

Nostalgia **vs.** **Historical Reality**

By Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan

怀旧与史实，丹·本·康耐安教授

Heilongjiang University – School of Western Studies
Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, PR China 2007

中国黑龙江省哈尔滨市黑龙江大学西语学院英语系



Nostalgia vs. Historical Reality*

Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan

怀旧与史实，丹·本·康耐安教授

Heilongjiang University – School of Western Studies

Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, PR China 2007

中国黑龙江省哈尔滨市黑龙江大学西语学院英语系

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." --- L.P. Hartley

To understand the active Jewish experience in Harbin, one must grasp the meaning of the community's daily existence – policy choices made by leadership, individual aspirations, and actions taken by the collective and by individuals. It can be done correctly by avoiding accounts based on selective memory – romantic notions or nostalgia. The window through which historical reality can be presented should be opened by a collaboration process between the journalist-reporter who searches the facts and the historian who examines and interprets them.

Starting at the end of the 19th century and for almost 60 years, thousands of Jewish people made Harbin their new home, and their legacy is visible in several sites around the city until today. It is visible, however, only to those who are familiar with it, not to others, because what has been written on the subject of the Harbin Jewish community is based, in parts, on inaccurate or nostalgic account. There are only few texts that narrate the Harbin Jewish reality in full.

The most visible of nostalgic accounts published in recent years have been several photo albums, "memoirs", academic papers, and autobiographies. Some were published in China in order to paint a picture that helps reach particular political or economical aims, and others either drew materials from incomplete reports or were based on nostalgic and selective recollections.

A 2006-2007 investigation by the influential Southern Metropolis Magazine of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences reveals for the first time an official policy that guides activities on "Jewish research" there. In fact, HCSS's central promotion site described its mission like this: "...attracting [Jewish] business investments as the tenet of our existence and purpose..."⁽¹⁾ To achieve such aim they have reproduced history and painted it with romantic colors as "heaven" and "paradise" in their two publications of *The Jews in Harbin*⁽²⁾ albums, and a *Collection of Research Papers* published in 2004. Another such publication is *The Jews in China*⁽³⁾ a photo album described by the publisher as "An extensive, mainly photographic record, of the various Jewish communities in China from the mid-19th century through to the 1950s." There are several other publications that follow a similar direction.⁽⁴⁾ *Jews in Harbin: a Historical Perspective* by Xu Xin of Nanjing University; *The influence and historical effect of Jews to Harbin in the first half of 20th century* by Lishiliang Yangyanjun who writes in her conclusion "This is also the historical witness of friendly intercourse between Sino-Israeli relations, and directly affects economic and cultural friendly relations and cooperation of people of these two nations."

* Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan, Heilongjiang University - School of Western Studies: This is an expended version of a paper presented at the 2006 "International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews". Harbin, June 17, 2006

Among publications printed elsewhere are *The Homesick Feeling of the Harbin Jews* by Teddy Kaufman[†], a native “Harbinski” and the president of the Association of Former Residents of China in Israel; and *Charitable Activities of Harbin Jewish Association* by Prof. B. B. Romanova, Dept. of Political History, Khabarovsk State Normal University, among many others.

This paper argues that as years goby nostalgic accounts tend to take over what I call ‘historical reality’, and that these should not be looked upon as complete reports of personal life and experiences because they lack full and intimate historical encounters and are based on official policy of a present and personal selective memorabilia. They omit anti-Semitic and fascist conflicts under the Russian rule, they neglect the Japanese occupation, the state of terror – the horrors of kidnappings and murders, and they give no reasons for the dramatic dwindling of the Jewish community during the 1930s and 40s.

In an album titled *'The Pictorial History of Harbin'* published by the Harbin department of City Planning, there is no mention of the Jewish active experience in Harbin. Within the album’s more than 200 pages, there is just one small photo of a building described as "a Jewish Hall". Those few who are familiar with the photo know it is the New Synagogue of Harbin. But, to those who have no knowledge of the city’s Jewish history, there is neither explanation nor any textual account of a Jewish community existence.

There are several examples to insufficient language, misrepresentations and lack of tangible information.

In his words of congratulation in the preface of the pictorial album *'Jews in Harbin'*, Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel, writes⁽⁵⁾: "The Jewish community of Harbin was lively and sparkling, reaching its peak of activity between the two World Wars and then thinning out to **nonexistence**."

It is followed by Teddy Kaufman’s letter in his preface to the same album⁽⁶⁾: "We, who were either born in Harbin, or came to live there for some time... still bear in our hearts the memories of our Harbin, because each of us has a Harbin of his own."

Kaufman's decades of collecting and preserving materials at the Israel Association of Former Residents in China, has presented historians with a key to a wider window. The key is in the periodical "Bulletin", and in the collection of Jewish newspapers published in Harbin. Here, through a journalistic narrative, one is able to find a less nostalgic picture of Harbin's Jewish people and their community. However, his book *“The Jews of Harbin Live on in My Heart”*⁽⁷⁾ is a limited nostalgic account that can not lead to understanding of the community’s functions.

In a letter to the author, dated May 27, 2006, Theodore Orosz of Valley Stream New York wrote:

"Our visit to Harbin was really the highlight of our trip to Asia. I had heard so much about the place for so long, but could never really get a ‘fix’ things because it was so remote, physically, and conceptually. Now it is all real for me."⁽⁸⁾

One should be interested in what Mr. Orosz has heard, why he "could never really get a ‘fix’ things because it was so remote, physically, and conceptually", and how it has become "all real..." for him. His answers to these questions, arrived short time after his first letter, but they are still vague. Never the less, in his later letter he reaffirms

[†] In collaboration with Mr. Qu Wei of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences.

the thesis that only those who have had a direct or straight excess to a particular past can find themselves there:

"I had heard about Harbin, read about it, seen pictures and we had quite a bit of Chinese stuff in our house (rugs, ivory, dishes etc). But I really needed to see it to understand it fully."⁽⁹⁾

But what about those who are without a direct connection or excess? Can they depend, while writing historical accounts, on nostalgic and romantic notions? Should those who engage in research minimize their efforts to uncover historical facts by summing a past as "nonexistent" - the state of nonentity or unreality? And what can one learn from others "secrets of the heart... because each of us has a Harbin of his own"?

In his autobiography "Darchai b'Derech Rabim" (1981) Mordechai-Modka Olmert (1908-1998), Ehud Olmert's father, opened a small window into the daily existence of a person, a family, and their relevant communal associations. But the selective and nostalgic writings of his Harbin experiences gave rise to manipulation to suite a certain point of view, direction, or orientation, favored by some later.

In an e-mail letter dated October 14, 2006 Wayne Mellon⁽¹⁰⁾ of the USA writes: "The reason that I am e-mailing you is to find out if any of you know of resources regarding the Jewish community of Harbin. My mother, grandmother and great grandmother were all born in or near Harbin... I believe that my great grandmother was interred in a Japanese concentration camp. If you know of anyone in China that could help me in my research I would appreciate it."

There are but few accounts in regard to the Harbin Jewish community under the Japanese occupation. What was Mr. Mellon's great grandmother experience? Why she was interred in a Japanese concentration camp and what was the outcome of her ordeal? Where there others in the Jewish community of Harbin that encountered similar experiences?

Researcher should perform a delicate surgery of each individual's heart to uncover and understand the meaning of a collective past existence. Not painting a general nostalgic picture in black and white of what may but not have been.

Historical facts come to illuminate aspects of the human experience -- including deep and rigorous scholarship, pioneering and innovative pedagogy, and a commitment to serve society or societies-- if we are to create a better understanding.

To look at history in the broadest and realistic possible manner and to try to learn from this should be the purpose done here in Harbin, in Israel or elsewhere, on the subject of the Jews of Harbin. We must learn from history if we are to have a better understanding of a future anywhere.

Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and journalists in particular, understand the immediacy of the impact of reality. The concern I have is in and about the way in which nostalgia may override scientific research and avoid truthful facts in the examination of historical reality. History is for all people. But if it lacks reality it may give rise to historical mistakes, controversies and intentional or unintentional misguides.

Prof. Jing Wang of MIT⁽¹¹⁾ suggests that "...materials that have to do with history, culture, society, and many other subjects that humanists and social scientists teach... are bound to generate controversies because no two audiences are alike..." That is absolutely

true because one perceives history according to his own experience, understanding and accumulated “knowledge”. The problem with “no two audiences are alike” is in that many historians chose to edit history not to present it as was.

Nostalgia describes a feeling of longing for the past, often idealized and unrealistic. It is an act of looking sentimentality to bygone things while generalizing or omitting many aspects of existence.

Dr. Linda Hutcheon, in her brilliant writing *'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern'*⁽¹²⁾ suggests that "...Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power... This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present..."

"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." said L. P. Hartley, in *'The Go-Between'*⁽¹³⁾.

And Prof. Lorraine Attreed of the College of the Holy Cross⁽¹⁴⁾ suggests that "...History is a written narrative of events of the past. It is the aggregate of past events, and the continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future." Thus, written history is a record or narrative description of past events; an account, a chronicle, a record, a report.

What and how different was the past? Can the past be treated like an alien country, to be visited now and then as a rushing tourist or a guest of the moment, who sees only what was selected for him and never can questions its nature, its shaping by professionals, the public and individuals alike, and the meaning of the past to all in both public and private roles?

Realism is commonly defined as a concern for fact or reality and rejection of the impractical and visionary. "Historical reality" refers to the real facts and events of the past as they occurred historically, whether they were external or internal to the subject confronted by them.

Historical reality deals with the actuality of existence. It is not fiction. There is no concern with the prettification of what was not with its ugliness. It is a presentation of the past as is, as it was. In general, historical reality stands opposed to wishful fantasies and to everything within the mind that may be said to answer to the pleasure none-pleasure principle and its principal mechanism: hallucinatory wish-fulfillment.

It helps reader enter into the experiences and feelings of those who lived in the past. It helps develop critical thinking through comparison of past and present, and gives perspective on both periods. It brings a feeling of the continuity of time; see the present in context of past and future. It helps understand that there are not only political, social, and economic changes over time, but that there are universal needs and desires of individuals that are the same throughout different time periods. Moreover, it helps us see interdependence of all people⁽¹⁵⁾.

The general frame of reference makes a distinction between two levels of scientific information, that is, descriptive/explanatory information - knowledge/insight into historical reality, and procedural information - skills to attain knowledge/insight and to evaluate its validity⁽¹⁶⁾.

The absence of historical reality and the presentation of nostalgia as a mean to recording of the past may bring an "end of history"⁽¹⁷⁾. It is a phrase that comes from GWF Hegel and, more popularly, from Karl Marx. I bring it here out of concern to Olmert's notion that the Jewish community of Harbin "thinned out to nonexistence."

History remains an irreducible component of human societies, and that you cannot understand their total development without a reference to their reality of existence and values.

Because I have seen a tendency to rely on nostalgia, often idealized and unrealistic, and because there is an inclination to look sentimentality to the past while generalizing or omitting parts of its existence, a researcher should not be an editor. He should promote, utilize, and depend on historical realism with all its fortunate or unfortunate twists.

I am not a historian by training. I come from the disciplines of text critique, analysis, Western journalism, and the handling of public information. I suggest that the study and research of Harbin's Jewish life, or any other subject, should be done with a narrative journalistic approach.

Most publications about Harbin attempt to paint the city as a pastoral heaven for its Jewish community. Was it such a reality? Was it a true "Jewish Far-East Paradise – [where] the inhabitants of Harbin, endowed with a hospitality and kindness unique to them, warmly accepted into their midst the Jews, perpetual travelers in foreign lands. In return, Jews who came to this city fell deeply in love with the land and people of Harbin. Harbin became a paradise for Jews who found a home in the Far East."?(¹⁸)

A closer study of Harbin, from its inception in 1896 through the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, the end of Czarist rule and the Bolshevik revolution, the Japanese invasion and occupation of the region and the city in 1931, and the formation of the People's Republic of China, reveals a different picture.

"My late Grandfather, Sol Kerson resided in Harbin in 1915..." writes Paul E. Kerson in a letter to the author dated August 2, 2007. "He had lived through and survived the Pogrom of 1905 at the age of 10. He was determined to escape to freedom, and at the age of 18 in 1913 he commenced walking east. He could not go west because of the Czar's bureaucrats and army, determined to prevent anyone from leaving their jurisdiction. Sol walked and hitchhiked to Cathrinaslav, Ukraine, where he managed to board the newly built Trans-Siberian Railroad. He got off in Irkutsk, and found his way to Harbin, which he described as an 'international city'. It took him the better part of two years to get this far. In 1916, with three other Russian Jews and lead by one Chinese with one salami and one bottle of vodka, he escaped the Eurasian land mass in a rowboat and crossed the Sea of Japan. He walked across Japan. This took six months. He then boarded a freighter in Kobe and arrived in Seattle in 1916, penniless... Sixteen productive American citizens now exist because the Harbin Jewish Community and Chinese City of Harbin took Sol under its wing in 1915, and somehow helped him into that rowboat. I learned this story in detail on June 2, 1973, 34 years ago this summer [2007], when I was 22. I interviewed Sol extensively in his retirement high rise apartment in North Miami Beach, Florida. Sol was then 78, but he remembered his odyssey clear as a bell..."

When I interviewed Sol in 1973, Ida [Sol's wife and Paul's grandmother] did not want to tell her immigration story, or perhaps could not. American Jewish immigrants

of their generation were often reluctant to recount their heroic odysseys. They very much wanted to blend into American life, and not be called ‘greenhorns’...⁽¹⁹⁾

For most descendants of immigrants, their ancestors’ past remains unclear and often a mystery. Only few agree in their later years to tell their real stories. It is a phenomena that makes the unveiling of past accounts difficult and in many cases inaccurate. But some first-hand accounts do exist.

“Between 1921 and 1931 life was not as comfortable in Soviet-dominated Manchuria as it had been before 1921. Unemployment remained higher than it had been. The levels of prosperity reached between 1907 and 1920 did not return, and there was considerable tension between Soviet and non-Soviet Russians who lived as neighbors. During those years the city’s population declined considerably from its post-civil war peak.”⁽²⁰⁾

But economic hardships were not the only concern. Harbin that was conceived and developed by Russians in 1896, became, in a sense, a mirror of the Russian society as a whole – an arena to political, religious, economical, and social conflicts, as well as a fertile soil to the Russian extreme right.

“The aforementioned semi-fascist Russian extreme right has usually been called the "Black Hundred" (chernosotensy). The name refers to the paramilitary groups that belonged to the Union of Russian People (Soiuz Russkogo Naroda), the most important rightist party that had emerged before the first Duma elections in 1906. The new message of the Black Hundred was that the fundamental confrontation of the contemporary world was "Russia versus Jewry." The idea of a Jewish conspiracy against Russia was gaining ground among Russian nationalists mainly as a result of the appearance of the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Protokoly Sionskikh Mudretsov), an infamous forgery attributed to the tsarist secret service.”⁽²¹⁾

The anti-Jewish dimension of the Russian ‘civil’ idea had become a key issue in Russian domestic politics already by the 1880s and mirrored itself in Russian communities across Manchuria. Although this phenomenon differed from the traditional confessional anti-Semitism that had been cultivated for many generations by the Russian Orthodox Church, the new kind of anti Jewish sentiment was based on what was to be called “political anti-Semitism”.⁽²²⁾

In her collection of poems *Skin for Comfort*⁽²³⁾, Nora Krouk[‡] paints a grim view on her personal history as an émigré in Harbin. Her poem “Yesterday” addresses the subject of Stalin’s atrocities from the invaluable perspective of a voice with an intimate connection to the victims:

... Efim and I dream collective dreams; He saves his Father Stops them in time;
They’re still in China He wakes with a smile; E. not all is lost; But I descend to

[‡] Nora Krouk was born in Harbin, China to a Jewish mother and Polish Catholic father, with a Russian Orthodox uncle and family friends of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. She considered herself Russian. Nora began writing Russian poetry in childhood, switching to English while living in Hong Kong, where a collection, *Even Though* (now disowned) was published. She also worked as a Russian-language journalist in Shanghai, and as an English-language journalist in Hong Kong, for the *South China Morning Post* and other newspapers. Throughout her life Nora has been obsessed with languages, studying and becoming fluent in German, French and Spanish, as well as Russian and English. She translates Russian poetry into English. Her Russian poetry has been published in magazines in Shanghai, *New York's New Review*, *Yigud Yotsei Sin* in Israel, an anthology of Russian poets in Australia and another of Russian poets from China published in St Petersburg (*Winter of Russian Buker*). Her poetry in English has also been widely published and anthologised. In 1993 she won the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Jean Stone award. Nora Krouk lives in Sydney. She is married with two sons, one now deceased, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

the permafrost of the frozen bones; back to 1937 USSR and the mincer grinds; Krouk Lipa Yankelev; from Harbin; Spy for a foreign Power; On the same day; they collected Guita; seventeen year old enemy of the state; Wife Liza; taken in '38; Young Lilya; left to fend for herself; step back to the edge back to the walls'; congealed horror back to the cell; with the blood-sticky floor; back to improbably weird confessions; Signed

Jews came to Harbin for various reasons, among them economic opportunities as well as what they thought will offer a “pogrom-free” environment.

In a paper presented at the International Seminar on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews in 2004, Mara Moustafine put new light on life in Harbin in what has been described as “heaven” or referred to as “Harbin became a paradise for Jews who found a home in the Far East”⁽²⁴⁾.

“For Jews of the Tsarist empire, Russian Manchuria was the land of opportunity. The discriminatory laws and restrictions which prevailed in the empire proper - like those confining the Jews to live in the Pale of Settlement, excluding them from certain professions and setting quotas for their numbers in schools and other educational institutions - did not apply there. Most importantly, there were no pogroms and little overt anti-Semitism, at least until the late 1920s... During the turbulent civil war years, while its political status was in limbo, the CER zone was a staging ground for the anti-Bolshevik White Guard and Cossack armies. With this came a rise in anti-Semitism, as the Cossacks regarded all Jews as Bolsheviks who deserved to be punished as perpetrators of the revolution... In 1919, my great-grandfather Girsh Onikul was captured by one of Baron Ungern-Sternberg’s men, though miraculously he escaped alive... In 1924, after protracted negotiations, China recognising the Soviet Government and agreed to joint Soviet-Chinese administration of the CER (China Eastern Railway)... the division into White émigrés and Soviets would have far-reaching consequences for those who remained in Manchuria during the 13 years of Japanese occupation under the guise of the Manchukuo puppet regime. Life for Jews in Manchuria deteriorated seriously after the Japanese occupation. The Japanese... associated closely with militant anti-Soviet Whites, such as the Russian Fascist Party (RFP), whose ideology of anti-Bolshevism and nationalism was laced with virulent anti-Semitism.

In the early 1930s, Russian thugs linked to the RFP engaged in a campaign of kidnappings, extortion and murder against wealthy businessmen, mainly Jews, masterminded by the Japanese military police, the *Kempeitai*. Faced with a declining economy, the rise in banditry, anti-Semitism, the takeover of their businesses by the Japanese and political intimidation (particularly of those who had Soviet citizenship), many Jews left Manchuria... For many of those who stayed on in Harbin during the 13 years of Manchukuo, life was a harrowing experience. Suddenly people, who for years had lived side by side, united by their Russian origins, became identified by the characteristics which divided them: ‘White émigré’ or ‘Soviet’, ‘Orthodox Christian’ or ‘Jew’.

In garnering support of Russian émigrés for their occupation, the Japanese rekindled old dreams and prejudices. As a mechanism to control the Russian population in Manchuria, in 1934 the Japanese established the Bureau of Russian Émigré Affairs in Manchukuo (BREM). Nominally under Russian control, it was headed by a succession of White Army generals and run by members of the RFP

and their sympathisers, thereby giving implicit sanction to their fiercely anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic ideology.

All adult émigré Russians were required to register with the BREM. Only then could they receive identity papers, residence permits, employment cards and travel documents. Those who did not were denied employment and education for their children. Though his brother and some other relatives “converted” to émigré status, my grandfather insisted that being stateless—“a citizen of nowhere”—was too risky in the face of Japanese aggression and his family remained ‘Soviets’.

As a result, my mother Inna was excluded from school and had to study at home with a tutor. Later, when contact between ‘émigrés’ and ‘Soviets’ was forbidden she could no longer study music or participate at concerts at Madame Gershgorina’s music school. Nor could she belong to either of Harbin’s two Jewish youth organizations... At first, she would walk her friends to meetings or sporting events to share a little of the excitement, then have to turn around and go home. Eventually, even this was stopped as émigré parents were warned there might be consequences if their children associated with ‘Soviet’ friends.

But even émigré status did not save my grandfather’s brother, Ruvim. In 1940, the Japanese arrested him and took over his retail business at Harbin market. Ironically, they kept my grandfather on because of his experience in the wholesale business, making him an adviser in their meat monopoly association. Only in 1943 was he removed at the behest of BREM officials, who from the documents I uncovered in the BREM archive in Khabarovsk, concocted a case full of bizarre anti-Semitic and anti-Soviet innuendo to secure his removal.

Still, the family fared much better than friends and relatives in Hailar, some of whom were imprisoned by the Japanese as alleged Soviet agents; others were among the 47 Jews and ‘Soviets’ rounded up and beheaded by the Japanese on the eve of the arrival of the Soviet Red Army in August 1945.”⁽²⁵⁾

To better understand Harbin as an unusual phenomena; a Russian founded city within China, one must read Dr. David Wolff’s brilliant account[§] as reported in his “To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914.”⁽²⁶⁾

“Yakov is seriously ill and cannot write to you. And his illness is of the kind that used to be treated in Harbin by Dr. Mozgovoi. Thus the family of Berkeley’s own Simon Karlinsky was secretly warned in a letter from an aunt that return to the Soviet Union from Russian Harbin in 1935 could be dangerous: Dr. Mozgovoi had been the prison director in Harbin, so the letter meant that Uncle Yakov had been arrested. Increasingly alarmed by fascism and the brutality of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, many Russian residents of Harbin fled in the 1930s to the Soviet Union, Israel, and, of course, California. In this way the multinational tapestry of Harbin society unraveled; the Chinese city of three million that stands in its place today has only its fanciful architecture as a reminder of its origins.

David Wolff’s [study], is concerned not with Russian Harbin’s dramatic denouement, but with its debut on the world stage at the climax of colonial ambition in late Imperial Russia.”⁽²⁷⁾

[§] "This outstanding work, the first scholarly history of the formative years of the city of Harbin, is much more than urban or regional history. It responds to a need to understand...a unique experience, where local, national, and world cultures, economies, and politics intersected."—Thomas Lahusen, Duke University

The relatively few reports, written by scholars, shade some light on Harbin and its turbulence, and some times confused past. But by in large, most accounts, official and private, tend to be edited to suite the writers' emotions and political goals. A discussion about Harbin's past communities, the interaction between them, the daily tensions created by different elements within them and their reasons, are unfortunately buried in memories that tend to smooth and beautify those years. Furthermore, many of the "new" reports are based on ignorance, incomplete "studies" and denials.

Interesting narrative writing, although narrow and incomplete, can be found in Prof. W. Z. Robinson's⁽²⁸⁾ speech at the International Forum on Economic Cooperation with World Jews held in Harbin in 2006.

In the first years of the 1930s Japan was expanding its political, economic, and military resources on its China-Manchukuo strategy to the limits. In 1933 the Japanese looked for ways "to centralize their influence and control over the Jews with BREM [the Bureau of Russian Emigrant Affairs under Japanese auspices] serving as a role model **,"...

"According to one astute observer, in 1937 the Japanese approached Dr. Abraham Kaufman, president of the Hebrew Association of Harbin, asking him to organize an umbrella organization of Hebrew associations in China and Japan. Dr. Kaufman complied with this "offer that he could not refuse", both in order to win Japanese support for "diminishing the rampant Anti-Semitism inspired by White Russians in Harbin. Even more important, Kaufman hoped to persuade the Japanese to offer protected areas for settlement by Jews fleeing Nazi Europe". Thus, the "Jewish National Council of the Far East" at the close of the final



Japanese Army troops enter Harbin and march along Zhong Yang Dajie - 1932. Archives - The Sino-Israel Research and Study Center at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies.

** On December 18, 1933 Vladimir Kislitsin had established the Bureau of Russian Emigrant Affairs (BREM) under Japanese auspices. The Russian leaders emphasized the fact that the committee was the officially endorsed body of the white Russian community..."

conference in December 1939, Chairman Kaufman signed a petition to the Japanese minister, Abe Nobuyuki, expressing his gratitude for the “protection without prejudice” that the Japanese authorities had given Jews in East Asia.”^{††} The settlement plan failed, both because of active aggressive Japanese activity against China^{‡‡} and the Soviet Union^{§§}, and because the Jews of America, led by the president of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, refused to give any support, financial or political, to enemies of America.

But Dr. Kaufman, [who “visited” Japan twice and had audience with high officials as well as the Emperor himself], saw the necessity of counter-acting the danger stemming from the newly signed “Agreement on Cultural Cooperation” between Japan and Germany. Certainly, it would have endangered all Jews of the Far East if an anti-Japanese policy had been adopted by the Jewish organizations of the Far East. On December 6, 1938, the Japanese minister of foreign affairs, Prince Konoé Fumimaro, adopted at a five ministers meeting three “articles” clarifying the Japanese position on the Jewish issue. First, Japan repudiated Nazi Germany's extreme Anti-Semitic policy. Secondly, treating Jews (including those of Manchukuo and China) in a fair manner; thirdly, Japan wished to maintain, now and also in the future, good relation with the U.S.A.”... This policy statement was transmitted to Japanese official installations abroad...”

The “Fugu Plan”, a secret Japanese plot designed to recruit “world Jewish money” and use it to enhance Japan's war torn economy, and to find a solution to the “Jewish problem”, did not succeed in Manchukuo. Records of Dr. Kaufman's deals with the Japanese are hidden and not to be found (except, maybe, in the locked and well guarded “Jewish Community Archives” in Harbin). One may get only a very narrow sense of the atmosphere of the time from the Jewish or other official newspapers published then in Harbin.

The city was, by no means, a paradise or heaven, to its inhabitants. Plagues, devastating floods, criminal and fascist gangs ruling the streets terrifying everyone, kidnapping and murders, were all part of the daily agenda of the citizens' life. Those were just part of the scene. During the Japanese occupation lives were controlled by military orders. Many private establishments – residential and commercial – were confiscated, most social activities were stopped and special permits were issued only for an extraordinary reason.

Collaborating official testimonies are hard to be found, but they do exist. It takes a journalistic approach, of letting both one's legs and fingers work, to find many documents stored in dusty boxes in attics and basements of former residents (if they are still alive) or with their descendants.

Some of them are willing to open the boxes and share information, for their own reasons. Some have questions that they want to solve, and others need to put missing pieces into their family roots. What is interesting is that many do not trust “official” organs or associations, thus willing to participate and help only what may seem to be individual or journalistic requests.

^{††} Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking. The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, Penguin Books, 1997

^{‡‡} The battle of Nanking, August-13 - December 1938

^{§§} July 11-August 10, 1938; Halingol and at Lake Hassan



Charlie Clurman's 1937 Betar membership card. Archives - The Sino-Israel Research and Study Center at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies. (Courtesy of Irene Clurman)

In 1997, Irene Clurman, an American journalist interviewed Charlie, her father who was born in Harbin and was sent by his father, Izko Chaim Gershowitz Clurman, for new and secured life in the United States⁽²⁹⁾.

“Grandfather (Izko Chaim Gershowitz Clurman – in Russian, Isak Grigori) built this building [83 Yamskaya Street, today Daan Street] in 1936 as a Japanese hotel during the occupation of Manchuria. The last building Grandfather built before his death, it occupied almost one square block... Because of the long Harbin winters, the building was under construction about two years. It was built largely from recycled materials salvaged by Grandfather. Essentially we were wreckers and dismantled everything, even a huge circus building built from

wood, freight railway cars and a couple of river boats. This made for excellent well-seasoned building materials...

The Japanese Hotel on Yamskaya Street was built as much for public relations as for income and profit. It was never sold. After the war, the Chinese expropriated it. It was well built over about one square block and heated by steam heat with a boiler fired by hard coal. The father of Efim Krouk was a plumber and he installed it. After the war, Efim moved to Hong Kong, then Australia with his wife Nora..." [see Nora Krouk entry above]

In a letter to his daughter dated June 16, 1997, Charlie offered the following comments on the difficulties of life in Manchuria at that time in history:

"...Japanese troops marched into Harbin and gradually occupied the entire country in 1931 when I was 13 years old and Johnny was 3. I stood on the street corner and watched Japanese mechanized Army units roll into the city. There was no organized opposition as the main body of Chinese Nationalist troops under Chiang Kai-Shek was engaged in a civil war against the Chinese Communists and thought it was more important to defeat the Communists than to fight the Japanese. The Chinese government in Nanking had no interest in Manchuria. To them it was just an uncivilized faraway border state. The central government also was very weak and riddled with graft.

Not unlike the German Nazis, the Japanese did not reveal their final plans and worked gradually to take over the entire country. Manchuria was destined to become an economic base to support Japanese military adventures to the south. We were totally defenseless and had no one to turn to for help and protection. The final stroke came when Red Russians sold their half of the Chinese Eastern Railway and pulled back to Russia. Gradually, like the Nazis, the Japanese tightened their hold on Manchuria and then the atrocities really reared their ugly heads. Japanese were not anti-Semites like Germans. They just wanted to eliminate the ruling class and Jews and Chinese merchants were it...

Your questions refer to this period and the conditions that prevailed under which we were living and trying to survive. Father for one did not survive. I am sure you have heard all this before. I consider this period as the beginning of World War II.

The White Russian remnants of the defeated Imperial Russian Army went to work for the Japanese and made sport of denouncing Jewish people to the Japanese Kempetai [secret police]. Father had good connections with the Japanese since we traded with them before the occupation. He used to help our people when they were taken by the Kempetai [headquarters for interrogation]. Unfortunately, when he was taken, there was no one to help him. I was already in the United States for six months when he was taken. Father actually sent me out of Manchuria to save me and so he would have someone abroad to help the family...

In an audio tape made on October 28, 1982, in Reno Nevada, Ethel Rachel (Roza) Clurman⁽³⁰⁾ [Isak Grigori's wife] tells the story of the family. It was followed later by another audio interview with Charlie Clurman:

"This guy was kidnaped and killed, Mark Abramovich. He was a very good athlete [pointing to a photograph in his album]...

Isak Grigori carried a pistol when walking the streets of Harbin. He was also known to use his fists on people who got in his way – and sometimes men crossed the street to avoid running into him. Once while walking to synagogue, Isak Grigori saw some young Russians harassing an old bearded Rabbi. Even though he was wearing his Sabbath finery, Isak Grigori pulled the young men aside and beat them up. The family never made it to synagogue that day...

We had two shuls (synagogues), one called the “old shul” [synagogue] and one called the “new shul”. We belonged to the new shul. Jews take care of their own people. We built cheap residences called “barracki” [for the Jewish poor, especially the refugees fleeing the Russian Revolution and later, the Nazis]. We had a cheap dining room for the poor and a Jewish school, Talmud Torah. I never saw a Jewish beggar or a Jewish prostitute, criminal or dope addict. I never saw a Jewish man drunk on the street. Saturday was an alms day. All beggars called on businesses to collect alms. In a famine year, literally millions of [Chinese] people starved to death. Not Jews, though...

In May 1938, Isak Grigori disappeared^{***} while on his way to work in the lumberyard a few blocks from the family’s apartment building. No one ever saw him again. The family and the Harbin Jewish community believed that the Kempetai, the Japanese secret police, had taken him into custody tortured him to death and possibly buried him in a mass grave. Isak Grigori had always said that if he was taken, he would force his captors to kill him because he did not want to live humiliated and broken. He had often helped extricate people from police headquarters, but by 1938, most of the friends he had helped had left Harbin. The family was financially ruined because the Japanese confiscated many of Isak Grigori’s holdings. His refusal to give his cattle operation over to the Japanese was said to be the reason he was disappeared...

I think you will now understand these things better.”

Such accounts of Harbin’s political, social, religious, and imperial conquests are hidden within the memories of many of those who lived in the city and moved to other places. For many, however, nostalgic sentiments override historical reality.

The reasons for nostalgic presentations of the past are many. They may belong to a “psycho-historical” analysis, and this paper does not attempt to discuss them. It is another area of studies.

What this paper does is creating an argument for the necessity of historical presentations that are fully accounted for – in a journalistic way. The American journalist Edgar Snow gave a reviling and vivid account of Mao Zedong and China's struggle for independence⁽³¹⁾. His journalistic reports-books are serving historians until this very day.

Journalism is a discipline of collecting, verifying, reporting, and analyzing information gathered regarding current and past events, including trends, issues, and people. The purpose of a journalistic work is to inform—not to impress, beautify or

^{***} See Appendix 1 – Trying to hold records of her family properties, Ethel Clurman received official document from the Shanghai Ashcenazi Communal Association and the Manchukuo government stating that the desists Isak Grigori Clurman was her husband. The document was translated to Chinese and Russian. Dates differ because of Manchu, Russian Orthodox and International calendars used by the translators.

distort. Going through a logical process of questioning; what, why, who, when, where and how, its products are often described as the "first draft of history" that should be understood by all readers.

History, in order to educate and live on, is not a matter of secrets of one's heart. Nor should it be summed up as nonexistent.

It is natural that if the past is to matter at all, if it is to enrich our lives on any level, we must be aware of its nature, its shifting meanings, and its vulnerability to present adjustments, needs and alterations. That awareness is the goal of this and future works.

We are not the guardians of the soul and life of neither the Harbin Jewish community nor the Chinese-Jewish experience in its totality. But in the journey to historical relevancy the soul of Harbin and her communities may be unveiled fully.

The role of reporter-historian as a verifier and authenticator, through accuracy, independence and integrity, is unique. It is in the ability to be useful, to make people understand, know and think, that will help the past endure. While we figure out the reality of the past, we also guard the future.

Notes and References:

* Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan: Speech at the 2006 "International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews". Harbin, China, June 17-19, 2006

1. Su Ling, *An investigation of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences*. Southern Metropolis Magazine, Guangzhou, China April 2007.
2. Qu, Wei and Li Shuxiao editors, *The Jews in Harbin*, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, Harbin 2004. First edition 2004 and, second edition 2006 – English text by Prof. Dan Ben-Canaan.
3. Guang, Pan, *The Jews In China* Chinese-English Edition, China Intercontinental Press Beijing 2001 1st Edition Hardback 200pp ISBN 7801138813 AU\$166.50 [t] 300 x 235mm.
4. See Ben-Canaan, Dan *The Business of Stereotyping Business*. Heilongjiang University School of Western Studies 2007. Economy and business have been two key concepts in China's policy-making in the past twenty years. It is well understood here that in order to be an active player within the global community, China should be using both economics and business concepts to its advantage. According to a statement in the Harbin Jewish Research Center brochure its goals are "to study the successful experiences of Jewish people in economy, science and technology, culture and education." The center's literature expresses China's friendship with the Jewish people and says that the Chinese "look forward to their return." But in fact their established goals contradict their statements. Their intention has been from the start to display their ability to fulfill a mandate given several years earlier, to recruit "Jewish money" from around the world.
5. Ehud Olmert, Prime Minister of Israel words of congratulation in the new 2006 album edition.
6. See Teddy Kaufman's preface to the new 2006 album edition.
7. Kaufman, Theodore (Teddy); *The Jews of Harbin Live on in My Heart*. The Association of Former Jewish Residents of China in Israel – Profil Publishing House Israel. 2004
8. Letter of Theodore V. Orosz of Valley Stream New York, dated April 2006, after his visit to Harbin in April 2006.
9. Letter of Theodore V. Orosz of Valley Stream New York, dated May 27, 2006, after his visit to Harbin in April 2006.
10. Wayne Mellon, e-mail letter to the author, dated October 14, 2006.

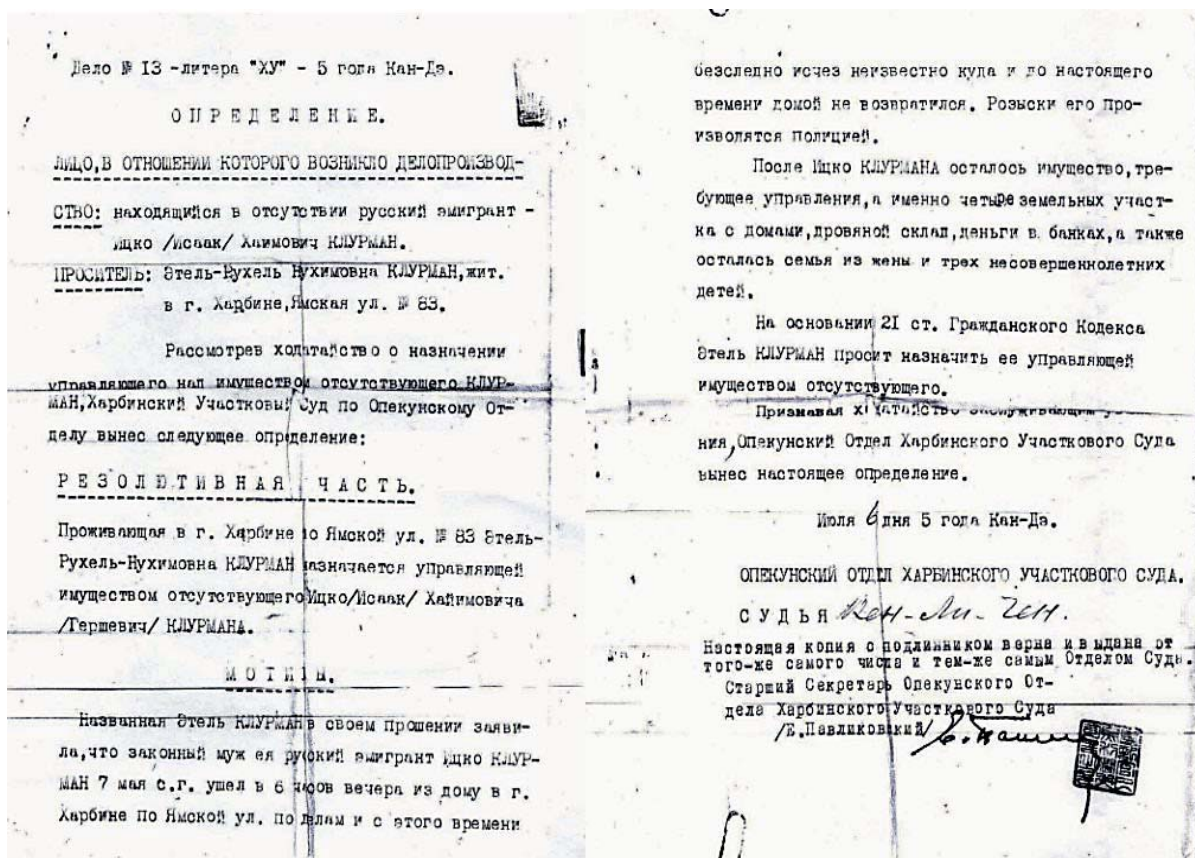
11. Prof. Jing Wang, Head, Foreign Languages & Literatures MIT. Chair, MIT Critical Policy Studies of China – Asian Newsletter May 6, 2006
12. Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern / Linda Hutcheon Ph.D., University of Toronto / January 19, 1998
13. Hartley, Leslie Poles, *The Go-Between* NYRB Classics, New York, March 31, 2002 edition (first published in 1953), is a novel (set shortly before Queen Victoria died in January 1901), rich in thematic interest. In the prologue to his book, L.P. Hartley says: ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there’. The novel paints a detailed picture of rural England at the beginning of the 20th century, when Hartley himself was only five years old. The leisurely life of the land-owning upper classes, with their bathing parties, cricket matches and dances, and their sometimes cruel manners and values, was to change radically as the century progressed.
14. Prof. Lorraine Attreed / Department of History, College of the Holy Cross / Making History: Interpreting the Past and Explaining Ourselves. 1998
15. Dr. Marilyn H. Stauffer, University of South Florida / Class Outline, June 23, 1997
16. Keyser, R. de & Vandepitte, P. Eds. 1998. Historical Formation. Design of Vision. VLG. Kuhn, D. 1991
17. See Prof. Francis Fukuyama article that forms the afterward to the second paperback edition of his *The End of History and the Last Man* (Simon & Schuster, 2006). Francis Fukuyama is Bernard L Schwartz Professor of International Political Economy and director of the International Development Program at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. He is also chairman of the editorial board of a new magazine, *The American Interest*.
18. Qu, Wei and Li Shuxiao editors, *The Jews in Harbin*, Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, Harbin 2004
19. Paul E. Kerson, a fund raising letter on behalf of “The American Friends of the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center at Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies. August 2, 2007
20. Adams, Brus F. *The re-emigration of Russians from China (1921-1960)*, University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA
www.sati.archaeology.nsc.ru/Home/pub/Data/LARYCH/?html=Adams.htm&id=1330
21. Kaikki Oikeudet Pidatetaan, *Modernisation and Conservative Backlash*. The University of Helsinki. 2007 Helsingin yliopisto. Chapter One
22. Ibid
23. Krouk, Nora, *Skin for Comfort*, IPeNEWS, Vol 6, No. 1 — ISSN 1442-0023
24. Mara Moustafine, *My family and its city: fifty years in Harbin*, paper presented at the International Seminar on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews, 30 August – 2 September 2004, Harbin
25. Moustafine, Mara, *Secrets and Spies: The Harbin Files*. Vintage 2002
26. Wolff, David, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1999. xix, 249 pp.
27. Elizabeth McGuire, book review *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914*. E. McGuire is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at Duke University where she is studying Sino-Soviet relations.
28. W. Z. Robinson, *The German Jews of Harbin – A Haven in Troubled Times*. Paper to the International Forum on Economic Cooperation with World Jews held in Harbin in 2006.
29. Building at 83 Yamskaya Street [Today Daan Street] - From information provided by Charlie Clurman to his daughter Irene Clurman in 1997.
30. Ethel Clurman was born Feb. 20, 1900 in Odessa, Russia. Died April 4, 1994, in Reno, Nevada. She was the wife of Isak Grigori Clurman (referred to on the tape as “Grandfather,”

because he was Irene's Grandfather). She was the mother of Charles (Ruvim) Clurman, (referred to on the tape as "Papa" because he was Irene's father); Sylvia (Tziva) Clurman and Israel (Izra, Izrick). She was the grandmother of Irene Clurman, Gregory Clurman, Nurit Epstein Eshtien, Rose Clurman Calander and Helen Clurman Pyne.

31. Snow, Edgar; *Red Star Over China*. Grove Press New York. 1968. (1938, 1944 Random House), 1961 (John K. Fairbank)

Appendix:

After Isak Grigori Clurman disappearance and murder by the Japanese or their surrogates, Ethel Clurman received official document from the Shanghai Ashcenazi Communal Association and the Manchukuo government stating that he was her husband. The document was translated to Chinese and Russian. Dates differ because of Manchu, Russian Orthodox and International calendars used by the translators.†††



1. Russian translation with a Manchurian government seal.

††† Documents at the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center archives - Heilongjiang University, School of Western Studies. The documents are shown here for the first time. Courtesy of Irene Clurman, Colorado, USA 2006.

הקהלה העברית האשכנזית השניא
Shanghai Ashkenazi Jewish Communal Association.

102, Route Tenant de la Tour
Tel. 75597

No. 152

Shanghai, February 28th, 1946

TRANSLATION.

Case No. 13 - letter XY - 5th year of KAN-OR

D E C R E E.

The person in respect of whom the case was brought.

Russian emigrant Itzke (Isaac) Chaimovich Gleurman being absent
Applicant: Ethel Rachel Nuhimovna Gleurman, residing in the city
of Harbin, Yamskaya Street No. 83.

Examining the application about the appointment of an executrix
over the property of the missing Gleurman, the Harbin District Court
of guardianship issued the following decision:

RESOLUTION.

Residing in the city of Harbin, No. 83 Yamskaya Street, Ethel Rachel
Nuhimovna Gleurman is being appointed administratrix of the property
of the missing Itzke (Isaac) Chaimovich (Gershevich) Gleurman.

MOTIVES.

The said Ethel Gleurman in her application explained that her legal
husband, Russian emigrant, Itzke Gleurman on May 7th of this year 1938
at 6 o'clock p.m. left his home situated at Yamskaya Street in the
city of Harbin for his business, and since that time disappeared without
leaving any traces, and has not returned home till now. An inquiry is
being made by the Police Authorities.

After Itzke Gleurman, property remained wanting management, i.e. four
lots of ground with houses, a wooden Godown, money in Banks, also a
wife and three underage children.

On the basis of article 21 of the Civil Code Ethel Gleurman requests
to be appointed administratrix of the property of her missing husband.

Acknowledging the solicitation deserving consideration, the department
of guardianship of the Harbin District Court issued this decree

July 6th of the 5th year of KAN-OR
Guardianship Dept. of the Harbin District Court,
Judge Ven-Li-Chen

continued
P.T.O.

194

continued

The present copy is true, and was issued on the same date
by the same department of the Court.

Chief secretary of guardianship of the Dept. of the
Harbin District Court,

signed
Pavlikevsky

Per true translation from the Russian,
J. Breitel

J. Breitel
secretary



3. Official Manchurian government document. The date refers to "the 3rd year of the Emperor's reign".

