisted many Jewish refugee by issuing transit visas for them to go to Shanghai (#52). For example, images include a Chinese visa signed by He (#53), the passport of Carl Israel Flatow with the destination changed from Iraq to Shanghai (#54), refugees disembarking (#55), Embankment building, one of the processing center, 1938 (#56). Other slides show transport to centers (#57), housing for 200 people (#58), food service (#59), leaders and activities information of the Shanghai Hebrew Relief Society (#60), Mir Yeshiva in Europe escaped Holocaust and settled in Shanghai (#61), and a kindergarten (#62). More slides show a German-language magazine Gelbe and its editor, Adolf Joseph Storfer (top) and Shanghai Jewish Chronicle and editor, Ossie Lewin (#63), the activities of Zionist groups (top) and local radio XMHA (#64), a Passover seder (#65) a marriage certificate recorded bilingually (#66), Dr. Wilhelm Mainzer, a high ranking medical officer in Chinese army immigrated to Israel with his Chinese wife (#67), entertaining at home (#68), Hans Lowenstein" grocery (#69), and a café and restaurant (#70)

February 18, 1943 the Japanese authorities proclaimed the "Designated Area for Stateless Refugees" ordering all refugees who arrived at Shanghai since 1937 to move to Hong Kou within a month (#71, #72). Images show an alley in Hongkou where refugees lived (#73), a crowded street (#74), a directory of Jewish Refugees (left) and ID card (#75), an ID card with time schedule of the day (#76), and passes were given to refugees working outside the ghetto by the Japanese head of Hongkou, Ghoya (#77).

The final slides show a caricature of Ghoya (#78), cooking in the ghetto (#79), the housing in the ghetto (#80), learning a trade (#81), looking through list of Holocaust survivors for relatives after V-J Day (#82), flags of China, Russia, Britain, U.S., that were painted by a refugee in the camp (#83), the celebration of the establishment of Israel as a nation (#84), and Goodbye, Shanghai 1947 (#85).