

FEATURE

“NOT JUST ANOTHER COUNTRY”

THE OLMERT FAMILY SOJOURN THROUGH CHINA

A CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF TRAVEL IN JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION



By Jonathan Goldstein

“China is the country which hosted our parents. They studied in China. They spoke Chinese, and the Chinese culture is part of my heritage and memory as a young kid in the State of Israel. So China is not just another country for me.”

—Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Briefing, 8 January 2007, p. 1.

Between 8 and 10 January 2007, the University of Cape Town’s Kaplan Center for Jewish Studies and Research convened an international conference to examine the role of “travel” and “journeys” in the formation of Jewish identity. This article adds an East Asian dimension to that discussion. In particular, it examines the sojourn through China of the family of one of Israel’s best-known contemporary personalities, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

How did the Olmert family’s political identity coalesce in an Asian political context? This article utilizes the four-part analytical framework suggested by conference organizers Tony Kushner, Sarah Pearce, and Milton Shain for examining Jewish journeys in many parts of the world. It focuses first on “leavings,” or what motivated Jews to abandon their ancestral homelands; second, “passages,” or how the vicissitudes of travel to new and relatively unknown destinations shaped Jewish consciousness, thought and behaviour; third, “identity,” the new cultural and intellectual characteristics which Jews adopted at their new destinations; and fourth, the “return,” or how Jews, in their

new homelands, remembered and utilized their ties to their ancestral homelands.[1]

“Leavings”

In 1919, Ehud Olmert’s grandfather Iosif Iosifovitch was a middle-class merchant the city of Samara, a trading port on Russia’s Volga River which came to be known as Kuybyshev in the Soviet period. In that year, Iosif made the momentous decision to move himself, his wife, young son and daughter away from the chaos gripping their ancestral homeland. For many Jews 1919 was a time of political uncertainty, social upheaval, famine, and virulent anti-Semitic pogroms which were byproducts of civil war between Red and White Russian factions. With little chance of escaping to the West and with strong devotion toward things Russian, Iosif turned eastward, traveling across the Trans-Siberian Railroad to the city of Harbin, a Russian railway hub located several hundred miles within Manchuria, in the northeastern part of China. [2]

Why would a Jew like Iosif Olmert flee from one part of Russia to another to escape such problems as anti-Semitism? The answer lies in the peculiar nature of Harbin. It both was and was not part of Russia. It was constructed in 1898 by Czarist Russia on land leased from China. Here Jewish and non-Jewish Russians enjoyed an array

of economic, political and cultural freedoms unavailable in Russia proper. Despite wars, revolutions and upheavals, many of these fundamental rights remained after the railroad zone was sold to Japan in 1936. In these fortuitous circumstances the community grew from zero Jews in 1898 to the Jewish first settler in 1899 to a high point of about 13,000 residents in 1931. By 1982, in the wake of the Chinese communist revolution of 1949, the community had declined to one elderly resident. [3]

“Passages”

It was both the “push” of Samara and the “pull” of Harbin that brought the Olmerts to the Far East. The vicissitudes of travel from one place to another in the turbulent Russia of the late nineteenth teens effected both the ideas and personality of Iosif’s son Mordechai, who had been born in Samara in January or May 1911. Mordechai was nine years old when his father made the momentous decision to relocate the family. By 1919 Iosif had reached Harbin but left his wife Michal and their two children in Irkutsk, north of the Chinese border. In that year Iosif wrote his wife, urging her to take the children and head southeast to Harbin. [4]

In his autobiography Mordechai explains how this trip contributed to the formation of his Jewish identity. He records that “my mother immediately began preparations [for the trip] because many dangers were involved. Between Irkutsk and the Chinese border the Ataman Semenov took over and they hated the Jews. My mother warned us and stressed that we hide our national identity. In those days, because of my mother’s warning, I was beginning to question what it meant to be Jewish. The question of identity is associated with other issues I found out about in Irkutsk from the Jews who were there. They were talking about a Jewish country of our own—Eretz Israel—where they were about to go. Those things were absorbed in my mind although I did not understand them and they were kept deep in my memory.” [5]

Finding “Identity” Within a New Geographical Context

Twenty hours after leaving Irkutsk Michal Olmert and her children reached Harbin and met Iosif. Both parents retained their traditional occupations, lifestyles and attitudes and become shopkeepers. This was definitely not the case for the younger generation, and particularly for Mordechai. His transformation can only be understood in historical context.

In addition to being a boom town from an economic point of view, the Harbin in which the Olmerts settled was a crucible for Jewish intellectual development. In the words of Mordechai’s son Ehud, Harbin “was not just another place.” A contemporary of Mordechai recalled that “Harbin was a place where the interests of Russia, China, and Japan all converged. This gave the town a cosmopolitan character... where Russian was the language spoken by the Jewish population...a small island of Russian Jewry beyond its borders.” [6]

The city had a Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish publishing company. It brought out the Hebrew and Russian-language tracts of the city’s long-serving Rabbi Aharon Moshe Kisilev [1866-1949], who had embraced the pre-Herzlian religious Zionism of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever while a student at the Volozhin Yeshiva. Twelve Russian-language Jewish periodicals were published in Harbin, including *Evreiskaia Zhizn’* [Jewish life]. The very freedoms that allowed those publications to flourish also enabled the left-leaning Yiddish-language newspaper *Der Vayter Mizrekh* [The Far East], edited by Meir Mendelevich Birman, to appear.

The city hosted a variety of political movements ranging from Lazar Epstein’s anti-Zionist Jewish Workers’ Bund to the general Herzlian Zionism of Jewish hospital director Avraham Kaufmann to the ultra-religiosity of the non-Zionist Agudat Israel. Harbin also had a tiny community of Karaites, who were not formally recognized as Jews in Israel until the mid-twentieth century. Among the best known

Karaites were the tobacco merchants Eli Aaronovitch [1874-1936] and Abraham Aaronovitch [1877-1953] Lopato, originally from Trakai [Troki], Lithuania. There were forty-one Karaite graves in Harbin's Foreign Catholic Union Cemetery before its demolition in the 1950s. Finally, there was a tiny clandestine Communist Party in which a few Jews were active. Arguably the most famous Communist sympathizer in Harbin was Lazar Epstein's son Israel, who later becomes a member of the People's Republic of China's National People's Consultative Congress. [7]

Perhaps the fullest description of Harbin's intellectual vitality at the moment of the Olmerts' arrival appears in an account published by General Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen, who had also visited the smaller Jewish communities of Singapore and Manila. Cohen contrasted Harbin's vitality with the relatively blasé Jewish intellectual life of 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.[8]

It is clear, then, that by the time of the Olmerts' arrival in Harbin Jewish identity had been defined as a mixture of culture, language, politics, and religion. Both Mordechai and his future wife Bella Wugman matriculated at Harbin's Russian-language Commercial Gymnasium [Kommercheskaya Gymnasia]. Additionally, Mordechai studied Chinese at the



The Main Synagogue in Harbin (also called the Old Church) is seen in Artilleriskaya Street, Pristan District (now Tongjiang Street, Daoli District). Its foundation was laid on May 3, 1907 and completed in January 1909.

Oriental Institute [Oriental'ny Institoot]. According to Mordechai's contemporary Teddy Kaufman, Mordechai knew Chinese well enough to teach Russian to Chinese students in Chinese. It was in this Russified Sinitic-Judaic context that Mordechai took on a new Jewish identity. [10]

Prior to the Olmerts' arrival, and under the influence of Rabbi Kisilev, the older generation within the Harbin Jewish community overwhelmingly committed to General Zionism. By the mid-nineteen twenties many members of the younger generation, under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution, tended to sympathize with the left wing of the Zionist movement. By 1928, both Mordechai Olmert and Bella Wugman leaned toward the Leftist Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hazair. They had been influenced by the Russian refugees David Laskov and his wife Zippora, who had already had a taste of Siberia. They had been exiled by order of the Soviet government, and, at great peril, crossed the Soviet-Chinese border. The Laskovs suggested to the older Jewish youth in Harbin that they join Hashomer Hazair. A letter was sent westward to Hashomer headquarters, requesting formal recognition of a Harbin chapter. Even before a response was received back, the leftist Harbin

Jewish youth began meeting under the banner of Hashomer Hazair

At that crucial moment a politically-astute businessman, Alexander Gurvich, arrived from Palestine. Gurvich had been born in Minsk in 1899 to a middleclass family which was very much part of the Russian Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment. He attended high school in St. Petersburg and, like such other maskilim as Chaim Weitzmann, Selig Brodetsky, and Harbin Jewish hospital director Avrum Kaufmann, sought higher education further west. In 1925 Gurvich matriculated in politics and economics at the University of Hamburg. There he embraced the right-wing ideology of Vladimir Zev Jabotinsky's Betar movement, the ideological precursor of many Israeli parties from Herut to Kadima. Gurvich immigrated to Palestine upon his graduation from Hamburg.

According to Mordechai, "Gurvich was our teacher. He came to us at a time of crisis in Zionist ideals, when many left Eretz Yisroel and returned to Europe. In those dark and overcast days, he acquainted us with Jabotinsky's theories [which] meant the obligation first of all of moving to Eretz Yisroel. Gurvich had not only made aliyah but was a chalutz, a pioneer, in the full sense of the word. He established factories, made employment for others, and went about developing trade and industry as well as the agricultural sector." [11]



The first member of the Olmert family to revisit was Mordechai in 1947. He had twin motivations. First, he wished to visit his mother Michal, who was still in China, and ease her exodus to Eretz Israel. His second motive was subversive. He was traveling on behalf of the Irgun, the Jabotinsky-oriented underground movement in Palestine. Mordechai was under the direct orders of Irgun Commander Menachem Begin and also in communication with his old Betar guru Alexander Gurvich.

Gurvich met regularly with the young Zionists in Harbin where, according to Mordechai, "he tried to prove to the youth that joining Hashomer Hazair had been a mistake...for based on their beliefs, they were closer to Betar than to Hashomer Hazair. Within a short time, the older youth came to the conclusion that they belonged to the National Camp of Jabotinsky. They sent a letter to Betar headquarters in Riga which approved their joining." A minority of the Harbin Hashomer Hazair refused to go along with the switch to Betar and instead joined the Communist party youth movement Komsomol. This tiny faction ultimately migrated to Birobijan in the Soviet Union and was never heard from again. [12]

Gurvich remained in Harbin until 1939. Under his influence, in 1930, Mordechai left China for agricultural training in Holland preparatory to his immigration to Palestine. His wife-to-be Bella Wugman left Harbin directly for Palestine on a phony marriage certificate to fellow Betarnik Eliahu Lankin, who was already an official Palestinian resident. When Mordechai ultimately reached Palestine in 1933, the phony marriage to Lankin was dissolved, Mordechai married Bella, they settled near Binyamina, threw themselves into Revisionist politics, and had four sons in rapid succession: Amram [Ami], in 1936; Yirmiyahu [Irmi], in 1943; Ehud [Udi], in 1945; and Yosef [Yossi] in 1950. Yossi was named for his

grandfather Iosif who was buried in Harbin in 1941. [13]

Return to and Memorialization of the Chinese Homeland

In China, Mordechai and Bella assumed a Zionist Revisionist political identity and a commitment to leave China for Palestine. A second ideational impact of their China sojourn was a determination to maintain their China ties while living in Eretz Yisroel. Amram recalls chinoiserie in the Olmert house in Nahalat Jabotinsky, near Binyamina. Ehud maintains that “China is the country which hosted our parents. They studied in China. They spoke Chinese, and the Chinese culture is part of my heritage and memory as a young kid in the State of Israel. So China is not just another country for me.” [14] An expression of that commitment has been the return visits to China by members of the Olmert family. These trips began in the 1940s and include a tangible and ongoing memorialization of the family’s China experience.

The first member of the Olmert family to revisit was Mordechai in 1947. He had twin motivations. First, he wished to visit his mother Michal, who was still in China, and ease her exodus to Eretz Israel. His second motive was subversive. He was traveling on behalf of the Irgun, the Jabontinsky-oriented underground movement in Palestine. Mordechai was under the direct orders of Irgun Commander Menachem Begin and also in communication with his old Betar guru Alexander Gurvich. His assignment was to raise funds for the arms ship “Altalena,” which was bringing weapons to force the British out of Palestine. In Shanghai and Tianjin Mordechai collected about \$100,000, a considerable amount of money in 1947. This sum was about 40% of the total cost to purchase and supply the “Atalena,” which was ultimately sunk off the Tel Aviv beachfront in a pitched battle between Zionist Revisionists and Labor Zionists. [15]

The second family member to reestablish Chinese ties was Yossi. By 1989, the heirs of

BEIJING, CHINA - JANUARY 10: Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao take part in the official signing ceremony and toast at the Great Hall of the People on January 10, 2007 in Beijing, China.



Jabotinsky had come to power in Israel via a succession of political parties which stretched from Herut to Gahal and ultimately to Likud and Kadima. In that year Yossi, as representative of Yitzhak Shamir’s Likud government, met in Israel with Chinese pilots, including the chief test pilot of Chinese air force, at a time when Israel was establishing its first military and diplomatic contacts with China. In 1991, again at the directive of the Prime Minister’s office, Yossi helped China set up a Tel Aviv office for its official press agency Xinhua. This office, and a branch of China’s official state travel service, Luxingshe, served as intermediaries between China and Israel until the establishment of full diplomatic relations and embassies one year later. In June 1992, after Likud lost national elections to Yitzhak Rabin’s Labor party, Yossi went to China on a private visit. There, he became the first family member to actually revisit Harbin.

The third family member to reestablish Chinese ties was Amram. He was a professional agronomist who had maintained the family farm near Binyamina even as a teenager, when his father returned to China to raise funds for the “Atalena.” In 1998 Amram visited China at the invitation of the Chinese Government, in his capacity as Chief Executive Officer of Agridev-Agricultural Development Company. While in China he learned that the grave of his grandfather Iosif was in dilapidated condition in Harbin’s Huangshan Jewish cemetery, which, with over 700 graves, is the largest in the Far East. Amram returned to Israel and planted the idea in the

minds of his brothers to help restore that tombstone, the graves of some other relatives, and also the graves of the grandmother and grandfather of [Ret.] Israeli general and parliamentarian Efi Eitam (Faine).

In 1998 Amram secured an appointment as Agricultural Attache in Israel's new Beijing Embassy. In that capacity he also laid the groundwork for his future appointments as Professor of Agronomy at Beijing's China Agricultural University and Qingdao's Laiyang Agricultural University. As Agricultural Attache, Amram also helped establish Israel's first Dry Lands Research Station in China, a project sponsored by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs's Foreign Assistance Program [MASHAV, headed at that time by Benjamin Abileah]. [16]

When Ariel Sharon's Likud party returned to power in the national election of 2001, Ehud became the fourth member of the family to renew his China ties. By 2004 he had already served eleven years as the Likud Mayor of Jerusalem and was a Vice Prime Minister in Sharon's national government. In that capacity Ehud visited China. Under Ehud and Amram's supervision the family purchased two monuments for the Harbin cemetery and effectively inaugurated the process for the cemetery's total rehabilitation. One monument is their grandfather's re-engraved tombstone. The second is a triumphal obelisk at the entryway to the cemetery. It bears a heartfelt inscription, in excellent Chinese and cumbersome English, reading: "Thank you for the protection given to our community. From the standpoint of a past member of this Jewish community, we appreciate this protection. Thank you for the dignity that was provided. All of this will be remembered by most of the Jewish people who lived in this city—Harbin. Ehud Olmert, Vice Prime Minister of the State of Israel, June 25, 2004." [17]

Yet another way in which the Olmerts have preserved and utilized the memory of their Chinese experience is in a series of historical

seminars about the Jews of Harbin. Two of these conferences have been jointly organized by the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, the Chinese Communist Party of Harbin's Daoli [formerly Pristan] district, Israel's Embassy in Beijing, and the Tel Avivbased Israel China Friendship Society and Igud Yotsei Sin [Association of Former Jewish Residents of China], headed by Teddy Kaufman. The first seminar, in which this author participated, was held in August-September, 2004. [18] The second, in which Amram Olmert and his wife Regina participated, was held in June 2006. By that time Ehud Olmert had become Prime Minister of the State of Israel. In that capacity he gave videotaped greetings in English to the historical seminar. Amram Olmert and Teddy Kaufman recited the Jewish prayer for the dead at the grave of Iosif Olmert in a ceremony covered by television, radio and print media crews from Harbin, Beijing, and Shanghai. [19]

On January 8, 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert visited China once again. His task this time was not to memorialize Harbin but to discuss the existential threat which Iran poses to the entire Zionist enterprise. [20] In a broader sense Prime Minister Olmert was rekindling his family ties to China that were first made during his father's perilous train journey from Irkutsk to Harbin eighty-eight years previously. That train trip into China initiated the rich, fluid, and complex process of ideological formation of the Olmert family.

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NOTES:

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[2] Iosif Iosifovitch's name suggests that his father had probably died while his mother was pregnant. Hence he received his father's first name in an unusual exception to the way in which Ashkenazi names are chosen. Iosif Olmert tombstone, Huangshan Jewish Cemetery, Harbin, China. In 1897 Samara had a population of 90,000, among them 1327 Jews.

By 1917 the Jewish population had grown to approximately 3000-5000. <http://www.ijc.ru/istoki37.htm>. According to Teddy Kaufman, who knew the family well, the Olmerts were escaping anti-Semitism and Communism when they left Samara. Email: Teddy Kaufmann [Tel Aviv] to the author, 1 February 2007.

[3] For a general history of Jewish settlement in Harbin, see 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; Boris Bresler, "Harbin's Jewish Community, 1898-1958: Politics, Prosperity, and Adversity" in Jonathan Goldstein, ed. THE JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME ONE. HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES [Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999], pp. 200-15; Israel Epstein, "On Being a Jew in China: A Personal Memoir," in Goldstein, ed. THE JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME TWO. A SOURCEBOOK AND RESEARCH GUIDE

[Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2000], pp. 85-97; Alexander Menquez (pseudo.), "Growing Up Jewish in Manchuria in the 1930s: Personal Vignettes, in Goldstein, JEWS OF CHINA. VOLUME TWO, pp. 70-84; Ya'akov Liberman, MY CHINA [Jerusalem and Hewlett, NY: Gefen, 1998]; and Israel Cohen, A JEWISH PILGRIMAGE [London: Valentine Mitchell, 1956].

[4] Iosif 's wife Michal, or Michele, died in 1965 and is buried in Binyamina Cemetery, Israel. Mordechai died in 1998 and is also buried in Binyamina. Mordechai Olmert, DARKI B'DERECH RABIM [Hebrew: My way on the way of many others]. [Tel Aviv: Or-am, 1981], p. 12; Interviews: Yossi Olmert, via telephone from New York, 10 December 2006; Ya'acov [Yana] Liberman, San Diego, Calif., 15 December, 2006; Amram Olmert, Tel Aviv, 1 January 2007.

[5] Mordechai adds that "there were two difficult years in front of us. My father was an administrator and didn't succeed in finding work that suited him. All the luxuries that we had became scarce. My mother opened a shop for milk and groceries. For the first time in our lives we were impoverished. I was then nine years old and with the beginning of studies in the 1920s I entered junior high school. My sister studied at the same school whereas my brother studied in a senior high school that was much more famous. The owner of this famous high school...was an administrator of the railway. Few Jewish students studied in it. Most of the teachers and students were ethnic Russians. On the other hand the high school where my sister and I studied was built shortly before and located in a Jewish area. A large part of the students were Jewish and even the building was owned by the Jewish community. In Harbin there was also a "Talmud Torah"— a Jewish elementary school— in which, besides general studies, Hebrew and religious studies were taught. In the city there were two synagogues, an old age home, and a huge library of the Jewish community. Community life was lively especially thanks to the hundreds of Zionists who left Russia and were on their way to Eretz Israel." Mordechai Olmert, DARKI, pp. 14-15.

[6] Alexander Gurvich, quoted in Joseph Chrust, ALEXANDER GURVICH [1899-1980] PORTRAIT [Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 1986], p. 4. In the mid-1920s Manchuria was the "property" of the local Chinese warlord Zhang Zuolin, who was assassinated by the Japanese in 1928. In 1929 there was a skirmish between Chinese and Soviet forces near the border town of Manzhouli. Japan becomes a significant actor in Northern Manchuria after 1931.

[7] Sam Ginsbourg, MY FIRST SIXTY YEARS IN CHINA (Beijing: New World Press, 1982), p. 199; Isador A.

Magid, "I Was There," in Goldstein, CHINA AND ISRAEL, pp. 41-45; Israel Epstein, "On Being a Jew in China," pp. 85- 97; Liberman, MY CHINA, pp. 57, 95-97, 151- 65.

[8] Israel Cohen, JEWISH PILGRIMAGE, pp. 203- 04. [9] Chrust, ALEXANDER, p. 6. Veteran China Betar leader Ya'akov Liberman asserts that "throughout the years, while the fate of political Zionism sailed between the calm waters of the Balfour Declaration and the rough seas of the British White Paper, Betar in China led the Jewish communities in their complete identification with Jewish independence and Statehood...The Jews of China were no longer identified solely by the method of worship. They were now seen on the various sport arenas, on street parades, assembly halls and public gatherings. The ghetto mentality was eradicated." Most importantly, "from the early thirties Betarim from China left comfortable homes and comparatively easy lives to join other Betar teams for "plugot avoda" duty in Palestine." Ya'acov Liberman, "Achievements of Our China Betar," in BETAR IN CHINA, 1929-1949 [Tel Aviv: Igud Yotzei Sin (?), ca. 1974], p. 137.

[10] Email: Teddy Kaufman [Tel Aviv] to the author, 1 February 2007.

[11] David Laskov graduated from the Haifa Technion and served with distinction the Engineering Corps of the Israel Defence Forces [Zahal]. As of 2007 he holds the record as longest-serving active duty soldier in Zahal. Mordechai Olmert, DARKI, p.26; Bressler, "Harbin's," pp. 207-08; Chrust, ALEXANDER, pp. 3-6; Interview, Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, 2 January 2007.

[12] Olmert, DARKI, p.26; Chrust, ALEXANDER, pp. 3-6; Bressler, "Harbin's," pp. 207-08. Interview, Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, Jan. 2, 2007. In Harbin Gurvich was editor/publisher of the Revisionist Russian language weekly GADEGEL [the Cyrillic rendition of the Hebrew "ha-degel," literally meaning "the flag" and having specific reference to the blue-and-white Zionist flag. See complete issues of GADEGEL for 1940 and 1941 in Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv.] Gurvich's acceptance into the Harbin Jewish community was greatly enhanced by his marriage to Raisa Zondovitch, who came from one of the city's wealthiest Jewish families. She had been sent to study agriculture in the Nahalal collective settlement in Palestine. RE: the Komsomol youth organization: In Israel in 2007 there is a weekly Russian-language newspaper entitled KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA! The emphasis on the last syllable DA!, meaning "yes." mocks the entire Komsomol enterprise, its hypocrisy and bloody history.

[13] Interviews: Yossi Olmert, via telephone from New York, 6 December 2006; Ya'acov [Yana] Liberman, San Diego, Calif., 15 December, 2006; Amram Olmert, Tel Aviv, 1 January 2007; Teddy Kaufman, Tel Aviv, 2 January 2007.

[14] Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY DAILY BRIEFING, 8 January 2007, p. 1; Amram Olmert interview, 1 January 2007. It is unclear just how much Chinese Mordechai and Bella Olmert understood and spoke. As already noted, they matriculated in a Russian-speaking high school, the Kommercheskaya Gymnasia. Both they and their parents surely knew some street Chinese or pidgin Chinese, which ethnic Russians and Jews used to communicate with the local Chinese population.

[15] Chrust, ALEXANDER, p. 21; Transcript of tape recording of Moredechai Olmert, approx. 1959, made by Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv [in Hebrew]; 1947-4; see also postal correspondence and four telegrams between Mordechai Olmert and Alexander Gurvich, in Russian and English, 1947- 48, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv.

[16] Yossi Olmert interview, 10 December 2006; YEDIOT AHCHONOT [Tel Aviv], 6 March 2001, p. 5C.

[17] Amram Olmert interview, 1 January 2007; Olmert monuments in Huangshan Jewish cemetery, Harbin. [18] Goldstein, Jonathan. "Chinese Jews Return to Harbin, See a Bright Future." CHINA RESEARCH CENTER NEWSLETTER [Kennesaw, Georgia] 3 [October 2004], pp. 2-3; <http://www.chinacenter.net/News/NewsOct04/News-10-04.htm>. Alternate versions in POINTS EAST [Menlo Park, CA] 19, no. 3 [November 2004], pp. 1, 7; THE SHOFAR [Chattanooga, TN] 18, no. 2 [October 2004], p. 11; ISRAEL-CHINA VOICE OF FRIENDSHIP [Tel Aviv], no. 50 [November-December, 2004], p. 5; THE FORWARD [New York], September 24, 2004, pp. 1, 6; BULLETIN OF THE IGUD YOTSEI SIN [Tel Aviv] 51, no. 382 [November-December 2004], pp. 7, 9; THE CARROLL STAR NEWS [Carrollton, Ga.], September 19, 2004, p. 7.

[19] Matanya Ben Avraham, "International Forum on the History and Culture of the Jews of Harbin," BULLETIN OF THE IGUD YOTZEI SIN [Tel Aviv] 52, no. 390 [November-December 2006], pp. 28-31.

[20] Ehud Olmert, Beijing, speaking to the Chinese news agency Xinhua, quoted in JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY DAILY BRIEFING, 8 January 2007, p. 1; "PM Olmert's Speech at the Concert Celebrating 15 years of Israeli-Chinese Diplomatic Relations," Beijing, January 11, 2007, text issued by Prime Minister's Office and available on line as

[http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOeng/Communications/PMSpeaks/speeches in 110107.htm?DisplayMod](http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOeng/Communications/PMSpeaks/speeches%20in%20110107.htm?DisplayMod). According to Yitzhak Shichor, "upon his return Prime Minister Olmert ordered his aides to draft a plan for even deeper relations with China." For a full analysis of Olmert's January 2007 China trip, see Shichor, "Reconciliation: Israel's Prime Minister in Beijing," THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION CHINA BRIEF 7, no. 2 [January 24, 2007].

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The Sino-Judaic Institute is a non-denominational, non-profit, and nonpolitical organization which was founded in 1985 by an international group of scholars and laypersons with the following goals: 1) To promote friendship and understanding between the Chinese and Jewish peoples and to encourage and develop their cooperation in matters of mutual historical and cultural interest. 2) To assist the descendants of the ancient Jewish community of the city of Kaifeng, Henan province, in their efforts to preserve and maintain the artifacts and documents they have inherited from their forebears, as well as in their efforts to reconstruct the history of their community. 3) To support the establishment and maintenance of a Judaica section in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum. 4) To promote and assist the study and research of the history of early Jewish travel in China and in the rise and fall of the various Jewish communities that were established in China over the past millennia. 5) To publish general information and scholarly materials dealing with all aspects of the Chinese-Jewish experience. 6) To serve as a briefing and information center for those interested in Sino-Judaica, and for travelers to Kaifeng and other centers of Jewish interest in China. 7) To cooperate with other groups whose interests lie in Sinitic and Judaic matters.