

Singapore, Manila, and Harbin

As Reference Points for Asian ‘Port Jewish‘ Identity

By [Jonathan Goldstein*](#)

The Jews of East and Southeast Asia resemble their European counterparts in one fundamental respect: both continents contain multitudes of geographically, linguistically, ethnically, and theologically diverse Jewish diasporas. In an attempt to generalize about the history of sixteenth to twentieth century Sephardi and Italian Jews living in Atlantic and Mediterranean seaports, historian David Sorkin advanced the concept of “port Jews.” [1] Some of Sorkin’s criteria may apply to East and Southeast Asian Jewish communities. What are these distinguishing traits and to what extent do they appear in Singapore, Manila and Harbin—three geographically, linguistically, ethnically, and theologically distinct reference points for Asian Jewish identity?

First, Sorkin cites the good fortune of Jewish merchants to be situated in societies that valued international trade. He emphasizes the specialized skills that Jews could then contribute to those communities, arguing that in an age without a developed banking system, these [Jewish] merchants had the great advantage of being able to do business with, and draw bills of exchange on, relatives, friends, or business associates whom they could trust. [2]

Because of these distinct capabilities, Jewish merchants assisted their host societies in the linkage of old Mediterranean trade routes with the Atlantic economy.

Second, Sorkin stresses the valuation of commerce. He argues that it was the precisely the commercial utility of Jews to host societies which valued international trade that assured Jews not just the right to settle but long-term, continuing residence in a polity. [3]

Third, the Jews’ commercial utility gained them forms of social acceptance and legal status over and beyond mere residential privilege. Examples of this phenomenon include the acceptance of Jews in chambers of commerce, the Masonic order, and honorary and appointed offices of municipal government. Their enhanced social status and legal privilege enabled Jews to move toward full emancipation.

Fourth, Sorkin notes significant intellectual ferment among Jews in these nurturing economic, political, and social contexts.

Rabbinic Judaism revitalized as ‘New Christians,’ or Jews who had converted to Christianity as a self-defence mechanism during the reign of the Inquisition and who were derided as ‘Marranos’ (pigs) by their Christian adversaries, were able to reconvert to their original faith. Others who had remained Jews all along had the opportunity to deepen their commitment to faith and practice in the relatively unrestricted environment of port cities. Still other Jews, without any formal exposure to the Enlightenment tracts of Voltaire, Locke, or Moses Mendelsohn, were able to access and imbibe a broad secular culture. Sorkin calls this phenomenon *haskalah avant la lettre*. Many of these *maskilim*, or “Enlightened Jews,” simultaneously retained and expanded upon Judaic beliefs. Sorkin cites the example of the Etz Haim Yeshiva of Amsterdam, which integrated secular

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subjects such as vernacular language, arithmetic and geography into a curriculum of Jewish subjects that included the independent study of the Bible and Hebrew language alongside study of the Talmud. [4]

Fifth, Sorkin offers a broad definition of “Jewish identity” as it existed in port cities, stressing that some Jews who were “lax if not altogether neglectful in observance... remained identifiable Jews through their loyalty to the community.” They expressed their secularized Jewish identity through philanthropy and political intercession. He cites the example of a Portuguese Jew who “did not keep the dietary laws, selectively observed the holidays, and in general questioned the authority of the Oral Law. Nevertheless he [was] always ready to contribute funds...to both secular and religious education...and to intercede with the authorities.” Sorkin describes “wealthy Sephardi merchants [in London] who lived like Christian gentlemen...at a distance from the synagogue.” They nevertheless continued “to support the community with their wealth and influence.” [5]

The philanthropic behavior and communal advocacy which Sorkin saw in the fifteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries had its counterpart in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish communities in Europe, the Americas, the Levant, and South Africa.

Forms of philanthropy and activism in these modern communities, like the earlier behavior Sorkin described, derived from a synagogue-based religion. These practices included the establishment of Jewish communal social service agencies, especially those serving migrants and immigrants; the endowment of settlement houses, soup kitchens, shelters for the infirm, aged, homeless and orphaned; the creation of youth, sport, fraternal, political, and Zionist organizations; and the founding of quasi-secular as well as explicitly religious schools, libraries, and publishing enterprises.

In an attempt to assess the extent to which these port Jewish characteristics apply in East and Southeast Asia, we will first examine Singapore, then Manila, and finally Harbin.

Singapore Baghdadi's Communal Origins and Commercial Activity Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Baghdadi Jewish merchants began moving eastward to Bombay, where they took advantage of the favorable economic conditions created by the British colonial presence. The pioneer Baghdadi immigrant to India was Suleiman Ibn Yakub, who was active in the Bombay opium export trade between 1795 and 1833. He and other Baghdadi Jews duplicated the economic strategies of contemporaneous Parsee merchants in India as well as those of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia entrepreneurs who had been trading in the Far East since 1784.

Those traders reinvested their opium profits in the import and export of other commodities, real estate development, and early forms of manufacturing, especially that of textiles. [6] In the case of the Baghdadi Jews, this strategy was perfected by David Sassoon [1772-1864], who fled persecution in Iraq and arrived penniless in Bombay in 1833. Within a generation, Sassoon and his sons built their own docks in Bombay harbour and were known as the “Rothschilds of the Orient.” [7]

Sassoon's sons extended their empire eastward to Calcutta, and by the mid-nineteenth century Baghdadi Jewish merchants reached Singapore. The Jewish community in this British colonial island/seaport/city resembled Sorkin's Atlantic and Mediterranean port Jews. Singapore Jews enjoyed residential permission, civic inclusion, and full commercial privileges from the moment of their arrival. Because they spoke Arabic (and

readily learned English but not Chinese) they tended to trade with other Baghdadi Jews as well as with ethnically Arab traders, particularly those from Hadramaut who had settled in India, Burma, Penang, Java, Sumatra, and Borneo.

Their major economic activity was the reexport Indian opium eastward to Canton, Macao, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. In 1858, when Yaakov Saphir visited Singapore on a fundraising mission for Jewish institutions in the Land of Israel, he wrote that for twenty Jewish families their means of livelihood was mainly the legalised opium trade that flourished between India and China and their generosity depended on the swings of the trade, for it was like putting money on the horns of a bull. [8]

Because of such fluctuations in the opium trade, Singapore Jews, like other opium merchants, began to invest their profits in more stable import and export commodities and in real estate. By 1907, Baghdadi trader and stockbroker Nissim Adis had built Singapore's Grand Hotel de l'Europe. For his private residence Adis built "Mount Sophia," described as "one of the finest mansions east of Suez." [9] In 1926 a Jewish merchant visiting from Shanghai marvelled that Singapore is an ideal place for trade, the country being peaceful and free from unrest and turmoil, to which China is afflicted. The ups and downs to which merchants are subjected [in China] are totally unknown in Singapore, which is under the benign rule of Great Britain. [10]

Menasseh Meyer was Singapore's supreme Jewish entrepreneur, and, by one account, "the community's revered benefactor." [11] He was born in Baghdad in 1846, raised in Calcutta, and arrived in Singapore in 1873 to join his uncle's opium trading business, the largest in the port. He expanded the firm's real estate holdings to include the Adelphi and Sea View hotels. By 1900 he owned about three fourths of the island. One contemporary described Meyer as "the richest Jew in the Far East," exceeding even the Sassoons. [12] Another source claims that Meyer "eventually owned more real estate in Singapore than any other person." [13] Meyer was knighted by Edward VII in 1906 and, by all accounts, dominated and shaped the identity of the Jewish community for sixty years. [14]

Singapore Baghdadis' Intensification of Belief and Quasi-secular Jewish Identities

The institutional and ideological evolution of Singapore's Baghdadi Jews followed the pattern of Sorokin's other port Jews, with the exception of the phenomenon of reconversion. There is no evidence of Marranos existing, let alone reconverting, in Singapore. In the nurturing political and economic environment of Singapore, traditional Rabbinic Judaic belief intensified. Simultaneously Jews embraced secular culture, local politics, and Zionism. Singapore historian Charles Buckley notes that the pioneering Jewish merchant Abraham Solomon, while having much to do with the synagogue, educated his children "in an English school here, an advantage Baghdad did not offer." [15] Many anglophilic Baghdadis, including Sir Menasseh Meyer, followed Solomon's example when it came to their children's education. Meyer also oversaw the building of the monumental Magen Aboth synagogue and its religious school [Talmud Torah]. In 1905, after a disagreement over who should run Magen Aboth, he built a second palatial synagogue, Chesed El, adjacent to his home. [16]

Sir Menasseh far exceeded his Baghdadi predecessors in his commitment to building Jewish institutions in Palestine. [17] His efforts were contemporaneous with those of European Zionists but of a quite different origin. [18] Meyer was influenced by the pre-

Herzlian religious Zionism of Hakham Yoseph Hayim of Baghdad, who officiated there from 1859 to 1909 and inspired in many Iraqi Jews a great longing for visiting and dwelling in the Holy Land. [19] Meyer took his family on a visit to Jerusalem in order “to inculcate in them a love for Israel.” [20] In Palestine he maintained a house for Talmudic study [Beth Ha-midrash] as well as a small synagogue for Baghdadi Jews. Like other Baghdadis, Meyer subsequently linked up with Herzl’s World Zionist Organization. By 1921 Meyer contributed three thousand pounds to World Zionist Organization activities, the largest individual gift Anglo-Jewish emissary Israel Cohen received on his Asia/Pacific fundraising tour of that year. In the following year Meyer became the founding president of Singapore’s Zionist Society, an affiliate of the worldwide organization. His home then became, according to one contemporary, a “beehive” of Zionist activity. [21] In 1922, when Albert Einstein passed through Singapore on a fund raising mission for the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Meyer hosted a reception for two hundred people which resulted in ten thousand pounds worth of pledges for the fledgling school. [22]

During Sir Menasseh’s later years his daughter Mozelle Nissim broadened the scope of his Zionist activity. In 1929 she committed three thousand pounds for the construction of a school at Kfar Vitkin, then the northernmost Jewish settlement in Palestine. South Asian Zionist emissary A. Goldstein [no relation to the author] wrote the Zionist Executive that Mrs. Nissim “is really one of the best womenour movement should be proud to have.” [23]

After Sir Menasseh’s death in 1930, the Zionism which he had promoted among Singapore Baghdadis continued to thrive. On October 1, 1936, in an expression of that enduring spirit, Montague Ezekiel and his two brothers wrote the Jewish Agency for Palestine:

We [the Singapore Zionists] have done much for Zionism here and our efforts were praised by Israel’s Messenger and the Jewish Tribune [arguably the pre-eminent Jewish newspapers in Far East--ed.]. We are not the type of Jews to be intimidated by riots and Arab violence. Our reply to anti-Zionism is ‘more and more Zionism’ and to anti-Semitism ‘more and more Judaism.’ We are ready to work on the soil of Eretz Israel right now. If [Palestine immigration] certificates are sent [the Baghdadi] community will be overjoyed and Singapore will be in the future another Zionist fortress. [24]

In early 1941 Singaporean Flora Shooker, in the tradition of her Baghdadi predecessors, established an educational trust for use in Palestine, Baghdad, and Singapore. [25] Singapore was overrun by the Japanese during World War Two and most of its Jews and other “enemy aliens” were incarcerated. After the war the Baghdadi community and its Zionist movement rebounded. In 1955 one member of the community, David Saul Marshall [1908-95], was elected Singapore’s first Chief Minister. In that capacity he gave Singapore its first measure of internal self-government and set the colony on its path to complete independence, which was achieved shortly after Marshall left office. [26]

Jews in independent as well as in colonial Singapore enjoyed full equality. Judaism became one of the multi-ethnic nation’s eight officially-recognized religions. In 1977 the magazine Israel Report detected an commercial rationale behind this equality. In an argument similar to Sorkin’s assertion about the economic utility of Jews in port cities, the magazine argued that:

Lee Kuan Yew [the long-term leader of independent Singapore—ed.]’s regime, which makes a point of displaying openness both internally and externally, is considerably interested in having Jews live in Singapore. For this country, which is a crossroads and commercial centre, there is a clear advantage in the existence of a synagogue alongside temples, mosques, and churches. [27]

Prime Minister Lee and other leaders of independent Singapore came to realize that there was much to be learned from the newly independent Jewish state. In 1956, in one of the earliest expressions of that awareness, Frances Thomas, the Minister for Communications and Works, argued that Singapore, “now on the threshold of independence, could learn a lot from the spirit which has turned the small State of Israel from a desert into a garden”. [28] Singaporean Zionists labored diligently to cultivate such ties. In 1946 a Singapore branch of the Labor Zionist youth group Habonim was established, followed several years later by a local affiliate of the Women’s International Zionist Organization [WIZO]. [29] A 1953 visit by Jerusalem Post founding editor Gershon Agron resulted in contributions of US\$ 6740 to the United Israel Appeal and a communal commitment to assist Singaporeans wishing to emigrate to Israel. An internal community assessment of the results of Agron’s visit includes the comment:

During Mr. Agron’s visit, steps were taken to assist the immigration to Israel of five young Jewish girls and a woman of sixty years. They travelled to Bombay with funds provided by various donors, whose generosity deserve our appreciation.

This should be an encouragement both to our youth, who really feel they could do better in Israel, as well as to our donors, who will have the satisfaction of knowing that the money was well spent. [30]

In 1956 the Singapore Standard reported that an “‘Israel Today’ photographic exhibit is the biggest postwar public event organized by the Colony’s 900-strong Jewish community.” [31] In that same year outgoing Israeli Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister Moshe Sharett remarked after a visit to Singapore that “the gathered people’s thirst to listen and understand is endless.” [32] A March 1962 visit and lecture by Keren Hayesod Director Shlomo Temkin netted contributions of US \$2443 to assist new immigrants in Israel.

This visit was followed by a series of trade and technical aid agreements between Singapore and Israel and ongoing visits by ministers, public figures, and senior officials. In 1969 this process culminated in the establishment of full diplomatic relations between an independent Singapore and the Jewish state. [33]

The strengthening of Baghdadi Jewish life in Singapore and of ties between Singapore and Israel occurred simultaneously with the almost complete disintegration of Jewish community life in Iraq. In 1949-50 over 150,000 Iraqi Jews evacuated en masse to Israel. At precisely the time when many Iraqi Jews were integrating into Israeli society, an opposite phenomenon was occurring among Singapore Baghdadis: a multi-institutional Jewish community was being preserved. A new Jewish population grew up alongside the Baghdadis. Starting in 1965, when Israeli experts began to train Singapore’s new armed forces, Israeli diplomats, consultants and business people arrived on temporary assignments. There was an additional influx of non-Israeli, overwhelmingly Ashkenazi diplomats, professionals, business people, students, and other temporary residents. This

group has initiated informal gatherings on Reform Jewish lines and imports a rabbi to conduct High Holiday services at a hotel.

The core of Jewish residents of Singapore with Singaporean citizenship remains overwhelmingly Baghdadi. Indeed if one wishes to see a functioning Baghdadi Jewish community in 2004, one only needs to visit Singapore. The community consists of about 180 people. An American academic who attended a Sabbath service in one of the Baghdadi synagogues in Singapore in 2000 observed both the recent diversity and traditional characteristics of the community. She wrote:

On the right side sit the old-timers, the men of Baghdadi origin who lived through the Japanese occupation. On the left side sit the wealthier members of the community and the younger generation of Jews and expatriate Israelis, some of whom have become important, active members of the community...When Frank Benjamin, President of the Jewish Welfare Board, stepped down from participating in the Torah service, he walked the room and wishes Shabbat shalom [Sabbath peace] to all. The gesture is heartfelt and inclusive, consistent with his determination to bring all Jews living in Singapore together...Frank Benjamin and others are determined to keep their [community] vibrant and alive without sacrificing the basic orthodox traditions that inspired Singapore's first Baghdadi Jews over 160 years ago. [\[34\]](#)

Apart from the fact that there is no evidence of 'new Christians' reconverting in Singapore, the Baghdadi community of Singapore exemplified and exemplifies all of the aforementioned port Jewish characteristics. Singapore is a distinct case of Jewish communal longevity and vitality in what was, in the 1970s, the largest seaport in the world. Two other cases—Manila and Harbin—represent somewhat different reference points for Asian Jewish identity.

Manila Jews' Communal Origins and Commercial Activity

The 'new Christian' brothers Jorge and Domingo Rodriguez may have been the first 'Jews' to arrive in the Spanish Philippines. They are recorded as resident in Manila in the 1590s. By 1593 both were tried and convicted at an auto-da-fe in Mexico City because the Inquisition did not have an independent tribunal in the Philippines. The Inquisition imprisoned these brothers and subsequently tried and convicted at least eight other 'new Christians' from the Philippines. [\[35\]](#)

There is no record of other 'new Christians' in the Spanish Philippines. But Philippine Jewry grew by other means. After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the brothers Adolphe and Charles Levy fled Alsace with a stash of diamonds. They ultimately reached the Philippines with five crates of religious medals, statues, gold chains, and gilt eyeglass frames which they had been unable to sell in California. In 1873 they established a jewelry store, and then a general merchandising business, Estrella del Norte, in Iloilo on Panay Island. The business expanded to Manila where it exists today. It grew from the importation of gems to pharmaceuticals, bicycles and ultimately automobiles. [\[36\]](#)

By 1898, when the United States took the Philippines from Spain, the Levys had been joined by Turkish, Syrian, and Egyptian Jews, creating a multi-ethnic community of approximately fifty individuals. By 1918, twenty years after the American take over, Manila Jewry consisted of about 150 people. According to historian Annette Eberly, these new immigrants considered Manila a second frontier...a place for the young and

ambitious to flee to. It was especially attractive to those who chafed at limitations on social and economic mobility in their native lands. [37]

The newcomers were mainly American servicemen discharged in Manila after the Spanish-American and First World Wars plus Russian Jews fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. While these arrivals, like their Singapore brethren, engaged in import and export trade and in portside real estate development, they were nothomogenous and did not interact with an ethnically-cohesiveinternational Jewish merchant diaspora. In this respect the Manila Jews were unlike Sorkin's Atlantic and Mediterranean Jews, whose commerce was overwhelmingly characterized by ethnic networking.

Jewish Institutional Development in Manila

By 1920 Manila Jewry included the founder of the Makati Stock Exchange, the conductor of the Manila Symphony Orchestra, physicians, and architects. [38] Apart from these purely secular achievements, twenty two years after the commencement of the American occupation there had been almost zero Jewish institutional development. While Spanish repression may explain this phenomenon before 1898, it does not account for the absence of institutional development under the Americans. In 1920 the aforementioned Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen, who was greatly impressed with Jewish development of Singapore [and later Harbin], visited Manila. He lamented that although there were several hundred Jews, they had not formed a synagogue...Only those who still had a flickering of Jewish consciousness met together on the two most solemn days of the Jewish calendar...after which they hibernated for another twelve months.

Despite the fact that they were there twenty years, there was no Jewish organization or institution of any kind. If a Jew wished to get married, he took a day trip to Hong Kong. I left wondering whether all the fortunes of the rich Jews of Manila are worth the soul of one poor Jew of Zamboanga [a Syrian Jew he had met on one of the outer Philippine islands, who told Cohen 'we feel here in Galuth...soon we hope to get back to the land of Israel' --ed]. [39]

A synagogue was finally built by a wealthy Ashkenazi benefactor in 1924. Full time, ordained clergy rarely serviced it. The community imported clergymen and lay leaders from Shanghai and elsewhere for short stints, beginning in 1924. At one point an itinerant rabbi commuted between the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. [40] In 1930 an American journalist reported that the eighty Jewish families and fifty single Jews in the Philippines are all well established yet indifferent to their Judaism. They have no interest in a Jewish community. There is a handsome synagogue, but it is used only on [the Jewish high holidays of] Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. There was a religious school, but it was closed on account of the scarcity of teachers. Thus, most of the children receive absolutely no Jewish education and the religious indifference of their parents plus the lack of knowledge of Jewish affairs of the children counts these families as a total loss to Judaism. [41]

Manila's Jews clearly experienced precious little of the type of intensified Rabbinic Judaism as occurred in Singapore. While some Manila Jews faded completely into the seductive woodwork of what historian Eberly calls "the good life out there," there is evidence that others assumed aspects of quasi-secular Jewish identity, Sorkin's fifth

characteristic of port Jewish life. [42] The fullest expressions of this identity were the significant forms assistance which Philippine Jews extended to Jewish refugees fleeing from Hitler; the solidarity within the community during the Japanese occupation of 1941-45; the community's postwar rebirth and reconstruction; and its significant support for the creation and maintenance of the State of Israel.

Philippine Jews' Assistance to Holocaust Refugees

The rise of Hitler mobilized some of Manila's most secularized Jews into communal service. The niece of the founder of the infrequently-used Manila synagogue observed that "we only became Jewish conscious in a deep way when the terrible threat came out of Europe and suddenly there were Jews in desperate need of help." [43]

The Philippines, as already noted, became an American territorial possession in 1898. They gained self-governing "Commonwealth" status in the nineteen thirties. Until the Philippines passed its own comprehensive immigration legislation on January 1, 1941, the immigration restrictions imposed by the United States Congress in 1924 theoretically applied in both the continental United States and the Philippines. But in practice the Philippines had some flexibility when it came to the implementation of immigration policies.

The first two German Jewish refugees from Hitler to reach the Philippines may have been Karl Nathan and Heinz Eulau from Offenbach. They arrived in Manila in June 1934 on affidavits of support from Eulau's cousin Dr. Kurt Eulau, who had resided in the islands since 1924 and would sponsor many subsequent immigrants.

On September 8, 1937 twenty-eight German Jews from Shanghai arrived in Manila aboard the Norddeutscher Lloyd steamship "Gneisenau." Hitler's government evacuated these Jews and approximately equal number of non-Jews from Shanghai to Manila as a humanitarian gesture, in order to safeguard all German passport holders from Sino-Japanese hostilities. That was the extent of Nazi Germany's assistance to these Jews who had fled to Shanghai explicitly to escape Hitler. A "Jewish Refugee Committee" of Manila hastily convened to help these unexpected arrivals. The refugees also received encouragement and assistance from U.S. High Commissioner Paul McNutt, a Democratic presidential aspirant who had been on the job in Manila only six months. The Committee quickly realized that under these fortuitous circumstances it might be able to assist other Jews fleeing Hitler.

Jack Rosenthal, an American-Jewish friend of Philippine President Manuel A. Quezon, was able to interest the islands' chief executive in the plight of European Jewry. The aforementioned Commissioner McNutt, and ultimately Quezon himself, took note of the skills that many Jewish immigrants could bring to the underdeveloped Philippine islands, especially Mindanao in the south. On February 15, 1939, President Quezon sent a message to the Philippine congress, urging the admission of 10,000 German Jewish professionals plus a Philippine \$300 million subsidy to assist them in settling Mindanao. [44] While this grandiose scheme never materialized, Rosenthal was able to persuade Quezon to independently authorize the admission of perhaps as many as one thousand Nazi-persecuted Jews.

Even these admissions were problematical as the Philippines had no independent consular service and relied on United States diplomatic personnel for the worldwide

implementation of immigration policy. In the blunt words of the son of Manila Jewish community president Morton Netzorg, “wherever the American consular staff was friendly to the Jewish people Jews got out, and where they shrugged their shoulders Jews did not get out.” [\[45\]](#)

Most refugees arrived penniless and on temporary two year temporary visas. Refugee Frank Ephraim wrote that “most Filipinos had no idea of our problem. We were probably the first whites they had met who were not rich.” Joseph Schwarz, the first full time, ordained rabbi to serve in the Philippines arrived with his wife from Hildesheim, Germany, in 1938. They served the Manila community until moving abroad in 1949. Schwarz was followed by Cantor Joseph Cysner. Morton Netzorg’s son recalled that although “the Jewish community was very small [it] practiced tithing to help the refugees. Five hundred were brought over in a three year period.” [\[46\]](#)

The Philippine Jewish community’s effort to assist refugees is all the more impressive when one considers that after December 9, 1941 the entire archipelago was under Japanese attack and subsequent occupation. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee aided the Jewish refugees until the Japanese attack.

Some aid before that date and all assistance for the duration of the war came from the Manila Jewish community itself. The Japanese interned several hundred Jews with American, British, British Commonwealth, Dutch, Polish, and Belgian citizenship, along with 5,000 non-Jews, in the Santo Tomas and Los Banos detention camps. “Third party aliens” or “stateless Jews” were registered with the Japanese words “MU KOKUSEKI YUDAYAJIN” (“Jews without citizenship or country”) stamped in their passports. [\[47\]](#) Those community members who held Iraqi, Filipino, and—ironically—Austrian and German passports, and who escaped detention since they were from countries not at war with Japan, were of particular help to the Jewish internees. The community suffered heavy losses during fighting in and around Manila in 1944-45, when 79 individuals, or approximately 10% of the Jewish community, became wartime casualties, a rate similar to that experienced by Manila’s overall population. The Japanese arrested, tortured, and murdered several Jews at Fort Santiago, alleging that they collaborated with anti-Japanese resistance. Some, such as the ritual slaughterer Israel Konigsberg, were active participants in the anti-Japanese resistance.

Several Jewish refugees were butchered in cold blood by the Japanese during a rampage in the Manila Red Cross Hospital on February 10, 1945. [\[48\]](#)

Despite all these vicissitudes the Jewish Community of Manila saved altogether perhaps 1,200 Jews from almost certain obliteration at the hands of the Nazis. One of the Austrian Jewish survivors asserts that you could never find as generous and solid a group of people [as the Philippine Jewish community] anywhere else in the world. They gave—and give—unstintingly in times of crisis.

They have never neglected the needs of the destitute and the sick. Even before the Japanese came the community set up a special home for the Jewish indigent in Marikina. It was kept up for years long after the war was over. [\[49\]](#)

The Philippine Jewish Community's Embrace of Zionism and Assistance to the State of Israel

When the aforementioned Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen visited Manila in 1920 he lamented that "I spoke to quite a number of Jews, but they simply would not hear of it, and not a single god damn cent did I get." [50] Within twenty-five years many members of the community changed their attitudes toward Zionism. Their embrace of Zionism was a natural outgrowth of their sacrifices on behalf of European refugees and their significant wartime losses at the hands of Hitler's allies. In the spring and summer of 1945 the war-ravaged Manila Jewish community reorganized and, with the help of American servicemen, raised \$15,000 to rebuild the synagogue which had been devastated in the February 1945 Battle of Manila. Simultaneously four American Jewish servicemen organized a "*Kvutsa chaverim*" [Hebrew: group of friends], for the Jewish youth of Manila. The *chaverim* discussed the situation in Palestine and studied modern Hebrew. In 1947 members of the community who were close to postwar Philippine President Manuel A. Roxas were instrumental, along with key advisors to U.S. President Harry Truman, in convincing the Philippine delegation to the United Nations to vote in favor of the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish territories.

The Philippines thus became the only Asian nation to vote for Israeli independence. It was also among the first to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. [51]

As was the case in Singapore, Manila's Jewish community cultivated Philippine-Israel relations. In 1951 the Philippines signed an aviation agreement with Israel. In that same year, retired Israeli Defence Forces Lt. Col. Shaul Ramati paid a fundraising visit. As a result of that campaign, Israeli Consul Ernest E. Simke was able to write to the Central Zionist Executive that "the appeal yielded approximately P\$60,000. It was the highest collection ever made in the Philippines." [52] In 1956 Simke wrote that "although the community is small, there is a strong Zionist sympathy." [53] In that same year the Philippines welcomed Moshe Sharett, Israel's outgoing foreign minister and former prime minister, on a semi-official visit. [54]

Jewish emigration from the Philippines to Israel and elsewhere shrunk the Manila community from an immediate postwar peak of perhaps 2500, to 1000 in 1946, 600 in 1948, 400 in 1949, 250 in 1968, and to approximately eighty families in 1987. [55] Some families, such as the Simkes, had Filipino citizenship and chose to remain. The community remains a mix of Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Oriental Jews, Americans, Israelis, and ethnically-Filipino spouses and/or converts. Its history exemplifies Sorkin's fifth port Jewish characteristic, namely a secularized Jewish identity. Manila never had been a *yiddishe gemeinde*, or Jewish community in the classic European or even Baghdadi sense. Although small in numbers and weak in formal aspects of religiosity, the Jewish community in the fourth largest seaport in Southeast Asia remains secular, Jewish, Filipino, and overwhelmingly Zionist.

Harbin Jews: Inlanders With Seaport Characteristics

While Singapore, perhaps better than any other Far Eastern Jewish community exemplified and exemplifies virtually all of Sorkin's port Jewish characteristics, and Manila moderately so, one final example is counterfactual. The experience of the Russian Jews in the Chinese city of Harbin, 1500 miles inland, also reflects all port Jewish

characteristics except re-conversion. Harbin was constructed in 1898 on land which Czarist Russia leased from Imperial China.

Here Jews and many other Russian minorities not only enjoyed residential permission but had economic and political freedoms unavailable in Czarist Russia proper. These fundamental rights remained when the railroad zone passed through various ownerships, up to and including the Soviet Union's sale of the zone to Japan in 1936. In some respects Harbin resembled the Panama Canal Zone in that it both was and was not a part of the colonial motherland. [56]

After 1898, within this tolerant environment, Russian Jews developed a Baghdadi-like trading infrastructure. Within China and Russia they traded extensively with their co-religionists and with ethnic Russians, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and native Siberian peoples. They also exchanged goods and services with Russian Jews in non-Russian parts of Europe, America, Japan, Korea, and other parts of East, Southeast, and South Asia.

Equally significantly in terms of the port Jews thesis, Harbin's political and cultural toleration enabled its Jews to develop a type of intellectual profile virtually non-existent elsewhere in Imperial or Soviet Russia. Many *Harbinetsi* were trained in the West. They knew about the Enlightenment and other Western ideologies before they immigrated to China. Prime exemplars are Jewish hospital director Avraham Yosifovitch Kaufmann [1885-1971] and his first wife, both of whom matriculated in medicine in Switzerland. Other Jewish emigres to Harbin had the good fortune to have been among the microscopic number of Russian Jews accepted into the universities, academies, and technical training schools of Czarist Russia, such as the mother of University of Southern California Asianist Peter Berton, who matriculated in St. Petersburg. Still others acquired a Western education in Harbin itself, which had both technical colleges and Western-style elementary and high schools. These schools included the German-run Hindenburg *schule*, where University of California economist Gregory Grossman matriculated, and what is today the Harbin Institute of Technology, where Israel Railroads general manager Leo Heiman and Hebrew University chief engineer Evsey Podolsky matriculated. In Harbin they were free to practice their professions or go into business. They were also free to leave Harbin, get further education, or practice their professions elsewhere, a nonexistent freedom in the Soviet Union.

Within the nurturing crucible of an open mercantile environment and tolerant polity, Harbin's long-serving Rabbi Aharon Moshe Kisilev [1866-1949], who had embraced pre-Herzlian Zionism while a student at Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever's Volozhin Yeshiva, published Hebrew and Russian-language tracts on Judaism and Zionism. It was under Kisilev's influence, from 1913 to 1949, that *Harbintsy* became increasingly Zionist. The left-leaning, Bundist-oriented, anti-Zionist Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Vayter Mizrekh* [The Far East] competed with the Russian-language Zionist publications *Evreiskaia Zhizn* [Jewish life] and *Gadegel* [Cyrillic rendition of Hebrew word for 'the [Zionist] flag']. Lazer Epstein's anti-Zionist Jewish Workers' Bund challenged Avraham Kaufman's General Zionists as well as the non-Zionist Agudat Israel. Harbin was the East Asian entry point for Vladimir Zev Jabotinsky's Zionist Revisionist movement, which counted among its adherents future Israeli political activist Yaakov Lieberman and Motti Olmert, father of Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Even Harbin's two

major Jewish sports organizations reflected the intellectual diversity of the community: Maccabi for the General Zionists and Brit Trumpeldor [Betar] for the Revisionists.

These rivals would cooperate at times of natural disaster, such as when flood waters breached the banks of Harbin's Sungari River. The groups also buried their ideological differences when it came to combating the virulent anti-Semitism of some of Harbin's White Russian organizations, which also thrived in this relatively unrestricted political environment. [\[57\]](#)

Perhaps the fullest description of Harbin's intellectual vitality appears in Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen's account of 1920-21, when he visited this community along with Singapore and Manila. He wrote that Harbin's "vigorous Jewish consciousness" manifested itself in a struggle of parties, in which the Right, Centre, Left, and Extreme Left were always engaged. There were ceaseless public discussions, especially on Saturday night, between the rival adherents of Zionism pure and simple, Zionism without Orthodoxy, Orthodoxy without Zionism, Zionism with Socialism, Socialism without Zionism, Hebraism in Manchuria, and Yiddishism in Palestine...I soon realized that there were...hundreds of Jews in Harbin who were eager to go to Palestine...There was therefore no need for me to gain converts: my task was confined to spreading information and obtaining donations from a relatively small group. [\[58\]](#)

Cohen's assertion of Harbin's vibrant intellectuality calls into question the argument that it was the special conditions of seaports which helped Jews win political privileges and fostered intellectual and institutional development. Although Harbin was not a seaport, it was a trading and distribution centre, a railroad hub, a river port, and an entrepot where long distance merchants made their headquarters and to and from which goods were shipped. The same dynamics which influenced seaports and produced intellectual and institutional vitality there also influenced Harbin. At least two other hypotheses, apart from Sorkin's port Jews theory, may explain Jewish intellectual development in Harbin and perhaps Singapore and Manila as well. Jews were among the earliest entrepreneurs in all three developing regions and continuously served as commercial middlemen. It may well have been the dynamics and opportunities of a frontier environment, as suggested by historian Frederick Jackson Turner with respect to the near-simultaneous development of the American West that enabled Jews to evolve economically, politically, and intellectually. [\[59\]](#)

A second hypothesis derives from sociology. Harbin, Singapore, and Manila evolved into substantial metropolises where Jews retained commercial prominence. It may well have been the dynamics of an open urban environment, maritime or inland, as postulated by sociologist Robert E. Park, which underlay Jewish political and ideological evolution. Park writes that the emancipated Jew's pre-eminence as a trader, his keen intellectual interest, his sophistication, his idealism and his lack of historical sense, are the characteristics of a city man, the man who ranges widely...who, emerging from the ghetto in which he lived...is seeking to find a place in the freer, more complex and cosmopolitan life of [the] city. [\[60\]](#)

On the basis of a comparison of Singapore, Manila, and Harbin, it is clear that additional research is needed to validate the important suggestions about seaport Jewry advanced by Professor David Sorkin.

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NOTES

[1] David Sorkin, "The Port Jew: Notes Toward a Social Type." *Journal of Jewish Studies* [Cambridge, Eng.] 50, no. 1 [Spring 1999], pp. 87-97. Among the works Sorkin drew on were Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999]. Dubin has subsequently offered port Jewish characteristics of her own, which differ from those of Sorkin, in "Wings on their feet...and wings on their head": Reflections on the Study of Port Jews," typescript of paper presented at the conference on "Port Jews and Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres," University of Cape Town, 6 January 2003, pp. 6-7. Since Dubin's criteria have not yet been formulated in published form, I refer only to Sorkin's five published characteristics. Arabic-speaking Jews from Baghdad, who have also been referred to as Levantine Jews, should not, strictly speaking, be classified as "Sephardim," Jews of Iberian origin who retained medieval Spanish or Portuguese as their mother tongue in varied places of exile. Nor should those Italian or Greek Jews whose forebears never lived in Iberia.

[2] Sorkin [see note 1], pp. 89-90.. The Sephardi and Italian-Jewish international trade infrastructure was similar to that which bound early American merchants from a particular city with each other and with their overseas financiers and agents. Economic historian Thomas C. Cochran observed that "in spite of intercolonial trade in some items, each major [early American] port was a separate business community remote from its neighbors. The personal ties that bound the business world together were more often between American merchants and the houses of Liverpool or London than between men on this side of the Atlantic. Businessmen of Charleston were more at home in London than in Boston." Thomas C. Cochran, *Basic History of American Business* [Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1968], p. 28. On Philadelphia Quakers as a

case in point, see Richard Waln, Jr., *Walnford Mill Accounts, 1772*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; [Stephen Winslow], *Biographies of Successful Philadelphia Merchants* [Philadelphia: James K. Simon, 1864], pp. 129-32; and Jonathan Goldstein, *Philadelphia and the China Trade, 1682-1846 Commercial, Cultural, and Attitudinal Effects* [University Park and London: Penn State University Press, 1978], pp. 11-12 and passim. A second case in point of networking in colonial and early national American trade are the Huguenots. In nineteenth century East, Southeast, and South Asia, the major ethnic networkers in maritime trade apart from Baghdadi Jews were the Parsees, Armenians, and various communities of Chinese. See Assiya Siddiqi, "The Business World of Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 19, nos. 3-4 [1982], pp. 301-24.

[3] Sorkin [see note 1], p. 90.

[4] Sorkin [see note 1], p. 94. On the "new Christians," see Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* [New York: Franklin Watts, 2001], p. 32.

[5] Sorkin, [see note 1], pp. 95-96.

[6] Goldstein, *Philadelphia* [see note 2]; Siddiqi, "The Business" [see note 2].

[7] Primary sources on Far Eastern Baghdadi Jews include manuscript materials and printed reports in the British Commonwealth Jewish community records in the Harley Library of the University of Southampton, U.K. [hereinafter referred to as "HL"], and in Jerusalem's Central Zionist Archives [hereinafter "CZA"]. Other sources include Israel Cohen, *A Jewish Pilgrimage* [London: Valentine Mitchell, 1956], pp. 194-96; Ezekiel Musleah, *On the Banks of the Ganga* [North Quincy, MA: Christopher, 1975], passim; Joan Roland, "Baghdadi Jews in India and China in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparison of Economic Roles" in Jonathan Goldstein, *The Jews of China, I*, [Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999], pp. 141-56; "Silas Aaron Haroon and Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Shanghai" in Goldstein, *Jews, I*, pp. 216-29; Maruyama Naoki, "The Shanghai Zionist Association and the International Politics of East Asia Until 1936" in Goldstein, *Jews, I*, pp. 251-66; Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* [London: Robert Hale, 1941]; Maisie J. Meyer, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Whangpoo: A Century of Sephardi Jewish Life in Shanghai* [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003]; and Roland, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* [Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993].

[8] Saphir quoted in Eze Nathan, *History of Jews in Singapore* [Singapore: HERBILU, 1986], p. 3. In 1883 the Singapore merchant W. G. Gulland asserted that "the opium trade...is wholly in the hands of Jews and Armenians...and forms an important part of the Native trade of this city, as of almost all other eastern settlements." LEGCO 1883 Straits Settlements. "Straits Settlements Legislative Council Proceedings." [Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1883], p. 8, cited in Carl Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and the Global Political Economy* [London: Routledge, 1999], p. 117. Twentieth century Singapore community historian Nathan described the opium trade of Singapore Jews as "a legitimate short cut to wealth." Nathan, pp. 8-9.

Additional sources on the early history of Singapore Jewry include censuses reproduced in Nathan, passim; Jacob Tomlin, *Missionary Journals* [London: James Nisbet, 1844], p. 23; "The Jews of Bagdad [sic]", chapter 43 of J[ohn] T[urnbull] Thomson, *Some Glimpses of Life in the Far East* [London: Richardson, 1864], pp. 242-49; Charles Buckley, *Anecdotal History of Old Time Singapore, Vol. 1* [Singapore: Fraser & Neave, 1902], p. 311; Israel Cohen, *Journal of a Jewish Traveller* [London: John Lane, 1925], pp. 198-208; Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 6], pp. 207-08; Ida Cowen, *Jews in Remote Corners of the World* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971], pp. 141-47; Moshe Yegar, "Le-Toldot Ha-Kehillah Ha-Yehudit Be- Singapore," [Hebrew: On the history of the Jewish community in Singapore] *Gesher* 1, no. 78 [1974], pp. 50-65; and Lionel Simmonds, "An Asian Odyssey," *Jewish Chronicle Magazine* [London], November 1983, pp. 16-17. Some Singapore Jews of Baghdadi origin did face a certain amount of social/employment discrimination in the colonial period as they were categorised not as "Jews" but as Asians.

[9] Somerset Maugham is reputed to have said "You may stay at the Raffles, but dine at the Grand." Phyllis Funke, "Singapore." *Hadassah Magazine* 76, no. 3 [November 1987], pp. 22-23; Tudor Parfitt, *The Thirteenth Gate: Travels Among the Lost Tribes of Israel* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987], p. 72.

[10] "The Jews of Singapore: Special Interview with John Solomon." *Israel's Messenger* [Shanghai], April 2, 1926, p. 21.

[11] Simmonds [see note 8], p. 16.

[12] Cohen, *Journal* [see note 8], p. 199; Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 8], p. 208; Funke [see note 9], p. 22; Parfitt [see note 9], p. 72.

[13] Joan Bieder, "Jewish Identity in Singapore: Cohesion, Dispersion, Survival," unpub. paper, 2002, p. 11.

[14] Simmonds [see note 8], p. 16; Warren Freedman, "The Jews of South-East Asia", *Jewish Post*, September 20, 1979, p. 74; Bieder [see note 13], pp. 11-18. While the great majority of the permanently resident Singapore Jews have always been Baghdadi, there have been significant figures with other origins, such as long-resident Rumanian diamond merchants and some businessmen and medical doctors who escaped from Europe before the Holocaust and for whom members of the community sought work and residential permits. Email: Jean Marshall, Singapore, to the author, March 31, 2003.

[15] Buckley, *Anecdotal* [see note 8], vol. one, p. 311. Buckley adds that Solomon also took "an enthusiastic interest in the manners, customs, and literature of the East."

[16] When Albert Einstein visited Meyer in 1922, he referred to Meyer as "Croessus" [the legendary king of Lydia]. Einstein viewed Chesed El as "a magnificent synagogue which was actually built for the purpose of communication between Croessus and Jehovah." Bieder [see note 13], pp. 1-2, 22-23; Parfitt [see note 9], p. 72.

[17] Louis Rabinovitz, *Far Eastern Mission* [Johannesburg: Eagle Press, 1952], p. 158.

[18] Other "Enlightened" Jewish nationalists in the Far East included Anglophile Baghdadi Jews like Shanghai's Nissim Elias Benjamin Ezra [1883-1936], who edited and published the Zionist monthly *Israel's Messenger* from 1904 to 1936, and Harbin General Zionist leader and hospital director Dr Avraham Iosifovitch Kaufmann [1885-1971]. Ezra, significantly, is representative of a generation which comes after Sir Menasseh Meyer, who was influenced by traditional Baghdadi, pre-Herzlian Zionism of Hacham Yoseph Hayim. The ideologies of Ezra, Kaufman, and their followers closely resemble those of eighteenth-to-twentieth-century American, Irish, Italian, and Scottish nationalists who took Enlightened world views but simultaneously and proudly affirmed their national identities. On Zionism and other nineteenth century nationalisms, especially Italian, as expressions of European Enlightenment thinking, see Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Jewish and Other Nationalisms," *Commentary* 35 [January 1963], pp. 19-20. He writes that Zionist leaders were "Europeans of the Enlightenment [who] were not content with distant memories or merely religious traditions. If they revived the Hebrew language it was not merely to study the Scriptures or the Law. If they remembered their history it was not merely their ancient, sacred history. It was a Jew of the Emancipation, Heinrich Graetz, who wrote the first continuous history of the Jewish nation, carrying it through the destruction of the Second Temple, over the intervening centuries, to his own time. It was a Jew of the Emancipation, Moses Hess, who first urged escape from Europe to Jerusalem, and he urged it explicitly as a nationalist, secular movement, in imitation of the nationalist, secular Italian Risorgimento. If Zionism was the age-old hankering of Jews for the Holy Land, it was that hankering secularized: a return to Israel without waiting for the Messiah, or led by a secular Messiah—one, moreover, who was half-assimilated into Europe... If [Zionism's] faithful masses came out of the Russian Pale, [their movement] was headed by half-assimilated men whom strict Jews might regard as little better than Gentiles and whose life was led in the Western Cosmopolitan cities of Paris and Vienna."

On the connection between the European Enlightenment and American, Irish, and Scottish nationalism, see David Dickson, "Paine in Ireland," in Dickson, Daire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan, ed. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* [Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993], pp. 134-50; John Burns, "Scottish

Radicalism and the United Irishmen,” in Dickson et.al., *United*, pp. 151-66. Historian Eric Foner notes that, in spite of all his propagandizing for an Enlightened internationalism, Tom Paine both “called himself a ‘citizen of the world’” and “was an early advocate of a strong central government for America.” Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* [London: Oxford University Press, 1976], p. xix.

[19] David Sassoon, *History of the Jews in Baghdad* [Letchworth, U.K.: S. D. Sassoon, 1949], p. 217.

[20] Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 8], p. 208; Freedman [see note 14], p. 74.

[21] Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 8], p. 208; “The Jews of Singapore” [see note 10], p. 21; Orly Baher, “The Baghdadi Jewish Community in Shanghai and Singapore”, *Points East* [Menlo Park, Calif.] 17, no. 2 [July 2002], p. 15. Apart from the visible activism of the Menasseh Meyers, there always were unaffiliated and apathetic Jews and non-Zionists within the Singapore Jewish community.

[22] Joan Bieder and Hanoch Gutfreund, “Einstein in Singapore: A Genius Abroad”, *The Straits Times* [The Sunday Plus Times Section], 2 January 2000, p. 20; Bieder [see note 13], pp. 1-2, 22-23; Baher [see note 21], p. 15.

[23] Letters: A. Goldstein, Kandy, Ceylon, to Zionist Executive, Jerusalem, 7 January 1927, KH4 9610; Dr A. Bension, Singapore, to Leo Herrmann, Jerusalem, 9 April 1929, KH4 12347; M. Nissim, Singapore, to Keren Hayesod, Jerusalem, 9 April 1929, CZA KH4 12347; Zvi Herman [sic], Jerusalem, to Mrs. S. Nissim, Singapore, 14 October 1952, KH4 12347, all in CZA; Baher [see note 21], p. 15.

[24] Letter: Montague Ezekiel, Singapore, to Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, 1 October 1936, 56 3797 CZA.

[25] Copy of Last Will of Flora Shooker, Singapore, 4 April 1941, KH4 12421, CZA.

[26] On Singapore in general during the Japanese occupation, see: George M. Kahin, *Governments and Politics of Southeast Asia* [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969], pp. 288-89. On the fate of Jews in particular, see personal account by Nathan [see note 8], p. 109; Moshe Yegar, “A Rapid and Recent Rise and Fall,” *Sephardi World* [Jerusalem] no. 3 [July-August 1984], p. 10; and Beider [see note 13], p. 24. A South African rabbi who spoke with Mozelle Nissim after the war recorded that she had “harrowing tales to tell of her adventures before she reached a haven of refuge in India, as had most of the Singapore Jews who had suffered either in concentration camps in Japan [e.g. David Saul Marshall, a P.O.W. in Hokkaido – ed.] or under forced labor in Malaya”. Rabinovitz [see note 17], p. 158.

On Marshall’s overall life and career, see Letters: David Marshall, Singapore, to Charles S. Spencer, London, 6 May 1955; Michael Cohen, Singapore, to Charles Spencer, London, 15 August 1955, HL.; “Bulletin of Jewish Welfare Board, Singapore,” [mimeographed], 1962, passim, in HL; “Profile: David Marshall,” *Sunday Times* [London], n.d., ca. 1956, in HL; Terrys Glick, “Jews in Southeast Asia,” *Chronicle Review*, December 1970, p. 103; Denis D. Gray, “Conscience of Singapore speaks out fearlessly,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 May 1994, p. C6; Gray, “Jewish lawyer is Singapore’s crusading conscience,” *Jerusalem Post*, 1 May 1994, p. 3; Rabinovitz [see note 17], p. 157; Cowen [see note 7], pp. 146-47; Nathan [see note 8], pp. 69, 80-81; and Chan Heng Chee, *A Sensation of Independence: A Political Biography of David Marshall* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984]. On Marshall’s 1956 intervention with Zhou Enlai which enabled Chinese Jews to immigrate to Israel, see David Marshall, *Letters from Mao’s China* [Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1996] and Josef and Lynn Silverstein, “David Marshall and Jewish Emigration from China,” *China Quarterly* 75 [September 1978], pp. 647-54;

[27] “Jews in Singapore,” *Israel Report* no. 5 [5 March 1977]. The significant role Jews have played in Singapore’s economic and political development, Singapore’s overwhelmingly non-Muslim population, and the commonality of interests between Singapore and Israel in trade, technological, and military matters, may explain why Lee Kuan Yew was willing to ‘take the heat’ from Arab and Muslim states for Singapore’s ties with Israel. Israel’s President Chaim Herzog wrote that when he paid an official visit to Singapore in 1986, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei withdrew their ambassadors from Singapore “for consultation” for a few days. There were threats in Malaysia “to cut off Singapore’s water supply.” According to Herzog, “thanks to

Israel and its military mission in Singapore, the country was well equipped to defend itself and to deter Malaysia.” Chaim Herzog, *Living History* [London: Phoenix, 1998], p. 308.

[28] Francis Thomas quoted in *Singapore Standard*, 20 February 1956.

[29] CZA file F49 634/1 contains approximately one hundred letters between Fay Grove, chairperson, and other officials of WIZO and Alice Blitz and other Singapore Jewish women, concerning the formation of an active WIZO chapter in Singapore between the years 1956 and 1970; Yegar, “A Rapid” [see note 26], p. 9.

[30] “Report and Accounts of the Jewish Welfare Board [Singapore], January to December 1953,” HL.

[31] *Singapore Standard*, 20 February 1956.

[32] Moshe Sharett, *Mi-shut be-Asyiah: Yoman masa* [Hebrew: From Travelling in Asia: A Travel Diary][Tel Aviv: Davar/Am Oved, 1964], p. 87.

[33] “Bulletin of Jewish Welfare Board, Singapore, 14 March 1962,” mimeographed, File MS 137,A5/95/76, HL; *Encyclopedia Judaica* 14 [Jerusalem: Keter, 1971], pp. 1608-10. Singapore Jewry turned out in force at a 1983 Israel Independence Day celebration given by Ambassador Nahum Eshkol at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, where the guests included the Egyptian Charge d'affaires, British diplomats, and leading figures in Singapore's political, commercial, and professional life. Simmonds [see note 8], p. 16.

[34] Bieder [see note 13], pp. 46-48; Bieder, “Jewish Identity in Singapore: Cohesion, Dispersion, Survival,” *Sino-Judaica* 4 [2003], pp. 54-55. Because of many Iraqis' high educational level and prominence in business, law, and government, they, unlike other Oriental Jewish immigrants, integrated relatively smoothly into the then-overwhelmingly Ashkenazi power structure of the Jewish state. Their success stories ranged from that of Shlomo Hillel, Israel's first minister of police, to a number of Chief Rabbis, to writers Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael, academicians Sasson Somekh and Sammy Smoocha, parliamentarian Mordechai Ben Porat, Defense Minister and Labor Party Chief Benjamin Ben Eliezer, and Army Chief of Staff Moshe Levy.

[35] George Kohut, “Jewish Heretics in the Philippines in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 12[1904], pp. 149-56; Henry Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies* [New York: Macmillan, 1908], p. 304.

[36] Frank Ephraim, *Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003], pp. 11-12; Lewis E. Gleeck, *History of the Jewish Community of Manila*, n.d., n. p., approx. 1989, p. 34; Email William Clarence-Smith to Joan Bieder, July 4, 2002, courtesy of Joan Bieder; *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13 [see note 33], pp. 395-96.

[37] Annette Eberly, “Manila? Where? Us? The Good Life Out There,” *Present Tense* 2, no. 3[Spring 1975], pp. 162-63; Cowen [see note 8], p. 132.

[38] John Griese, “The Jewish Community in Manila,” unpub. M. A. thesis, University of the Philippines, 1954, pp. 21-22.

[39] Cohen, *Journal* [see note 8], pp. 108-114; Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 8], p. 193.. The absence of Jewish institutional development in Manila occurred simultaneously with social, albeit not legalized, anti-Semitism. The Manila Polo Club was founded by Philippine Governor General W. Cameron Forbes, according to one contemporary, “for white men only. It excluded Filipinos and mestizos. It frowned pointedly on Jews.” In cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, Jewish exclusion from overwhelmingly Christian clubs and institutions induced the formation of Jewish counterparts. This did not happen in Manila, apart from functions directly related to the synagogue. Florence Horn, *Orphans of the Pacific* [New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941], p. 132.

[40] Jack Netzorg, *Manila Memories* [Laguna Beach, Calif.: Pacific Rim Books, n.d., ca. 1990], pp. 29, 66; Cowen [see note 8], pp. 129-38; World Jewish Congress, *The Jewish Communities of the World* [New York:

World Jewish Congress, 1963], p. 49; Ephraim [see note 36], pp. 14-15; Gleeck, [see note 36], pp. 16-17; Griese, [see note 38], pp. 21-22.

[41] "Jews in the Philippines Not Religious," *The Jewish Advocate* [Boston]], 25 March 1930.

[42] Eberly [see note 37], p.60.

[43] Minna Gaberman, Manila, quoted in Eberly [see note 37], p. 60.

[44] [Manuel E. Quezon], *Messages of the President V, Part One* [Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1941], p. 427; Ephraim, [see note 36], pp. 15-77 PASSIM; Griese, [see note 35], p. 28. According to one contemporary, after Quezon suggested the admission of Jewish refugees, the Philippines' indigenous Chinese minority "wonder, ironically, at this generous hospitality. For the Jews, like the Chinese, eventually, work their way into trade, no matter how they start their lives in any country." Horn [see note 39], p. 146.

[45] Netzorg, [see note 40], p. 4. In a 1947 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Philippines Foreign Minister Felix Romulo reminded delegates that "during the dispersal of the Jews from Hitlerite Germany the Philippines was among the very few countries that opened their doors to Jewish refugees and extended to them a cordial welcome. We gave them a haven in our country, we accepted them among us, and today they live and work with us in complete harmony and understanding." United Nations, *Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Plenary Meetings: 16 September-29 November 1947* [Lake Success, NY: United Nations, 1947], vol. two, p. 1315. President Quezon donated seven and a half acres of his country estate at Marikina for the establishment of a working farm for Jewish refugees. Marikina Hall was dedicated on April 23, 1940 and housed forty residents. Ephraim [see note 36], p. 68.

[46] Netzorg [see note 40], p. 3.

[47] German Jews were arrested in Manila on December 9 along with non-Jewish Germans but were quickly released after the intervention of Jewish Refugee Committee secretary Morton Netzorg. The classic story of a Jew passing with a Filipino passport is that of Ernest Simke, who was interrogated by a Japanese officer on Negros Island. After examining Simke's papers the astonished officer remarked "You put chicken in oven, out should come chicken, not fish." Eberly [see note 37], pp. 62-63. On the Philippines in general during the Japanese occupation, see Kahin [see note 26], pp. 695-97. On the fate of Jews in particular, see: S[olomon] S. Seruya, "The Jews of Manila," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 11, 1979, p. 8; Ephraim [see note 36], pp. 39, 55-56, 71-72, 84, 92; Freedman [see note 14], pp. 74-75; Gleeck [see note 36], p. 34; and Griese [see note 38], pp. 31-33.

[48] Ephraim [see note 36], pp. 140-50; Yegar, "A Rapid" [see note 26], p. 10 and Cowen [see note 8], p. 131.

[49] Eberly [see note 37], p. 61.

[50] Cohen, *Journal* [see note 8], p. 110. Cohen called his Manila sojourn "the least lucrative gathering in the whole of my tour." Cohen, *Jewish Pilgrimage* [see note 8], p. 193.

[51] The Philippine Jewish community planted three hundred trees in Quirino Park in the "Forest of Freedom" in the Upper Galilee. An additional three hundred were planted, as Ernest Simke stated in a ceremony attended by the Philippine President, to honor "the Republic of the Philippines, as an expression of gratitude for the human and just attitude taken by the Philippine government in voting for the partition of the Holy Land and thereby joining the majority decision of the United Nations to establish a new democracy, the State of Israel." Ephraim [see note 36], pp. 175-76, 188-90; Eberly [see note 37], p. 64; *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13 [see note 33], pp. 395-96.

[52] Letter: Ernest E. Simke, Manila, to Central Zionist Executive, Jerusalem, May 28, 1951, S5/12.170, CZA.

[53] Letter: Ernest E. Simke, Manila, to Office of the 24th Zionist Congress, Jerusalem, February 20, 1956, S5/12.165, CZA.

[54] Manila Chronicle, 29 September 1956; Manila Times, 29 September 1956; The Evening News [Manila], 3 October 1956; Sharett, Mi-shut [see note 32].

[55] Letter: Dina Tischby, Manila, to Mrs. Gordon of WIZO, Jerusalem, 23 November 1958, CZA; Letter: Simke [see note 49]; World Jewish Congress, Jewish Communities [see note 40], pp. 48-49; Susan Bures, "Behind the Headlines," Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin, 12 September 1984, p. 4; "Tiny Jewish Groups," Forward [New York], 3 April 1987; Asia-Pacific Survival Guide [Melbourne, Vic.: Asia-Pacific Jewish Association, n.d., ca. 1988], pp. 85-88; Ephraim [see note 36], p. 190; Seruya [see note 46], p. 8; Griese [see note 38], pp. 21-22; Encyclopedia Judaica 13 [see note 33], pp. 395-96.

[56] On the peculiar status of China's railway zone and the origin and development of the Harbin Jewish community, see Alexander Menquez [pseud.], "Growing Up Jewish in Manchuria in the 1930s: Personal Vignettes" in Goldstein, Jews [see note 7], II, pp. 70-84; Mantetsu Chosa Bu [Japanese: South Manchuria Railway Company, Research Department], Zai-Man Yudaya Jin No Keizai-Teki Kako Oyobi Genzai [The economic past and present of Jews in Manchuria] [November 1940], Yudaya Mondai Chosa Shiryo Dai 27 Shu [No. 27 in the Jewish problem investigation materials series], marked "Gokuhi" [Top Secret], pp. 20-21, 44-46, cited in Menquez [pseud.], p. 70; Israel Epstein, "On Being a Jew in China: A Personal Memoir," in Goldstein, Jews, II, pp. 85-97; Yosef Tekoah, "My Developmental Years in China," in Goldstein, Jews, II, pp. 98-109; Boris Bresler, "Harbin's Jewish Community, 1898-1958: Politics, Prosperity, and Adversity" in Goldstein, Jews, I, pp. 200-15; Zvia Shickman-Bowman, "The Construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the Origins of the Harbin Jewish Community, 1898-1931" in Goldstein, Jews, I, pp. 187-99; Joshua A. Fogel "The Japanese and the Jews in Harbin, 1898-1930, in Robert Bickers et. al. New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842-1953 [Manchester, U. K.: Manchester University Press, 2000], pp. 88-108; Herman Dicker, Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East [New York: Twayne, 1962], passim; Soren Clausen and Stig Thogerson, The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin [Armonk, N.Y. and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995]; David Wolff, To the Harbin Station [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999]; Yaakov Liberman, My China [Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, 1997], passim; and Isador A. Magid, " 'I Was There': The Viewpoint of an Honorary Israeli Consul in Shanghai, 1949-1951", in China and Israel, 1948-98: A Fifty Year Retrospective, ed. by Jonathan Goldstein [Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1999], pp. 41-45.

[57] . Kisilev's fellow students at Volozhin included future Hebrew national poet Hayyim Nachman Bialik and future Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine. Avraham Yitzhak Kook. Aharon Moshe Kisilev, Mishbere Yam: Sheelot U-Teshuvot Be-Arbaah Helke Shulkan Arukh [Hebrew: The Waves of the Sea: Responsa on the Four Parts of 'The Set Table'] [Harbin: Defus M. Levitin, 5686 [1925 or 1926], reprinted Brooklyn, N.Y.: Katz Bookbinding, 1981]; Kisilev, Natsionalizm I Evreistvo: Stat'i, Lektsii, I Doklady [Russian: Nationalism and the Jews: Articles, Lectures and Reports] [Harbin: Evreiskaia Zhizn', 1941]; Kisilev, Imre Shefer [Hebrew: "Good words" or "Beautiful sayings"], a collection of sermons published posthumously in Tel Aviv by Bezalel-Levitsky with a 1951 introductory letter from Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog; Evreiskaia Zhizn' [Jewish Life] [Harbin] no. 47 [2 November 1938], pp.14-16, 23-25; no. 48 [25 November 1938], pp. 7-10, 24-25; Interview, Jonathan Goldstein with Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, 2 January 2002; Violet Gilboa, comp., China and the Jews [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Library, 1992], pp. 40, 43; Shickman-Bowman [see note 52], p. 196; and Passage Through China: The Jewish Communities of Harbin, Tientsin, and Shanghai [=Derekh Erets Sin: Ha-Kehillot Ha-Yehudiot Be-Harbin, Tiyeng'tsin Ve-Shanghai] [Tel Aviv: Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1986][exhibition catalogue], pp. viixii; Dicker [see note 56] pp. 21-60; Liberman [see note 56], passim.

[58] Cohen, Jewish Pilgrimage [see note 8], pp. 203-04.

[59] On Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis as it may apply to Jews, see George L. Mosse, Confronting History: A Memoir [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000], pp. 152-63.

[60] Robert E. Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man", American Journal of Sociology 33, no. 6 [May 1928], p.892.

