

Original article

The Jewish Archives in Harbin

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Abstract

The Jewish people belong to a nation with a long history. It once created a splendid culture, and the Jewish scriptures have been instrumental in two world religions – Christianity and Islam. Together with the Jewish people, Christians and Muslims are known as the ‘People of the Book’. However, for thousands of years, the Jewish people had no homeland, so they had to wander around, suffer humiliation, and were even slaughtered. This is the sad history of the nation, but there were exceptions. Jews have a long history of migrating to China. The ancient Kaifeng Jews were thoroughly assimilated throughout history. In modern history, at the end of the 19th century, many Jews from Russia and Europe came to Harbin, and tens of thousands of people formed the largest Jewish community in the Far East. From 1903 to 1963, Jews established a Jewish community in Harbin. During the Japanese occupation in World War II, many of them fled to Shanghai along with others who had fled from Europe in order to escape the genocide of the German Nazi regime and then left after the war ended. These Jews from different social backgrounds and ideologies, but with the same destiny, practiced national autonomy, became one, shared wealth and woe, and followed the traditional customs of their ancient nation to move successfully toward a better life. The Jewish Archives in Harbin illustrate that their story is a unique chapter in the history of the Jewish wandering.

Keywords

Jewish nation archives Harbin

Introduction: The Complex Background of the Jews’ Migration to Harbin

With the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing between China and Britain after the Opium War in 1840, western powers set off a frenzy to divide China.

Tsarist Russia seized the opportunity to annex over one million square kilometers of northeastern China through the *Sino-Russian Treaty of Tianjin*, the *Sino-Russian Treaty of Aigun*, and the *Sino-Russian Extended Treaty of Beijing*.¹ As a result, Russia migrated to the Far East and constructed the Trans-Siberian Railway spanning the continents of Europe and Asia.

In May 1896, the Russian government specifically invited Li Hongzhang, the most prominent and influential diplomat and military leader of the late Qing Dynasty, to attend the coronation ceremony of Tsar Nicholas II. During his visit, the Tsar himself, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Finance employed tactics, such as flattery, promises of alliance, economic incentives, reassurances of sovereignty, and appeals for modernization, to influence Li Hongzhang. Helplessly, on 3 June 1896, Li Hongzhang, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Lobanov,

¹ The *Sino-Russian Treaty of Tianjin* was signed on Jun 13, 1858, the *Sino-Russian Treaty of Aigun* on May 28, 1858, and the *Sino-Russian Extended Treaty of Beijing* on Nov 14, 1860.

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and the Minister of Finance Witte signed the *Treaty of Mutual Assistance against Enemies*. This was not made public until 1921 and was thus called the *Sino-Russian Secret Treaty*,² enabling Russia to seize the right to build railways in northeastern China and find an excuse for the subsequent military invasion. Based on this treaty, the *Contract of the Railway Company of Eastern Province* was signed on September 8, 1896, and the *Charter of the Railway Company of Eastern Province* was signed on December 16, 1896. This led to the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, with Harbin as the hub. A large number of Russians settled along the Chinese Eastern Railway, with Harbin as the central city.

Concurrent with the building of the railway, the migration of Jews to Harbin was caused by the persecution of Jews in Tsarist Russia and various European countries. Over 90 percent of the Jewish population in Harbin originates from Tsarist Russia. This ongoing social hostility and persecution against Jews was fueled by both governmental and social factors stemming from political and religious motivations. Originally, Jews were prohibited from settling in Russia and were expelled. However, in the 18th century, as Tsarist Russia engaged in continuous wars against Eastern European nations, it acquired a vast territory, including Jewish communities. As a result, the government had to establish Jewish 'settlements' in these newly acquired areas. Jewish people were confined to specific areas, away from cities, where they engaged in agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry for their livelihood. They lacked civil rights and were subject to special laws that imposed additional restrictions on them. In the first half of the 19th century, the rulers of Tsarist Russia implemented numerous anti-Semitic decrees, interfered in Jewish education, and closely examined Jewish texts to eradicate the Jewish legal code. It was required that Jewish individuals aged 12 to 18 serve in the compulsory military camp as reservists and then complete 25 years of active duty. Additionally, the Jewish community were required to provide soldiers according to the established quota. During the second half of the 19th century, several decrees were implemented that limited the number of Jewish students allowed to enroll in higher education. A notice from the Ministry of Education stipulated that the enrollment of Jewish students in middle schools and universities within the settlement could not exceed 10 percent of the total student population. Also, the number of Jewish students in institutions outside the settlement was restricted to no more than 5 percent, and in Moscow, it was limited to just 3 percent.³ Jewish people were prohibited from holding positions in the government. At the same time, widespread massacres of Jews, referred to as pogroms, occurred repeatedly. The most notorious incidents affecting Russian Jews included the Odessa Incident in 1871, the expulsion of tens of thousands of Jews from Moscow by the police in 1891, and the Kishinev Atrocity in 1903. By the end of the 19th century, Jewish communities in Russia faced a tragic situation and endured a difficult life. These circumstances prompted many Jews to seek escape from their plight and search for a new home.

² Wang, Tieya. *A Compilation of Old Testament Chapters: Chinese and Foreign Versions* [M]. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 1957.

³ Wang, Zhijun & Li, Wei. *Harbin Jews in Early 1900's: Their Political and Religious Lives* [M], Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2013.

Considering the situation, the primary reasons for the Jews' arrival in Harbin were as follows:

- 1) The construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway initially attracted a significant number of Jewish builders, material suppliers, distributors, and skilled technicians.
- 2) Following the Russo-Japanese War, Jewish military doctors and soldiers in the Russian army were transitioned to civilian roles and remained in Harbin alongside the army.
- 3) Anti-Semitic incidents in Eastern Europe occurred between 1905 and 1907.
- 4) The First World War took place from 1914 to 1918.
- 5) After the October Revolution, many individuals who were dissatisfied with the new Soviet regime chose to stay.
- 6) After the 1929 Incident involving the Chinese Eastern Railway, Jews in Manzhouli, Hailar, and other places were concentrated in Harbin.⁴

The history of the Jews in Harbin is little known. Fortunately, the Jewish community archives from that time are now preserved in the Archives of Heilongjiang Province. The materials are rich in content, variety, and quantity, and they are all in Russian with a small amount of Hebrew, English, and French. Harbin City Archives stores a large number of Jewish household registration files and catalogs of Jewish cemeteries. These items have become world-class cultural relics and are extremely valuable.

Archival materials are the foundation of historical research; however, the Jewish archives have not been made publicly accessible. To ensure that the world gains a comprehensive understanding of this unique history, it is essential to systematically organize and describe the key aspects of the past 60 years. This process is vital for studying the Jewish community in Harbin and holds research significance for understanding Harbin's history, present, and future. Therefore, the publication of this collection of books is an innovative and important work with significant relevance.

This set of books⁵ primarily derives from the archives of the Harbin Jewish Religious Association, and it also includes the household registration files of Jews found in the municipal archives and relevant departmental records. It is compiled into 15 volumes, containing millions of words, nearly 1,700 pictures, and approximately 4,000 pages of scanned original texts. There are five major categories of content:

⁴ To regain the Soviet Union's privileges in the Middle East railway system, friction between China and the Soviet Union persisted. In 1929, this tension escalated into armed conflicts, primarily concentrated in the Manzhouli and Zhalainuoer regions. Over several months, dozens of battles of varying sizes resulted in heavy losses for the Northeast authorities in China. The Sino-Soviet Boli Conference Draft Agreement was signed at the end of the year. This agreement outlined the immediate withdrawal of troops, the release of captured personnel, and the restoration of consulates for both nations. However, it is essential to note that this was merely a temporary agreement, serving as a ceasefire between China and the Soviet Union.

⁵ *A Compilation of Jewish Files and Documents in Harbin (15 Volumes in Total)*, edited by Qiuping Guo, was first published in August 2020. This set of books was written to meet the academic needs of historical research and was approved and funded as a special project by the National Committee for the Compilation of Qing History. Its development received financial support from the Harbin Municipal Government and the National Committee for the Compilation of Qing History, and its publication was subsidized by the National Publishing Fund. The primary goal of the compilation is to address the gaps in research concerning the archives related to the history of Harbin's Jewish community.

1. Articles of Association of Various Social Organizations (Books 1-2)



Figure 1. The internal regulations of the Jewish Religious Association

The most important aspect of life is understanding “Who am I?” and “Where do I come from?”: the question of belonging. A deep and heartfelt sense of national identity and belonging empowers Jews to connect with fellow citizens and establish their own communities wherever they are. While an individual’s power may be limited, an organization’s energy is boundless. This truth, learned by Jews over thousands of years, embodies great wisdom. To address the challenges they faced, Jews established a distinct community in Harbin, creating numerous political, economic, religious, educational, and artistic institutions: 1) Harbin Jewish Religious Association; 2) Jewish Funeral Mutual Association; 3) Staff Mutual Association; 4) Synagogue Management Committee; 5) Jewish Music, Literature and Drama Association; 6) Jewish Public Library; 7) weekly magazine *Jewish Life*⁶; 8) Jewish public school education organization, which included a Jewish religious primary school, a Jewish public elementary school, and a Jewish middle school; 9) Jewish Society Vocational School for Poor Students’ Education Association; 10) Israel Union; 11) Jewish Religious Education Association; 12) Jewish Women’s Charity; 13) Harbin Jewish Emigration Palestine Promotion Association (later changed to Zionist organization); 14) Middle East Railway Affiliated Area Association; 15) Jewish Interest-Free Loan

⁶ Its predecessor was the Russian weekly magazine *Siberia-Palestine*, which aimed to promote the Zionist movement, introduce Jewish immigrants from the Far East, and discuss the situation in Palestine. The magazine relocated from Shanghai to Harbin in 1920. In 1924, it transformed from a publication of the Zionist Far East Bureau into a social and cultural weekly magazine. In 1925, it was renamed *Jewish Life*. After the magazine was renamed, Dr. Abraham Kaufman took on the role of editor-in-chief. The magazine documented the life of the Jewish community in Harbin, Dalian, Shanghai, and other locations. In 1943, when it was forced to cease publication, it was the longest-running magazine and the only one to systematically reflect Jewish life in Harbin.

Organization; 16) Real Estate and Real Estate Association; 17) Jewish Consumer Cooperative; 18) Poor and Sick Jewish Relief Association; 19) Jewish Nursing Home; 20) Far Eastern Mutual Loan Society; 21) Jewish National Bank; 22) Far Eastern Jewish Commercial Bank; 23) Mutual Savings Society in case of Death; 24) Jewish Religious Council Arbitration Court; 25) Jewish Passover Committee; 26) Jewish Community Committee for War Refugees; 27) Jewish Free and Cheap Cantons. Relying on these social institutions, the Jewish community would not let a child drop out of school, would not let a homeless body lie on the street, and provided nursing homes to adopt those who had nowhere to live, such as the lonely and elderly.

Wherever there was an organization, there were activities, and these activities needed to be conducted according to established rules. The Jewish community fully understands that an organization generates rights, and the operation of those rights brings benefits. Therefore, the first action a social institution took was to create a charter, which went hand in hand with the organization. An organization must have a constitution, and even though this constitution may have originated a hundred years ago, it remains relevant today. All articles of association embody the spirit of jurisprudence, the principle of democratic centralism, and the commitment to benefiting the world and helping others.

The Harbin Jewish Religious Association, the highest governing body of the community, established five key terms of reference in its charter: a) Fulfilling the religious needs of Jewish residents, managing synagogues and facilities, supporting rabbis and kosher slaughtering house workers, and addressing other organizational needs within the framework of Kashrut (kosher dietary laws); b) Registration of births, marriages and deaths of Jewish individuals; c) management of public cemeteries and burial services; d) Jewish cultural education; and e) Providing social assistance to all needy Jewish residents, which included clinics, nursing homes, and free canteens. These five functions closely resemble those of a local government.



Figure 2. Several bylaws of Jewish associations

Jews have always placed great importance on education. From a young age, they emphasize the value of their national language, Jewish classics, and Jewish history. In Jewish public schools, the curriculum mandated that two-thirds of teaching hours be Jewish courses, reflecting a strong sense of national identity.

In the first half of the 20th century, Harbin became known as a prominent 'City of Music.' A significant number of highly skilled Russian musicians settled there, either performing on stage or dedicating themselves to music education. Their contributions greatly advanced the city's musical development, with Jewish musicians playing a particularly crucial role.

Harbin's musical history saw the establishment of several institutions, including the Harbin Music Training Class (October 20, 1927), Harbin Music College (1929), Harbin Soviet Higher School of Music (1947), and the Harbin Commerce Club Music Training Class. Each of these schools featured exceptional Jewish musicians on their faculty. These musicians introduced the Chinese people to various musical forms, such as symphonies, sonatas, and concertos, as well as the classical works of composers like Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, and Tchaikovsky. They also established artistic groups, such as opera troupes, operetta ensembles, jazz bands, wind bands, symphony orchestras, and ballet schools. Additionally, they developed initiatives like the charter of the Harbin Jewish Music, Literature, and Drama Association, which greatly advanced Harbin's musical culture and enriched the cultural lives of its residents. Early theaters and cinemas in Harbin, such as the Danilov Theater, Yekaterinsky Cinema, Modern Theater, American Cinema, and Globus Cinema, were also established by Jewish entrepreneurs. More than half of the founders of the Commerce Club in Daoli District were also Jewish.

As a 'City of Music,' Harbin is home to not only top-tier music halls and theaters but also numerous musical instrument stores. Among these, the most iconic was the Lyra Musical Instruments Store, located on Harbin's Central Street. The store, named after the ancient Greek god of music, Lyra, symbolized exceptional musical taste and fostered a vibrant artistic atmosphere. In addition to selling instruments, strings, and sheet music, the store also organized and produced records. In 1928, it released a commemorative record to mark its 25th anniversary. The store's owner, Jewish entrepreneur Lev Skorohod, was both a businessman and a musician. He opened the Lyra Musical Instruments Store in 1903 and nurtured his son to become a violinist. Numerous advertisements for the Lyra store can still be found in Harbin, serving as historical markers. Lev Skorohod passed away in 1941 and was buried in the Harbin Jewish Cemetery. The growth of musical arts in Harbin highlights the significant contributions of Jewish musicians, educators, and cultural entrepreneurs to the city's evolution as a 'City of Music.'

These organizations and regulations reflect the following ideas of the Jews: strong organizational consciousness, clear organizational concepts, applicable organizational forms, strict organizational regulations, and responsible organizational personnel. Thus, the Harbin Jewish community effectively managed its social life, creating a complete social system.

2. Famous Social Activists (Books 3-4)

The Jews in Harbin appear to have established a number of social institutions, and all of them operated very effectively, as testified by the work of a group of excellent social workers the archives committee of the Harbin Jewish Religious Association, who collected information for the book. From newspapers, magazines, manuscripts, letters, autobiographies, resumes, certificates, etc. the book compiled data on nearly 100 Jews and classified them according to their occupations into five categories: clergy, businessmen and entrepreneurs, educators, medical workers, and others.

Over the more than 60 years of the Jewish community's existence, two important leaders emerged: Rabbi Kiselyov and Dr. Abraham Kaufman⁷, the chairman of the Jewish community. Together, they worked harmoniously, wisely, and courageously to guide the development of the community, ensuring that Jewish customs and national values were maintained. Rabbi Kiselyov served in Harbin from 1913 until his death in 1949. He worked as a rabbi for 36 years and adhered to many rules associated with Jewish birth, circumcision, marriage, funerary rites, and dietary laws. In 1944, when the Japanese attempted to place an image of the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu in a synagogue, he declared proudly, "I will not die; I will lie on the synagogue door, which is completely against the fundamental rules of religious belief." His tombstone describes him as "a widely respected spiritual teacher of extraordinary temperament and influence, a true spiritual leader whose words burned like the sun until his soul departed." Zalman Agranovsky, the last secretary of the community, was born in Harbin. He played a key role in the relocation of the Jewish cemetery in 1958. Despite having the opportunity to move to Israel, he chose to give up his family's visa and remained in Harbin until 1962. His dedication to his duties and his compassion for deceased compatriots buried in a foreign land were truly admirable. Agranovsky worked tirelessly to preserve the gravestones, reaching out to the relatives of almost every owner scattered around the globe. He personally oversaw the relocation of graves, making the Jewish cemetery relocation the largest of its kind for foreigners. In our analysis, we compared the data: Out of 19,267 individuals buried in the Orthodox cemetery, only 154 were relocated, representing 0.8 percent. In contrast, of the 3,173 people interred in Jewish cemeteries, 853 were moved, accounting for 27 percent. Moreover, he verified and compiled materials related to the old Jewish cemetery and produced the *Foreign Nationals Cemetery Book*. This book has become a vital resource for the study of Jewish cemeteries and has left a valuable historical and cultural legacy for both the Jewish community and Harbin.

The autobiography of Isaac Haliton Norwich Soskine offers valuable insights into his life and experiences. He wrote, "In 1916, I came to Harbin for business, and for that reason, I decided to move my family there as well. In Harbin, with some of my brothers, I reorganized a large

⁷ Born in Ukraine, he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bern in Switzerland. In 1912, he moved to Harbin, where he held various positions, including chairman of the Jewish community. He actively led the Harbin Jewish community and the Zionist movement, dedicating himself entirely to these causes and becoming a prominent national leader. After the Soviet Red Army arrived in Harbin in 1945, he was arrested and taken to a Soviet concentration camp, where he spent 11 years in prison. He returned to Israel in 1961 and passed away in 1971.

grain export shipping company, of which I was a shareholder and the executive manager. The following year, I was elected to the Harbin Jewish Society Committee, and from then on, I had the privilege of working within this vibrant and active community until my move to Europe. During my time with the Society, I served at various times as Chairman of the Committee and Chair of the Finance Committee. I have at all times been a member of the Committee of the Society. In the years leading up to my departure for Europe, I served as Chairman of the Society Committee. Up until October 1928, I also held the position of Chairman of the Main Synagogue in Harbin. From 1922 to 1928, I was the founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Jewish National Bank of Harbin. During my stay in Harbin, I was the Chairman of the Harbin Branch of the Palestine Foundation, the President of the Far East Regional Relief Society for the Victims of War and Persecution of Jews (established in 1922), and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Harbin Commercial School. Additionally, I was involved as both a member and the Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Harbin Glazunov Music School. I also served as the Chairman of the Harbin Securities and Exchange Commission. Later, when Harbin became autonomous under Chinese administration, I was appointed as a member of the Harbin Municipal Autonomous Committee. Finally, I took on the roles of manager of Harbin Bank and Chairman of the Harbin City Association. These are the various positions I held within different organizations and institutions before I left for Europe in October 1928.

“I was influenced by the Zionist movement from a young age, and my entire family participated in it as well. I firmly believe that the Jewish issue can only be fully resolved through the establishment of a genuine Jewish state. My political views ultimately focus on democratization, as I believe that only through democratic means can we address the pressing problems facing humanity today.

“My experience working in Harbin has made me appreciate the dedication and professionalism of the workers in various social, educational, and charitable organizations. Their commitment to their causes, strong work ethic, and deep sense of responsibility have left a lasting impression on me. As I prepare to work with a Jewish social organization in Paris, I carry with me the valuable lessons learned in Harbin, which only deepens my affection for the city. The values they hold, their beliefs, their actions, and their emotions are truly extraordinary.”

A large number of economic elites emerged among the Jewish community in Harbin. They actively participated in various economic activities in this rapidly developing city and pioneered many initiatives.

The wealthy Skidelsky family became contractors for the Chinese Eastern Railway and established multiple enterprises in Northeast China, including forestry, coal mining, and flour milling. They also funded to establish the Skidelsky Jewish Primary School. With wheat and soybeans being the main agricultural products of Heilongjiang, Jewish entrepreneurs such as Derigin and Kagan set up flour mills, Kabalkin founded an oil extraction factory, trailblazing the export trade, and others, like Kroler, opened breweries.

The business activities of the Jewish community flourished, with countless companies, shopping malls, and restaurants. For example, the “Modern Hotel,” established by Kasper, integrated a hotel, a restaurant, a theater, and a conference hall, attracting elites from both home and abroad. The Samsonovich brothers ran a trading company specializing in clothing and textiles, building a three-story structure in the commercial center of Harbin. Jewish entrepreneur Chukerman founded the “Mars” chocolate and confectionery factory in Harbin, among others.

The economic endeavors of the Jewish community in Harbin were closely linked to their social activities. The development of Jewish institutions, such as synagogues, Jewish hospitals, and Jewish nursing homes, was made possible by their fundraising efforts.

3. Registration of Jewish Babies born in Harbin (Books 5-13)

Confronted with a large collection of files, we decided to focus on sorting through birth registrations. Although the sheer volume is overwhelming and the handwriting is often difficult to read, we did notice some repeated entries. While the task is time-consuming and painstaking, what truly matters is the outcome: we need to gather the necessary numbers! How many Jews were there in Harbin? Historical statistics estimate there were 15,000, 25,000, 35,000, or even 50,000. How many Jewish babies were born in Harbin? There is no record in domestic and foreign literature, creating a historical gap. Fertility is an important aspect of social life that can reveal many essential elements of social and historical development in relation to politics, the economy, culture, and more. In secular terms, this relates to the vital interests of every family. For the persecuted Jews, this is related to the continuation of their race.



Figure 3. The birth registers of Jewish people in Harbin from 1904-1909

According to the 50-volume birth register maintained by the Jewish Religious Council, the compiled data should be made public to the entire society. Between 1899 and 1961, a total of 3,522 individuals (1,805 males and 1,717 females) were born in Harbin and its surrounding areas (e.g. Qiqihar, Angangxi, Heihe, Manzhouli, Mukden, and others), including 38 pairs of twins (10 males, 19 females, and 9 pairs of twins). Of these, 3,036 individuals (1,556 males and 1,480 females) were born in Harbin itself. The earliest baby girls were born in 1899, and the last baby boys were born in 1961. The highest number of births occurred in 1919, with a peak of 172 births, while there were more than 100 births per year for 17 consecutive years, from 1907 to 1923. Before and after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the birthrate dropped drastically, with only dozens of births every year, or even fewer. The registration includes the baby's name, gender, date of birth (in both the Gregorian and Jewish calendars), the date of circumcision (or naming), the master of ceremonies, the place of birth, and the parents' names. This register reflects Jewish ideals, highlighting the age-old custom and tradition of circumcision, which is performed on the eighth day of a boy's life, regardless of the circumstances. In Jewish baby naming ceremonies, both men and women are required to take a Hebrew name. Hebrew names are important as they are used in religious celebrations, official ordinances, marriage contracts, and are inscribed on tombstones. Birth records from Mukden, Manzhouli, and various locations were kept by the Harbin Jewish Religious Association, which highlights the significance of the Harbin Jewish community in the Far East. This shows that Harbin became a central hub for Jewish life during times of adversity.

Now, they are scattered all over the world, most of them dead, while the living are already in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, and many of them return to visit their birthplace. Teddy Kaufman, the former president of the Israel-China Friendship Association, who was born in 1924, visited Harbin many times. In his memoirs, he wrote, "It is still the loveliest home of my youth. Although the Chinese see us as foreigners, they have accepted us. They have never harassed us, they have not banned the Zionist movement, and they have allowed us to lead our community life." Paul Eglon, born in 1922, traveled from the United States to Harbin at the age of 86 with his 84-year-old wife to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, known as the diamond wedding. He considered himself a Chinese person living in a foreign country. His documentary, *Paul and Esther's Harbin*, was so moving that it aired on American television and won several awards. Judith, born in 1940, visited Harbin four times from Israel with her husband and three children to pay homage to her ancestors. She also published a memoir titled *Childhood in Harbin*. Yossi Klein, born in 1938 and currently the president of the Association of Native Chinese Jews in Israel, wrote the preface for this book. The interaction between history and reality not only enriches the content of Harbin's local history but also strengthens the friendly relations between China and Israel. Thus, the compilation of this book holds both exceptional practical and international significance.



Figure 4. Child No. 2354, born on May 21, 1924, surname Näslund.



Figure 5. Children Nos. 2830 and 2862, born on October 7, 1936 and March 30, 1939 respectively, with the surname Podilsky. Photographed in Harbin Central Park (now Harbin Zhaolin Park)

4. Personal Household Registration Files (Books 14)

A comprehensive understanding of history should be grounded in detailed research at the microcosmic level, reflecting a trend in contemporary historiography. All historical activities are ultimately human endeavors. Although the lives of ordinary people may seem small and insignificant, these experiences are essential to true historiography. The Harbin City Archives contain extensive records of Jewish household registrations, which are rich in content. These documents from grassroots society hold significant historical value for studying Jewish history and culture.

The contents of the household registration archives include the following items: household registration forms, residence permits for foreigners, applications for foreigner registration, autobiographies, reports on the migration of foreigners within the jurisdiction, death certificates and reports on deaths, food supply certificates, population cancellation certificates, university admission applications, surveys of foreigner-owned industries and businesses, various investigation materials, records of changes in circumstances, applications for foreigner travel, registration forms for foreigners passing through, correspondence, visas from foreign immigration bureaus, and certificates from Jewish religious associations. The nationality of the Jewish community in Harbin was a complex issue. Most of the Jewish population came from Russia and identified as Russian nationals. However, as the political situation in Harbin evolved, many Jews adapted to their environment by changing their nationalities multiple times, leading to some becoming stateless. Additionally, there were Jews from various other nationalities, including Poland, Lithuania, Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. In 1945, when the Soviet Red Army entered Harbin, many people changed their nationality to Soviet. Household registration records show that Harbin also welcomed European Jews who had escaped the Nazi regime during World War II, with the majority being of German nationality. By 1948, following the establishment of Israel, most Jews returned to Israel. This illustrates that nationality was in a constant state of flux, making it challenging to draw definite conclusions. When examining the Jewish community in Harbin, we can only understand their nationality through historical context, and it is not appropriate to reach a definite conclusion. Acknowledging this evolving process is essential for respecting history. Consequently, we chose not to include nationality in our résumés of the Jews.

This book contains the biographies and profile pictures of 677 Jews, with nearly a thousand others excluded due to various circumstances. It includes details such as name, gender, date of birth, place of birth, occupation, educational level, time of arrival in China, residential address, destinations, and a summary of their activities. The collection features both prominent individuals and ordinary people. By highlighting these real lives and events, the book provides a clearer understanding of Jewish history in Harbin, a topic often overlooked in traditional history books that focus on significant figures. Ultimately, the lives, spirit, and courage of these everyday individuals shape the rich tapestry of Harbin's Jewish history. Traditional Chinese historiography is primarily conveyed through words. However, with the advancements in modern science and

technology, visual imagery can more directly represent objective realities, particularly when it comes to people. The information conveyed by a photograph often surpasses that of a verbal description. Photographs allow viewers to gain insights into the psychological and spiritual worlds of individuals through their clothing, hairstyles, and especially their eyes. This visual medium enables researchers to explore various facets of historical study, particularly concerning unique ethnic groups. What are the Harbin Jews like? This is a topic that captures people's interest. Modern conservators are working to restore portraits of individuals that highlight their social significance and the scientific value of their research. This endeavor represents a new and promising approach to our historical research.

5. Relics and Remains (Books 15 – Tangible Heritage)

The remnants of the ruins serve as a historical testament to the Jewish community in Harbin, rich in cultural significance and important for scholarly study. This book, illustrated with photographs, is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on architecture, highlighting the two main synagogues: the existing Main Synagogue and the New Synagogue, both of which are centuries old. It also features the Jewish secondary school, known for its distinctive Jewish architectural style, as well as notable Jewish-run businesses, including the Jewish Bank, the Hotel Mariel, and the Ashe Sugar Mill, along with the opulent Skidelsky family mansion. A field investigation has also yielded new findings, including the Harbin Temple of Literature, which is the Confucius Temple. In 1926, the East Province Special District government constructed the temple with significant financial support from various Jewish companies and individuals.⁸ Their contributions are memorialized on a stone monument at the site. Notable donations include 1,000 silver yuan from Hotel Ma Diere, 500 silver yuan from the Jewish Commercial Bank, 2,000 silver yuan from the Jewish merchant Soskin, 2,000 silver yuan from the Jewish merchant Kagan, and 250 silver yuan from the Jewish merchant Chukelman. These donations serve as a testament to the Jewish community's identification with Chinese culture, from which they have also greatly benefited. This relationship highlights a theoretical breakthrough by underscoring the global importance of Chinese civilization.

The second section focuses on the Harbin Jewish Cemetery, the largest and best-preserved Jewish cemetery in the Far East. In Jewish tradition, there are three major life events: birth, marriage, and death. The Jewish people have a deep connection to their eventual burial in the ancient 'land of milk and honey,' also known as the Land of Canaan. Due to the difficulty of returning from the diaspora, Jewish public cemeteries are established in various foreign lands, symbolizing a homecoming to their ancestral roots.

⁸ In 1920, the Chinese military disarmed the Russian troops stationed along the railway line. As a result, the Beijing government revoked its judicial authority and renamed the area affiliated with the Middle East Railway as the Eastern Special Administrative Region. This new region was divided into sections of 11 to 15 kilometers along the railway, making it independent from Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces while still being linked to them. In 1921, the Municipal Administration Bureau of the Eastern Special Administrative Region was established, with the first Chief Executive appointed by the commander of the Road Protection Army, Zhu Qinglan. He was responsible for military and police matters, diplomacy, administration, and the judiciary. The Chief Executive's Office was located in Harbin.



Figure 6. The master plan of the Jewish cemetery

Jewish cemeteries charge fees based on the financial status of the deceased. Wealthy individuals pay higher fees, with 20 percent of the total going towards funeral costs, while the remainder supports various welfare institutions within the Jewish community. In contrast, if the deceased is poor, the burial is free, and the family incurs no costs for either the burial or the headstone, as these are provided by the community. When a Jew in Harbin died, the Funeral Society coordinated volunteers to attend the funeral. The Sanhedrin, the supreme council, ensured that there was a collective prayer service held to honor and bless the deceased.

The Harbin Jewish Cemetery was established in 1903 and was managed by the Jewish Funeral Society, a voluntary organization part of the Jewish Religious Council. The first president of this council was Ring-in Bach. Located on Ping'an Street in the Nangang District, which is now the site of the Ice Sports Center of Heilongjiang Province, the old Jewish cemetery is noted for its size and construction quality. It is surrounded by a red brick wall that stands approximately two meters high, with a synagogue situated at the front gate, featuring a large satellite on top. The synagogue included an office, a memorial hall, and a funeral room. A full-time secretary managed the cemetery's affairs, such as liaising with overseas contacts and collecting management funds. Additionally, there were dedicated flower workers who planted flowers throughout the cemetery and provided services based on memorial requests, with varying fees. Due to urban development plans by the Harbin Municipal Government, all urban area cemeteries were relocated to the suburbs in 1958. The first burial in the Jewish cemetery took place on May 28, 1903, and the last on March 5, 1958. In total, 3,173 individuals were buried in the old Jewish cemetery, comprising 1,923 men and 1,250 women. Of these, 853 graves were moved to the new Jewish cemetery, while the rest remain at the original site.

The new Jewish cemetery is still protected and managed by the Huangshan Cemetery Management Office of the Harbin Civil Affairs Bureau. It covers an area of 6,532 square meters and contains 591 existing tombs. Among those buried in the cemetery are notable figures such

as Chief Rabbi Gisheliev (aged 83), prominent entrepreneur Drigin (aged 103), and the family of Jewish leader Dr. Kaufman, including his parents, wife, and daughter. Additionally, the grandfather of former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert is also interred here. While the cemetery primarily serves ordinary people, it features a unique tombstone for a child named Tasinka Bolger, who passed away on April 7, 1916, at the age of 7. The layout of the Jewish cemetery, along with the design and materials of the tombstones and the inscriptions, offers valuable information for scholarly research.

Ms. Nan Yueming, the first Ambassador of Israel to China, reflected on the profound experience of witnessing the special protection of the Jewish cemetery in Harbin. She noted that Deputy Prime Minister Olmert visited the graves of his grandfather and relatives there, expressing gratitude by saying, "Thank you for protecting our family's past and allowing the Jews here to feel dignity." His brother, Omuran, added, "We would like to build a bridge of friendship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora in Harbin, as China has provided us with a healthy childhood, a happy youth, and a noble character." They rest forever in China, which influences the Chinese perspective of the Jewish community.

Conclusion

1) The history of the Jewish community in Harbin is also a vital component of the city's urban history and an indispensable area of research for local history studies. In recent years, the Harbin municipal government has placed great emphasis on preserving the city's historical and cultural heritage. It has allocated funds to restore the New Synagogue and the Jewish Cemetery. The Heilongjiang Provincial Archives has invested considerable resources in digitizing paper-based materials for archival preservation. These original documents are now housed there as archives of the Jewish community. While archivists are responsible for managing these records, they are not researchers. Access to these overseas documents is subject to strict regulations and requires formal procedures. To date, 15 volumes of compiled Jewish files and documents have been published. Efforts are underway to collaborate with international publishers to translate these volumes into English for global distribution, making them accessible to scholars and interested readers worldwide.

2) Throughout history, whether in ancient Kaifeng, modern Harbin, or contemporary Shanghai, Jewish communities have found a unique haven for survival and development in China. This is a testament to the profound and inclusive nature of the Chinese culture, which values diversity and harmony. We advocate for equal exchanges and peaceful coexistence among all ethnic groups, paving the way for global harmony.

3) UNESCO Experts conducted an on-site investigation in Harbin, drawing the attention of the Committee for Historical and Cultural Affairs of the Heilongjiang Provincial Committee of CPPCC. The former chairman, Du Yuxin, held a meeting with visiting experts. This meeting also included representatives from the Heilongjiang Provincial Archives and the Harbin Municipal Archives, as

well as scholars researching Jewish history. Following the meeting, the experts examined the Jewish archives and visited Jewish heritage sites. They affirmed the global significance of the Harbin Jewish archives. Dr. Yang Kaijing, Chair of the Memory of the World Knowledge Center in Macau, wrote a nine-page report applying to include Harbin Jewish archives and architectural complex in the World Heritage list. The report elaborates on the concept of historical heritage, categorizing examples of the heritage in and beyond China, while discussing the connotation, significance, evaluation criteria, and guiding principles of the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. Dr. Yang made three recommendations: A) Joint Application by China and Israel: The Israel Association of Former Residents of China in Tel Aviv maintains the magazine *Jewish Life*, which documented Jewish activities in Harbin and the Far East from its founding in 1920 until it ceased in 1943. Harbin does not have this publication, whereas Israel possesses a complete collection. B) Start Small and Simple: Begin by applying for the registration of Jewish birth records, which is a straightforward and non-controversial process, as these records have already been compiled. Although the Heilongjiang Provincial Archives has submitted Jewish archives for inclusion in the National Archives Heritage Register, priority was given to the Japanese Unit 731 Site due to quota limitations. The possibility of a joint application by China and Israel is still being explored.

4) Key Features: The compilation process incorporated extensive scholarly research, achieving the following: A) Names were not translated phonetically but based on their original meanings, highlighting the cultural significance of Jewish names. For example, “Moisei” was translated as “Moses,” and “Abram” as “Abraham.” B) The term “Jewish Synagogue” was adopted instead of “Jewish Meeting Hall.” C) The order of names follows the original documents in translation, some surname first, first name last; or vice versa, depending on its regional nature.

5) The history of the Jewish community in Harbin is an essential part of the broader narrative of the Jewish diaspora. The publication of Jewish archives brings this history to life, offering a glimpse into the community’s values and aspirations, their strong sense of community, and their spirit of mutual support and friendship.