

HOLOCAUST STUDIES IN CHINA

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In order to address the issue of Holocaust studies in China, it seems to me there is a necessity to review briefly the background of the issue, especially the early awareness of the Holocaust by the Chinese. Ever since Adolph Hitler came to power in June 1933, Chinese began to feel the ill treatment to German Jews. Shortly afterwards, quite a few Jews came to Shanghai, China, as refugees. First, many Jews professionals such as doctors, nurses, scientists and professors arrived and sought haven in Shanghai.

From 1937 to 1940, about 10,000 Jews refugees came to central Europe who did not have a way to any other country and swamped into Shanghai. Shanghai became the destination for thousands of Jewish residents from countries under Nazi rule. For the first time, Chinese newspapers began to report their coming and described them as refugees and informed Chinese readers that those Jews were persecuted by Nazis and had to escape from their home country. The Chinese people, as well as Chinese government, were very sympathetic to Jewish refugees and took action to assist those helpless Jews in China. For instance, Jews in Shanghai were well treated by Chinese people, who were also suffering from Japanese invasion at the same time. The Chinese government then moved to Beijing from its original capital Nanking because of Japanese occupation of its capital and made the proposal by the son of doctor Sun Yat-Sen and chairman of the Chinese legislative body.

He proposed to set up a settlement in South West China as a replacement for those suffering in German occupied countries in Europe in 1939. Discovered documents assure that this proposal was officially approved by the Chinese administrative counsel and the government. Though the resolution was not implemented, due to the complicated issue of Second World War, it shows that Chinese government and people did not stand by in silence and do nothing. I mention this because I wrote an article last year based on archives in Nanjing about this resolution. Normally people believe no government took any action to help or assist those persecuted Jews, but this resolution makes it very clear that the Chinese were aware of the suffering of Jews in Europe. And the proposal makes very clear the situation of Jews in Europe and how the Chinese government wanted to help them.

Actually, they wanted to set up settlement for Jewish refugees in southwest China next to Beijing area. Supposedly, they would try to accept one hundred thousand Jews if the plan could be implemented. The significance and importance of this action stand out even more if one takes into consideration the situation of China at the time. In 1939 when the proposal was made and passed, Chinese people were suffering a great deal from Japanese invasion and atrocities. Half of the Chinese territory was under the Japanese occupation and millions of Chinese were killed by Japanese. The brutality of Japanese invasion is beyond description. The Japanese factions were no worse than Nazi as far as the cruelty of human beings. For instance, during the First World War against China, Japanese conducted the Nanking massacre which left more than 300,000 Chinese civilians dead within about 6 weeks. It occurred in 1937 after Japanese took over the city of Nanking, then captured China. The death toll of this massacre exceeds that of the two atomic blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki

in 1945. It's estimated to be around 210,000 or the number of civilian casualties of Great Britain, France, and Belgium. I mention this to show that even though the Chinese people suffered a great deal at the time they still want to assist Jews. That's why after the War there were many Jews who lived in Shanghai and survived the Holocaust. A lot of people went back for that reason.

I'm going to continue with the Chinese awareness of the Holocaust, especially after the war. We could say that the terrible consequences of Holocaust reached China at a very early time almost as soon as the Second World War was over because of the presence of Jewish refugees in Shanghai. We have evidence that the names of those people who had been killed in concentration camps or elsewhere were posted on Chinese streets and a lot of people were aware of that event. However, at the time China was concerned about its own suffering from Japanese, and so not much attention was really paid.

Perhaps the earliest awareness by the Chinese masses of public about the Holocaust was the publication of the Chinese version of the diary of Anne Frank in the 1940's. It is estimated that more than 500,000 copies of the book were sold at the time. It was the first and perhaps the only time that the Chinese public was shocked by the event. However, the Holocaust was not studied by Chinese. After the Communists took power in 1949 there were no formal relations between China and Israel. Politics and ideology played a decisive role in society in all fields, including academia and education.

It was almost impossible for Chinese scholars to study the Holocaust. Even the trial of Adolph Eichmann was not discussed in Chinese academic circles in 1960. However, following Nixon's visit in 1972, China began to relax her strict control over academic activity. Quite a few Western books and movies were translated into Chinese and circulated among Chinese people. Among them are *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and *The Winds of War*. A book dealing with Second World War and Nazi Germany gave Chinese readers a chance to read about the anti-Semitic policy of the Nazis and Hitler. The horror and the genocide of European Jews began to appear fairly frequently in many translated books. Chinese scholars began to pay some attention to the issue of Holocaust. This tendency developed much faster in the 1990s, especially after normalization of relations with Israel.

I would just like to list a few things in China that happened at the time. For instance, the genocide documentary made by the Simon Wiesenthal Center was aired on Chinese television in 1991. That was supposed to serve as a friendly gesture of Chinese to Jewish people. That's what it did deliberately. An exhibition "Courage to Remember the Holocaust: 1933-1945" was also prepared by the center and was held in a few Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Nanjing. The exhibition held in Nanjing is probably worth mentioning because it was put in the Memorial Hall of the Nanjing massacre. Side by side two "Holocaust people" could use that exhibition together. More than 80,000 Chinese people visited that exhibit within seven weeks. People for the first time realized that during the Second World War Chinese people and Jewish people suffered the same. In those exhibits we could see many pictures. Stories were identical about how Nazis killed Jews and how Japanese killed Chinese.

Then, there is a documentary film "Century Shanghai," about Jewish refugees in Shanghai, made in 1998. Millions of Chinese viewed it when it was aired on Chinese television. This

was the first time Chinese people made a movie about Holocaust survivors (though on Jewish refugees in China during the War). But it would give the chance to Chinese people and audiences to understand that issue we call Holocaust.

Also it is worth mentioning that the visit by Chinese leaders to Israel caused a lot of attention especially President Jiang Zemin's visit to Israel in 2000. His visit to Yad Vashem was very much reported. I believe that kind of visit could make the Chinese aware...

The majority of Chinese are aware of the existence of the Holocaust and its consequences to Jews. But what Chinese scholars? Before 1980 very few Chinese academic papers published ever focused on Holocaust studies. The Holocaust was actually studied by Chinese scholars by the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, especially after the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Israel in 1992. Major signs of such development included publication of large number of books and articles on various Jewish and Israeli subjects in the Chinese language lots of books on Jewish history and Israel carried certain chapters or descriptions of the Holocaust. Generally speaking, those books and publications tried to cover every aspect of Jewish and Israeli lives, their people, history, politics, geography, economy and culture. There is broadened Chinese knowledge of Israel, her history and culture. Since Israel studies is a new subject in Chinese academic circles both scholars and the general public are much in need of basic information rather than academic insight. So the first few books chiefly focused on such information. The article on anti-Semitic position of Hitler by Chin Sing Hong, a young scholar at Honna University is perhaps is that of the first Asian academic appearing in the Chinese language focusing on the Holocaust. It was written in 1990 and published in a series on Jewish culture in 1992. Its focus is on Hitler's policies [but] without tracing the roots of Hitler's anti-Semitism.

The article gives a fairly good analysis on the issue. She points out reasons why Hitler hated Jews. For instance, she mentions ideological reasons, racism, anti-Marxism and, as an economic reason, control of European countries as international "reason" for Hitler to adopt anti-Semitic policies or start what we called the Holocaust. This article definitely brought attention of Chinese scholars to this issue in 1995 two books were published by Chinese scholars focus on the process of Holocaust. The book by Yam Nae Su from [unintelligible] university was called *Catastrophe for Jews*. The record of the Holocaust was published in 1995 and another book by scholar in Chin Hi Sui Jan Jin *The Death of Six Million Jews in Europe*. Both books present a massive description of the Holocaust. They provide a general picture of the Holocaust for Chinese readers. More than 800,000 copies were sold... Perhaps my own book on anti-Semitism deals with this issue most systematically and deeply. This book carries a special chapter dealing with Nazi Germany's policy towards Jews and the consequences of the Holocaust. It gave Chinese readers a much wider background to understand anti-Semitism in Germany and Europe, going back two thousand years.

Since then some articles have been published dealing with the Holocaust. From 1998 in China we have a student who is doing an MS thesis on the Holocaust. For instance, one of my students write her MS thesis on (unintelligible). We have also started to offer courses on the Holocaust at Nanjing University. For instance, in spring semester of 2000 we had a course which attracted more than 70 students. By offering these courses we try to link Holocaust studies with emphasis on what it means to the Chinese. We put emphasis not so

much in details of what happened but on its consequences, and how can we prevent it from happening again.

Holocaust studies in China has some unique features. For one, it is linked to the development of Judaic studies in China. Most, if not all scholars who write articles and translate books about the Holocaust are involved in Jewish studies in China. For instance, professor Yau who wrote a book on Holocaust or, professor Tau, were all involved in Jewish studies. Holocaust studies is part of what we call Judaic studies in China. There are many conferences and they all emphasize this chapter, relating the Holocaust to the suffering of Jews and providing reasons for the Chinese to understand the necessity of the building of a Jewish state.

People have begun to make that connection Holocaust study in China is connected to that of the Nanking massacre. Many Chinese scholars, non -Jewish scholars, use the Holocaust experience to let the Chinese know how we should deal with the Japanese intervention into China. Even as the vast majority of Chinese learn about the Holocaust, there is still more to be done. I believe that Holocaust studies will deepen as Jewish studies deepen in China and more and more people pay attention to human rights issue. In the last few years we have tried to teach the Holocaust with an emphasis on human rights issue, because treating human beings in such a way is unbelievable. I believe that Holocaust studies in China will develop in that direction.

Discussion

Panelists

Shawkat Toorawa: [Question related to translation of word “Holocaust” into Chinese and whether the word Holocaust is being used to described the Nanjing massacre.]

Edward Kissi: I wanted to ask my colleague why people in China have to wait until they get to the university before they study the Holocaust. Or are attempts made in the secondary or the elementary school together to teach the Jewish experience and the Holocaust?

The sense I have in your presentation was that there is a relationship between the Holocaust and the Nanking massacre. I am wondering whether the interest in Holocaust studies in China stems from the Chinese own attempt - as a tactical measure - to highlight their own sufferings in the hands of Japanese.

Chivy Sok: It seems that Holocaust studies in China would seem to highlight more human rights issues. From what I understand a “human rights perspective” is a loaded term and a loaded concept depending on so many different historical and political contexts. I’m encouraged by the fact that Holocaust studies will help bring out more human rights discussion. Because of the Chinese government’s positions on certain human rights issues I wonder whether linking the two so strongly - and I am in favor of doing that - would put you in danger in some degree in the kind of work that you would like to promote.

Audience

Northeastern PhD student in History Department: I'm very interested in the survival of Jewish refugees. Professor Xu Xin mentioned the proposal to move people to the Southwest of China...Three Chinese people married Jewish people and moved to Israel or Europe. Some Jewish musicians taught Chinese students and a lot of these musicians chose to stay in China even after the Communist party came into power. Another Jewish doctor joined in the Communist army in the war against the Japanese invasion and he became very close friends of [unintelligible] who later became minister. So we can see how people stay together through such a phenomena. Thank you.

Debra Kaufman, Northeastern University Director of Jewish Studies: My question links a little bit what has been said by all three speakers that is, I would like to know the link of Holocaust studies and what you are calling Judaic studies. What does that mean in China? What is Judaic studies? What is the content and how far reaching is it? And could you tell us about the Jewish community in China and its relationship to Judaic studies and Holocaust studies?

Zhu Hong, Boston University: I just want to add to all the material that Professor Xin has offered. It is very illuminating because a lot of it is new to me. I feel that the issue of the Chinese public in general knowing about the Jewish experience and the Holocaust is also linked to the political situation. I remember when I was student in a university in China it was anti [unintelligible]. Perhaps I'm not using the correct English term in Chinese is [speaking Chinese] against the right of the Jews to set up their own state. That was the early 50s. So much has happened in between. Suddenly, with the open change of policy in tune with China's relations with the outside world, and with the West in general, I was aware of these relations. I was lucky enough to have a ticket to the Israel Philharmonic orchestra, which was an unforgettable experience for me when they performed in Belgium. I would like to add a little detail to Mr. Xin's story of the growing awareness. I was buying books from the library at BU and I came across a series. I'm sure Mr. Xin knows it - a series published by a very good publishing house called "Hebrew Studies." I found six which I bought and gave to [unintelligible]. It's a general title of Hebrew's studies and then there were historical studies, and Bible studies, culture of the Jewish people, very rich so I just wanted to add this.

I actually have in my own possession a very popular novel by a young woman writer who had been fairly controversial and had spent a little time in prison but then she got out. Her name is Tan Miening. She had written a very popular novel called Holy Temple in Chinese. It's about a romantic adventure of a Chinese Jewish girl. It was Chinese blood and Jewish blood and her adventures. Although it's just a popular novel I think it also helps.

Finally, a last comment or question. Professor Xin had mentioned that Jewish studies is now being linked to human rights awareness. I was wondering, and that is of course taking us to the political field, whether Jewish studies could be taken into the philosophic field. It may benefit the Chinese nation as a whole to take it into the philosophical field, if we do more thinking on the issue of memory. I think we are a big population with a long, long, history and I think memory is so important. I personally feel that the way the Jewish people is commemorating the Holocaust is very inspiring, from the perspective of historical memory.

Professor Xin responds

Thank you for those questions. About high school education: Holocaust is not included. Even the Second World War in Europe is mentioned very, very briefly. As a matter of fact, even at the university level we have textbooks in which it is mentioned very briefly. Now, we in the last five years have a new textbook starting to appear carrying some words about the Holocaust. But it seems to me that it was impossible for them to deal with it in detail. Those teaching world history in elementary school - when they were students, there were never trained. I mentioned in the past few years attempts to promote the study of Jewish subjects among Chinese. I ran a workshop on Jewish history to train Chinese professors from various universities and colleges in 1997. In 1999 we ran two workshops with more than fifty professors being trained. Those people, after being trained, go back. Hopefully some of them will establish courses but so far, we are only able to reach college, not high school, level. More work needs to be done.

Translation into Chinese must be concise and narrow. Any translation has to focus on the meaning. Otherwise it wouldn't get across like "anti-Semitism." It wouldn't make any sense, people would not understand. But now we have a general term: we say massacre. But in most cases Holocaust is translated into "killings Jews by Nazis."

Secondly, linking Holocaust studies to the Japanese invasion and Nanking massacre: in the last five years studies like Judaic studies really want to link this. We believe that the basic reference of those two is Jewish attitude. As professor Hong mentioned, Jewish memory normally was much longer than Chinese. Jews try to remember the historic events, especially major events like Passover. Those kinds of memory are very long for Jews. For Chinese, such memory is not that long. I believe there are many similarities but for Chinese, sometimes the bad things just are forgotten: "let bygones be bygones" becomes a phenomenon in China. We do hope when Holocaust studies get popular [this] would help the Chinese to re-think about Japanese invasion. Especially the massacre and how we should deal with this issue appropriately. And also, how we can make the Japanese government accept their responsibility wholeheartedly or fully? That is the issue.

In Nanjing we have a Memorial Hall of the massacre and I often talk to the director. They invite me to give talks on how Jews deal with the Holocaust issue.

As for human rights issues, we hope that Jewish studies or Holocaust studies will make Chinese aware how important it is to value the life of human beings. Hitler, or Nazi Germany, policy towards Jews was anti-human rights. In China, when we teach topics related to Judaic studies, we try to teach Jewish values or Holocaust with some kind of emphasis on the Jewish concept of dealing with human life. Often for Chinese people human life is important, but not that important if you take into consideration influences like Buddhism: life is pain and suffering, this life doesn't mean anything, what we live today is not all important because we try to prepare for next the life. We try to emphasize that for Jews life was given by God. Each life is important. We have to enjoy this life. If we emphasize life in such a way, we should respect human rights. Each human being is individual, unique. We try to get this information across from a cultural perspective.

As for whether such talk of human rights puts me or other scholars in danger - I don't think so. It depends on the way you present it. In my class, over the last ten years, when I teach Jewish culture I always emphasize what Judaism or Jewish culture means to the Chinese. The uniqueness of it.

Finally, some questions about the Jews of Shanghai- t here were Jews who came more than eight hundred years ago, Jews from Russia, from elsewhere, who lived in China in Jewish communities. Jews lived and cooperated with the Chinese very well and never were persecuted.

As far as the Holocaust and the Jewish study connection is concerned, when we introduce Judaic studies to Chinese people, when we try to talk about Jews and Jewish subjects, they always ask why Jews were hated by people. Why did Hitler want to kill Jews? All those questions are inevitable. You have to be introduced to Holocaust studies. My book on anti-Semitism is one of the mentioned published in Chinese, but most are translations. A few books were written by Chinese in the hope that we Chinese can know those kind of connections. And by the way, I have a couple of copies about the Chinese government proposal of 1939 to establish a Chinese settlement for Jews. Thanks.