

In the fall of 2002, I received an invitation from Mr. Robert Daly, of the Johns Hopkins-Nanjing Center for Chinese and American Studies, in Nanjing, People's Republic of China, to visit for a week's time, lecture, and meet with students.

The Hopkins-Nanjing Center, located at Nanjing University, is one of the leading places in China for Western scholars to meet Chinese colleagues. The University, which is separate from the Center, is also the home of our learned colleague, Professor Xu Xin, foremost authority on the history of Chinese Jewry, and his wife, Kong Defang. Nanjing University is also the *alma mater* of HUC-JIR/Cincinnati graduate student, Bo Yang.

The principal interest at the Center is international stud-

received – and I taught two classes besides. My time at Nanjing University was enriched by a week of lively athletics and other wonderful experiences. One morning, while setting out for a jog, I noticed students playing basketball on outdoor courts near the track. I was invited to join in and had some fine games during these days. The students all knew about Houston Rockets center, Yao Ming.



Following the week in Nanjing, I flew to Lhasa, Tibet. After getting me settled in my hotel, my guide took me to Jokhang Temple, the central focus of visits for devout Tibetans. I heard the famous chanting of the monks (which does *not* resemble our familiar Torah

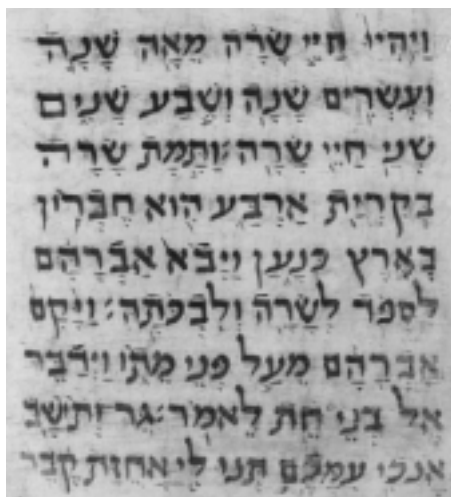
Dr. Weisberg on the roof of The Portula Palace, Lhasa, Tibet

From HUC-JIR to China: Faculty A

ies. The invitation to a scholar focusing on the Ancient Near East would afford faculty members and students an opportunity to contrast an unfamiliar but important discipline of human history in an ancient landscape and a distant place. Having been told that “Chinese historians like nothing better than a narrative involving ‘intrigue,’” I decided on the lecture topic: “The Grandeur that was Babylon (625-539 BCE): Culture, Religion and Political Intrigue in an Ancient Capital.”

At the Nanjing Center, I was welcomed by American Director, Mr. Daly, and Chinese Director, Professor Chen, who were most gracious. I met professors from the University faculty, as well as students, and visitors – principally from the U.S., but also from France, Africa, and elsewhere. Most, but not all visitors, spoke Chinese – while a few, like myself, spoke only English, which most everyone at the Center understood. The lecture was illustrated with slides and a few artifacts. It was very well attended and heartily

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Kai Feng manuscript: Hayye Sarah, HUC Ms 953, Klau Library/Cincinnati

There was also a small banquet in my honor, and Professor and Mrs. Xu Xin graciously extended an invitation to their

home. Moreover, Professor Xu Xin took time from his busy schedule to take me on a tour of the city that included historical sites of exceptional interest: The Ming City Wall (1368-1644 – the longest city wall ever built in the world) and the main Confucian temple and Imperial Examinations History Museum, where scholars spent months or years preparing for their exams.

trip!) and saw the banner-festooned halls and rooms.

In following days, we took an excursion to the fortress-like Potala Palace of the Dalai Lama, built in the 14th century, and went on tours to the great monasteries of Drepung and Ganden, massive, citadel-like ecclesiastical retreats.

There is much to see in Shanghai, one of the three wealthiest cities of today's China, but of major significance to the Jewish traveler is the “special interest tour” of the old Jewish neighborhood, with its museum, former “Russian” synagogue, and reconstruction of a typical apartment of a refugee family that had fled Germany for the safety of China in the late 1930's. Outside the museum, when I paused to take a photo of the building, the guard, in military uniform, gestured for me to wait, and after running inside, came out to pose holding a small Israeli flag!

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As a professor of Jewish education in the United States, the most unusual situation in which I might imagine myself is as a consultant/scholar in a Christian private school in Hong Kong. In January 2003 this unusual situation became a reality as I traveled with my Catholic colleague and partner in interreligious work, Dr. Mary C. Boys of Union Theological Seminary (see page 6), to the Hong Kong International School (HKIS). It is a school with 2500 students from kindergarten through high school on two campuses. We were invited as the Charles W. Dull Visiting Scholars to work with students, faculty, and families to explore the meanings of religious pluralism and the implications for their school.

HKIS was founded by Lutherans of the Missouri Synod as a Christian school with a strong commitment to the beliefs and practices of the Lutheran tradition. In the 21st century they find themselves to be a very diverse school religiously, with Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, followers

Professor Sara S. Lee with Dr. Mary C. Boys and scholar Dr. John LeMond.



poses an educational challenge for which teachers, educators and clergy need to be prepared, and that has been the focus of our work and our research.

The location of HKIS on Hong Kong Island places one in an interesting meeting of cultures. On the one hand, Hong Kong is part of China and much of Chinese culture is in evidence. At the same time, Hong Kong retains much of the British influence from the days of being a colony, and is home to expatriates from all over the world who work in this important commercial and financial center. Skyscrapers and all the hallmarks of prosperity and Western culture stand side by side with human density that is startling and a mix of Asian cultures that remind one that this is a very different place. HKIS reflects this same juxtaposition of cultures – a school that is American in its curriculum, the dress of its students and the origins of many faculty members – and yet a school where the students are from many cultures and religions, where the learning of Chinese is

Adventures of Professors Lee and Weisberg

of Bahai and other religious traditions. The cultural and national origins of the students and their families span the globe. The HKIS mission statement describes the school as “an American-style education grounded in the Christian faith, respecting the spiritual lives of all.” Given the origins of HKIS, their current social and religious reality, and their commitment to “respecting the spiritual lives of all,” the school faces an educational and cultural challenge of remaining true to the Christian tradition of their founding but aspiring to become a school that is truly reflective of religious pluralism.

We were invited, based on our work of the past 18 years in the field of religious pluralism and particularism, in the hope that we could help them move toward this aspiration. Our work with Jewish and Christian educators and scholars is based on a belief that it is very important to educate students, young and old, in our respective reli-

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gious traditions and toward knowledge and appreciation of the religious other. If religious pluralism is to be more than a slogan in our society then religious education must prepare people of all faiths to be deeply grounded in their own religious particularism while affirming the value of the religious particularism of others. We believe that this



Professor Lee and Dr. Boys with the faculty of the Hong Kong International School.

mandatory, and where Chinese New Year, as well as other Asian celebrations, punctuate the school year and are taken for granted, whatever the origin of the students.

Our visit involved sessions with students, faculty, families, and administrative staff. In each of these encounters the objective was to allow participants to share their understanding of their own religious and cultural commitments and to explore how that plays out in an environment committed to religious and cultural pluralism. In dialogues with High School and Middle School students we shared some of the experiences we have had working and learning together. We asked the students the following questions. “How has your experience at HKIS influenced how you think about yourself as a member of your tradition? About other traditions in the school?” Some students were quite puzzled when confronted by the reality that a

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Professor Weisberg

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A short flight took my wife, Ophra, who was now able to join me, and me to Xi'an, where the highlights were an all-day excursion to the monumental Qin Dynasty excavations with over 6,000 life-sized terra cotta warriors unearthed from the 3rd century B.C.E. In the evening – which happened to be our anniversary – we attended a concert of Tang Dynasty court music and dance.

For many years, the late Dr. I. O. Lehman, Curator of Manuscripts, and I labored on a project involving investigation of the Biblical manuscripts of the Chinese Jews of Kai Feng which are preserved in the Dalsheimer Rare Book Room of HUC-JIR's Klau Library. (A debt is gratefully acknowledged to Dr. Herbert Zafren and Dr. David Gilner, for their support.) Our project, which I am still continuing,

stemmed from our mutual interest in the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. Could manuscripts from far-off China reveal hitherto unknown facts about the development of the apparatus of the Torah? A careful review of the features of these priceless documents might reveal new pathways in Masoretic study.

All through this period, I had read about the Jews of Kai Feng, the place of origin of these rare Scriptures. However, for many decades, it was only a dream to be able to visit that city. The reason was that travel for American citizens to the People's Republic of China was forbidden. Therefore it was a particular pleasure and one of the highlights of the trip to go there and see the museum and the setting where Jews had flourished for so many centuries. An unforgettable occasion was the invitation to the home of the head of the Jewish Community, Mr. Moshe Zhang, his wife, and son.

Closing out this fabulous trip was a stay in Beijing, including sightseeing at Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. After purchasing entry tickets our guide said to us: the price of admission today was about \$1.50 – but back in the days of the empire, it would have been our necks! The better part of a day was spent at the Great Wall of China, Mutianyu section, with its cable car to the summit.

My thanks go to Dean Kenneth Ehrlich, Drs. Edward Goldman and Peter Obermark, Rabbi Sam Joseph, Sharon Crain, and special love and gratitude to Cheryl and Richard Weisberg.

A brief bibliography for the interested reader:

Bonavia, Judy, *The Silk Road*, Chartwell Books: Hong Kong, 1988.

Pan Guang, Xu Xin, et al., *The Jews in China*, China Intercontinental Press, 2001.

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Catholic and a Jew work together, learn together, and deeply respect each other's faith. They did not understand how we could accept the truth claims of each other's traditions. By exploring this with them we attempted to help them understand what a commitment to religious pluralism means.

For the faculty we constructed a learning experience in which they confronted the challenges of teaching toward the school's goal of preparing a religiously educated person in terms of the school's Christian roots and its religious diversity. For parents we created an interreligious learning experience, and asked them about the value of the experience and what it might mean to create such experiences at HKIS. At several meetings with administrators they shared their struggle of faithfulness to their identity as a Christian school and a desire to promote religious/spiritual pluralism. Based on the exploration of educating for pluralism in our work and our encounter with the realities of HKIS we shared some insights about the

importance of teaching for pluralism from the youngest grades. This always raises the question of how we can teach for pluralism before students are deeply grounded in their own religious tradition. The exchanges we had with all of the people we encountered at HKIS were as educative for Mary and me as they were for the groups and individuals with whom we met.

We could help them identify the questions and challenges in defining their school as both particularistic as a Christian school and yet ideologically committed to religious/spiritual pluralism. We learned from them how dedicated educators who take seriously the philosophical and ideological identity of a school struggle with enacting their commitments in the curriculum, culture, and all other aspects of the school on a day to day basis. For our ongoing work in educating for religious particularism and religious pluralism, which will be located at the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, the work we did at HKIS provides us with a rich case study from which we will continue to learn.

At the end of our visit to Hong Kong, Mary and I were invited to join in *Shabbat* worship and dinner at the Progressive Synagogue in Hong Kong. We spoke with the congregation about our work in general and what we had been doing at HKIS, where some of their children are enrolled. In my case as a Jew at HKIS and in Mary's case as a Catholic at the Progressive Synagogue, each of us experienced being the "religious other." In both situations, however, we were welcomed and respected for the wisdom and insight that each of us could bring about our own tradition, the deep interest we had in learning about the tradition of others, and the commitment to advancing religious pluralism as an ideology. In the rich cultural mix that characterizes Hong Kong, where the confrontation and synergy of diverse cultures and religious traditions is so palpable, the importance of working toward genuine pluralism in religious and cultural terms was reinforced. I return to my work in interreligious learning with greater energy and passion, and a debt of gratitude to HKIS for having invited me to be part of their struggle and search.