

# RelBib

Bibliography of the Study of Religion

<https://relbib.de>

Dear reader,

This is an author produced version of the following article. This article has been peer-reviewed and copyedited but does not include the final publisher's layout including the journal pagination.

---

Author: Pătru, Alina

Title: "Judaism in the PR China and in Hong Kong Today. Its Presence and Perception"

Published in: Between Mumbai und Manilia: Judaism in Asia since the founding of the State of Israel (Proceedings of the International Conference, held at the Department of Comparative Religion of the University of Bonn. May 30, to June 1, 2012)  
Göttingen: V&R Unipress  
Bonn: University Press

Year: 2013

Pages: 1 - 17

ISBN: 978-3-7370-0158-8

---

The article is used with permission of [Brill](#).

Thank you for supporting Green Open Access.

Your RelBib team

EBERHARD KARLS  
UNIVERSITÄT  
TÜBINGEN



UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK

## **Judaism in the PR China and in Hong Kong Today. Its Presence and Perception**

**Alina Pătru, Sibiu**

During the last 30 years, China has gone through the so called process of opening up, rising as an economic world power as well. Since then, Jews have started to settle in China again after a break of several decades, and in the big cities organized forms of Jewish social and religious life appeared. In 1997 Hong Kong, the host city of a Jewish community which looks back on a history of 160 years, became part of China, playing an important role in the trade relations between China and the Western world. In Hong Kong there are seven synagogues now (figure for November 2011) which serve the special needs of the growing number of Jews.

The present day Jewish communities on Chinese territory have to some extent been subject of interest for Chinese historians (Guang / Jiam / Shuming 2011) and for Jewish journalists (Anna 2008; Klayman 2008; Levin 2008; Wade 2008; Weisz 2011), sometimes even for Jewish scholars (Ehrlich 2008; Ehrlich 2010). I myself have undertaken field work on them, looking at them through the eyes of a researcher in the field of religious studies. My paper seeks to give a short presentation of some of my results, embedded in the theoretical frame which I will use for their analysis. Before doing that, I will offer some information about the specific research interest which I carry as a scholar of religious studies, about my working methods and about my particular aims.

### **1. Research interest in the Religious Studies**

My perspective is that of a scholar of religious studies, which understands religion as a social and cultural system. The focus on the specific manifestations of a certain religion in a specific cultural context always bears the footprint of the general history of religions and always aims to draw conclusions which are generalizable for the comparative study of religions per se. A scholar in the field of religious studies aims to draw a *thick description* on religion in its interdependence with social, political, economical, cultural aspects, and with issues of every day life. He / she analyses how religious beliefs develop, become influenced by or influence the surrounding cultural settings; he / she is interested in the resulting behaviors and in the structures of the religious community founded on them (Hutter 2012: 177).

A scholar of religious studies focuses on one certain religion in one defined context, and usually he / she wants to find out something specific about the potential of that religion under certain conditions, or about the transformations suffered by it. The findings may shed new light on religiously motivated social transformation processes and thus contribute to a better understanding of social dynamics in the global space. For the researcher himself, it is also exciting to learn more about the possibilities of religion in general in social interaction by studying the particular case, and thereby to challenge his / her own subject-specific concepts and expand if necessary.

## **2. Particular aims**

My special interest lies in the field of diaspora studies and intercultural exchange. The purpose is to see how religion interferes with the diaspora experience, shapes it and is itself transformed by it. The scientific approach to religion and diaspora is a new field of research inside the religious studies (Vertovec 2008: 275-276), and until now, most scholars have mainly dealt with the experience of migrants in Western, developed countries.

The static homeland-diaspora paradigm usually stays at the basis of such research. It is considered that people are torn between two worlds, the homeland which they have left, which they miss and which they often idealize, and their hostland, where they have to confront unexpected problems. Attitudes towards religion change under these circumstances, and people develop new forms of religious attachment and practice. This paradigm, too rigid to express all kinds of diaspora experience, has been challenged, and some interesting forms of criticism emerge from within the field of Jewish social sciences. Weingrod and Levy argue, that “the static homeland-diaspora model may be much too simplistic, and that under certain political and historical circumstances these relationships are much more challenging and ambiguous” (Weingrod / Levy 2006: 694). This would certainly be the case in my analysis, as both the context (China, a new emerging world power) and the religion I deal with (Judaism) are non-typical elements for the recent diaspora research.

Judaism is the classical diaspora, and exactly by that it differs from the other diasporas we meet today. This group of people, as well as this religion, have lived for almost 2000 years

exclusively under diaspora conditions and their present-day homeland has never been, for many of its members, a real geographic homeland as well. For many Jews, Israel has the value of an ideal, spiritual homeland, to which they feel connected, but at the same time they feel a strong connection to the place where they have been born and have lived; to their real, geographic homeland. Jews living outside Israel do not simply have one homeland, they have two places which share the title of “homeland” - embodying different aspects of it. These multiple connections relativize the concept of “homeland” and have an impact on the diasporic transformation processes, too.

At first sight, the problem might be more simple in the case of the Israelis. At a deeper look, it is not: even for them, the place from which they or their parents have emigrated from Israel may still be loaded with emotions and rememberings. More than that, similarly to the diaspora Jews, Israelis also carry with them the shaping of that world, a so-called specific “flavor” of Judaism. The situation is even more complex for Israelis living temporary or permanently outside the borders of Israel. As Weingrod and Levy point out, a new Israeli diaspora emerges in places such as New York, Los Angeles, London or Paris (Weingrod / Levy 2006: 707). The Israeli diaspora has recently become a topic of research itself, and it is considered to be “still only an incipient diaspora” (Sheffer 1998: 29). Israelis who decide to leave the country for another place to live find themselves as forming a new, differently featured diaspora inside or besides the big Jewish community of that place. The Jewishness which they find there is not the same as the Jewishness they know from Israel, and thus Israelis develop a sense of difference and tend to connect to their own fellow Israelis and form a new kind of diaspora inside or besides the dominant Jewish cultural form.

Although it is impossible to speak about an outlined Chinese or Hong Kong Jewish diaspora, some diaspora related issues (such as transnationalism, or the relation to the state of Israel) may be explored in relation with Jews living on Chinese territory. When it comes to transnational issues related to Judaism, one can hardly ignore the Chabad-Lubavitch movement and its *shluchim* and *shluchos* sent all over the world to found communities or take care of Jewish travellers and merchants. They are present in China, too. They are not alone in the big Chinese cities. The Jews in Hong Kong, Beijing and today Shanghai, too, have alternatives: in all the three cities there is an organized progressive group, which appeals to various types of non-orthodox Jews. Progressive communities are usually also linked transnationally, gain support and influence from international movements. Hong Kong offers

the greatest variety, so that a Jew living there can chose between Modern Orthodox with a strong Zionist commitment, Sephardic Judaism, Chabad or the Progressive form.

### **3. Working methods**

During my second China trip (October to November 2011), I visited most of the Jewish congregations located in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. In each one of these congregations I had the chance to record interviews with the leaders and some of the members of the congregations, gaining some interesting insights about the internal dynamics of the communities, about aims and motivations of their members and about their self- and outside-perception in the Chinese world.

I have conducted a series of semi-structured, guided interviews, asking specific questions, but also allowing my interlocutors to give free, elaborated answers, which sometimes brought us very far from my initial concern. At the moment, I am in the midst of the process of analysing and evaluating my interviews, using methods from the field of qualitative social research. The final results shall soon be available in form of a book. Due to space limitations imposed by our frame, I will now restrict my analysis to one city and one topic. I will work with one single interview, in which two persons with different Jewish backgrounds try to reflect on issues related to dynamics of intercultural exchange in the large Jewish community in Hong Kong.

### **4. A Hong Kong example**

For this analysis I have chosen an interview with two Jewish women living in Hong Kong, both active members of the Jewish Women's Association, Deborah and Elisa (the names have been changed). I had been introduced to Deborah during the common meal after one of the services in the synagogue and we decided to meet again at her home. There she was working with Elisa, and they both showed great interest to answer my questions. Both consider themselves expatriates in Hong Kong, and they both had lived there for less than five years. Deborah is an Israeli and Elisa comes from Brasil. Deborah was very eager to tell me about the special character of the Jewish community in Hong Kong. Let's give her the floor:

Deborah: “It is very different culturally and ... in most places in the World, Jews and Israelis do not mix in the communities. There are communities of Israelis and communities of Jews. What is unique in Hong Kong is that there is a school, one school, that a lot of Israelis like to send the children to, and that creates a connection. But if you look at the congregations, although there isn’t that the Israelis are not invited here or non-Israelis are not invited there ..., but actually you have Ohel Leah typically non-Israelis ...”

Alina: “Ohel Leah?”

D: “and Chabad typically Israelis, typically.”

A: “Chabad?”

D: Yes, in Hong Kong. They don’t mix, is like water and oil. ... This is a very unique community; it isn’t a typical community like anywhere else in the world.”

A: “And it is unique because of the school, or because of the ...”

D: “Because of the structure of the community. The Centre [Jewish Community Centre] is very strong. Because of the school, because of the fact that the most people live in the same area, it is a very strong area ...”

As we can see, a very strong accent is put on the difference between one of the subgroups of the Jewish people and the rest. Deborah, the Israeli, starts by emphasizing the usual separation of the two groups. Plastic comparisons (“it’s like water and oil”) are used to express this in a very strong manner. An uninformed reader may even think that Israelis are not Jews themselves. Hong Kong is seen as a “unique” place, because there are some links between the two groups, here an institution like the school “creates a connection”. It is not that the two groups act together in every aspect, but there are elements which are important for both, and therefore they come together in relation with these.

The difference is manifest on the level of religious practice, too. Different ways of practice, different attitudes towards religion, drive these groups away from each other. This difference persists in Hong Kong too, and this becomes visible in the different synagogues they would attend. The plurality of the religious offer is a factor that maintains the separation of the groups.

The question arises: what brings them together? An interest in making sure that Jewish identity will be passed on to the next generations seems to be a common element, since the Jewish school in the city is attended by the youngsters of both groups. A general interest for the broader Jewish culture reunites them under the umbrella of the single Jewish Community Centre, and of the adjacent institutions: both ladies are working together in the Jewish Women's Association, performing charity projects. These interests create connections, apparently much more than religion does. And the connections take shape in the form of institutions, which are not religious institutions, at least not primarily religious ones.

Due to these links, Deborah turns to speak about one single community, "a very unique community" which reunites both groups. She seems to be convinced that the existence of these connections is something unique to Hong Kong, and that it has to do with the institutions mentioned above. Are the institutions the real link between the groups, the real plus which makes Hong Kong unique?

If we are to explain Hong Kong's uniqueness, we should first think about the fact that here all the groups live under diaspora conditions. In Hong Kong, as well as in Mainland China, there is not anything that can be seen as a well established previous form of Judaism. A short insight into the historical background of the community is necessary for a correct understanding:

In Hong Kong, the community looks back to an uninterrupted history of about 160 years, centered upon Ohel Leah as a synagogue and upon a club which later became the Jewish Community Centre (Leventhal 1988; Smith 1996: 398-399). Ohel Leah, the impressive, more than 100 year old synagogue, certainly is one of the most stable factors of the community, but not in the content of its religious practice, which has suffered many changes during the history. Let us just recall that it started as a Sephardic synagogue and is Ashkenazi Modern Orthodox now. Modern Orthodox Judaism is a religious form which tries to embrace both openness to the modern society and faithfulness to the orthodox tradition, thus appealing to a large number of Jews. And still, as the Ohel Leah Rabbi himself puts it, "it may be a successful style, but it may not be a style that is for everyone" (Interview with the Ohel Leah Rabbi, November 15, 2011). So it is not the religious style of Ohel Leah which gives the identity of Hong Kong Judaism. Neither is it the Jewish Community Centre as the secular counterpart, since it is mainly a frame for different activities, an umbrella, large enough to

shelter old and new initiatives. It is none of the established institutions who can convincingly affirm that it represents the Hong Kong Judaism.

It is also not one group. The Jewish community in the city is extremely diverse (Jewish Community Centre 1995: 15). The Khadoories are a Jewish family of long tradition in Hong Kong, and they still represent the old group of Baghdadi Jews, which had first arrived in the city in the 1840s (Leventhal 1988: 1; Jewish Community Centre 1995: 17). There are also some remnants of the Harbin Jews, the Russian immigrants at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Leventhal 1988: 3-4). But there is no Jewish group strong enough to become a dominant host in front of which newcomers would develop diasporic feelings inside the broader Jewish community. In other words, the newcomers are, at least numerically, much stronger than the hosts, so strong that they set the tone and particularize Hong Kong Judaism. And the newcomers are very diverse and relatively balanced in numbers. Another section from my interview will not only support this idea, but also bring some new aspects of the Jewish intercultural exchange:

Alina: "... is there any special flavor that Judaism could get here or no? ..."

Elisa: "The flavors that we get here are more the flavors of the Jewish community exchanging flavors with each other, wherever you come from, so we find, from Brazil, we are Latin Jews, I will bring a flavor ..."

Deborah: "of energy..." [*both laughing*]

E: "she will bring a flavor as an Israeli Jew, the French would bring their flavor, the British would bring their flavor, and then you will have a mix of flavors within the community that to me is absolutely magical! ..." I think more than the Chinese flavor, more than the Hong Kong flavor, Hong Kong flavor is this, this is Hong Kong flavor, Hong Kong flavor is this mix of people coming together, that's Hong Kong. ... China is another story. In China you get a strong Chinese flavor. The flavor that you get here is the flavor of Hong Kong, which is the openness of every flavor coming together."

D: "I like this explanation, I agree. ..."

E: "That's the Hong Kong flavor, you see, much more than any Chinese flavor, because by nature, Hong Kong is a mix ..."

The answers offer an insight into the diversity of the Jewish community in Hong Kong. South-American, Israeli, French and British Jews, and of course Jews of other origins, too,



form a mix of great diversity, a world in itself. None of the groups is perceived as being dominant, none takes a hegemonic position inside the community. They all are involved in a process of cultural giving and receiving without restraints, which is an indication that they are all on the same level in terms of numbers and influence.

This fragment also leads us to further observations. My question aimed to find out something about the intercultural exchange between Jews and the local culture. The answer is interesting because it widens the horizon, pointing to the fact that dynamics of intercultural exchange do not happen only between the host country and the recently arrived group. Such dynamics happen inside the group itself. They lead to the outline of a unitary identity, melting together the different regional influences. In a completely new environment, as Hong Kong is for most of its Jewish inhabitants, a new Jewish identity can emerge, enriched by flavors of the different regions of the world where Jews came from.

A few more details about Hong Kong might be helpful in order to understand this process. As mentioned before, Hong Kong, meaning literally “fragrant harbour”, is a place where Jews have lived for more than 160 years, and there are families which can look back to such a long local history. Nevertheless, during the last 20 years, the community has experienced a boom in terms of numbers: Jews from all over the world have moved here, mainly out of professional reasons (Green / Diestal 2009: 1190-1191). Various estimations see the number of Jews living in Hong Kong today somewhere between 3000 and 5000 (Green / Diestal 2009: 1186).

These people are not the classical immigrants who seek to integrate into the host society. They call themselves “expatriates”, and almost all of them are sure they will go back one day, back to their home country, which in this case means the country they have come from. Or, they will leave for some other place in the world. In spite of this, many of them live here for a very long time, much longer than they had originally imagined, and would continue to live here for an indefinite period. Some have started their own businesses and do not know how long they will remain. Connections inside the broader Jewish community are very important in this case. They or their family members become active and involved in different activities inside the Jewish community. For these long-term inhabitants, a change in their Jewish identity in the way described above may be the interesting result at the end of their stay.

A few questions could arise. One of them is concerned with the relation between these intercultural processes and the host country itself. In this particular case, the question is whether *Hong Kong is present or not* in this process of intercultural exchange among the Jews. In other words, would this evolution be the same everywhere in this world where Jews would meet, but none of the Jewish groups would be dominant, or *does Hong Kong play a certain role, catalysing the reactions which occur among foreigners of the same group?* Another question queries the *value of generality* of the observations taken inside the Jewish community. It is to be asked, whether such dynamics are to be found only inside the Jewish world, or whether the remarks have a more general value, whether they can be useful for the studies of other diasporas as well.

Elisa is convinced that these processes inside the Jewish community have something to do with Hong Kong itself. “By nature, Hong Kong is a mix”, she says. Jews who live in Hong Kong benefit from this mix. Being open to different influences makes you a real Hong Konger, being a cosmopolitan makes you a real Hong Kong-er, she suggests. Hong Kong means openness, which is to be rewarded by various enrichments. So yes, Hong Kong provides the tolerant soil which nourishes such processes, and to be engaged in such processes of sharing and receiving shows you to be integrated in the host society.

Elisa’s argument is interesting, but it overlooks the fact, that all these forms of intercultural exchange she is talking about just happen inside the Jewish community, inside one of the diasporic groups. Despite the fact that they have different geographical origins, Jews form one single ethnical group. When they go abroad, they seek contact to members of this group, and not so much to other Brazilians, French, Britains or other representatives of their origin country. So yes, Jews living in Hong Kong are, according to Elisa’s description, open to influences, but only to influences internal to their own diasporic group. The question is: Is this enough in order to affirm that they get a real Hong Kong flavor?

I will try to answer the question by looking at it from a different angle. Depending on the way one perceives Hong Kong, he or she will draw conclusions about what it means to get a local flavor in Hong Kong, and about the relation between the inner-Jewish processes and Hong Kong itself. Thus, I will reformulate the question and therefore ask: *how is one supposed to understand Hong Kong in order to affirm that exposure to intercultural dynamics among the expats in Hong Kong makes you get a Hong Kong flavor?*

More than other host places in the world, Hong Kong can be perceived in different ways. One can look at it as *the Chinese metropolis*, today part of China and with an indisputable Chinese majority of population. This perspective emphasizes the Chinese dimension of Hong Kong, and therefore to become Hong Kong flavored means to be influenced by the local Chinese / Cantonese form. Or one can see Hong Kong as *the international city*, deeply influenced by the former status of a British colony, a place where today a significant number of foreigners from all over the world live, where English is an official language too, besides Mandarin and Cantonese, and where Chinese are just one of the ethnic groups. In this way, the international dimension of Hong Kong is in the foreground, and the Hong Kong flavor could mean to reach a higher level of internationality. Both interpretations are legitimate: quantitatively, Hong Kong is strongly Chinese, but qualitatively it can be regarded either as Chinese, or still as an international city.

I am grateful to Noam Urbach for his suggestions after my presentation and let them flow into my considerations. Urbach does not agree with the sentence that Jews get influenced by Hong Kong. For him, to be Hong Kong flavored implies to be in contact with the Chinese and to become influenced by them:

“In fact, expat communities in Hong Kong tend to be surprisingly separate and distanced from the Chinese communities there. Their knowledge of either Cantonese or Mandarin tends to be very limited even after many years. Jews are no exception. Jewish kids who go to the Carmel school, grow up in a cultural enclave, disconnected from local culture. In fact, the Jewish community / communities is their surroundings, not Chinese Hong Kong. So I think their enthusiastic description of all sorts of Jews coming naturally together in Hong Kong, which one of them said ‘that is Hong Kong’, in fact means that for her, Hong Kong means not being in Hong Kong, having nothing to do with Hong Kong in general, but rather simply being in the Jewish expatriate enclave which is her actual surrounding. I.e. if she was in, let’s say, New York, she would have been actually living in New York, spending time and making a variety of connections with a variety of people etc., just part of this being ‘the Jewish community’, but in Hong Kong, she is wholly in the Jewish community” (Urbach, personal email communication, June 20, 2012).

Besides the fact that he adopts the first interpretation of Hong Kong, which is justified by the strong quantitative and even cultural dominance of the Chinese in the city, Urbach raises an important problem. He says, Hong Kong itself is missing in Elisa's everyday life, since the Jewish community is all that matters. The too weak outside connections have as counterpart the strengthening of her ties inside the Jewish community, and the intensity of the inner-Jewish dynamics is to be explained by the fact that the group ignores the host.

What happens, if we turn to look at Hong Kong as an international city? This is for sure Elisa's interpretation, since she defines Hong Kong as "a mix", and its flavor as "more than any Chinese flavor". Is Elisa focused on the international side of Hong Kong? Does she go beyond the borders of the Jewish community there? Does she have contacts with others, with non-Jews living in Hong Kong and does she become influenced by them? We need to look at the continuation of the interview in order to understand this:

Elisa: "You have eight million people, and from these eight million people roughly 150.000 are expats, roughly, if I'm not mistaken ..."

Deborah: "... and 5,000 of these are Jews."

Alina: "And the others? ..."

E: "There are eight million people, say, out of these 200,000 people are expatriates; the rest is Hong Kong Chinese. So there is already a big separation here. I mean, I ... most of ... a lot of my friends are Hong Kong Chinese. Because I've been coming here for many years, doing my work etc ..."

D: "... and she is very outgoing, very friendly. Not many people have Chinese friends like Elisa. I also have some Chinese friends, because I teach Hebrew and some Chinese, they want to learn Hebrew ..."

E: "... but the nature of these people, sorry, just to finish my thought, the nature of the expatriates here is that they would come together and share. So, within this large umbrella there's the Jewish community who behave the same way, we come in and we share our flavor."

In this part of the interview, Elisa moves on the quantitative line, giving exact numbers and explaining the proportion between Chinese and non-Chinese in Hong Kong. All this in order to emphasize the "big separation" which exists between the small group of expatriates and the large group of Chinese. Then she presents herself as different: she manages to overlap the gap

which separates the two groups. The sentence is formulated with hesitation: “I mean, I... most of... a lot of my friends are Hong Kong Chinese”, which shows that she is wrestling to find the right words. Her friend Deborah confirms her and stresses the fact that such people like Elisa are a minority, but a minority of which she is also part. Then Elisa interrupts her and affirms that it belongs to the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong to come together and to share, and exactly this is what Jews do inside their community.

The four key-concepts of this text are: separation between Chinese and expatriates, a minority of the expatriates bridging the gap, dynamics of intercultural exchange as part of the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong, dynamics of intercultural exchange inside the Jewish community. The first together with the third and the fourth are three steps which can be seen as the premises and the conclusion of an argumentation process: since there is such a separation between Chinese and expats in Hong Kong, it is the nature of the expats here to share, and therefore the Jews also do this inside the Jewish community.

Does Hong Kong play a certain role in this process? For Elisa, the answer is yes. It is the nature of the expatriates *here* to come together and to share. The host provides not only the space, but also the conditions which foster the dynamics among expats. The Jewish community is only actualizing a pattern for itself which is common for Hong Kong – if Hong Kong is to be understood as the international city. Not the contacts with the Chinese, which may indeed exist, are decisive for the evaluation of the presence of Hong Kong inside these dynamics. Elisa feels to be Hong Kong flavored due the fact that she is involved in such exchange processes among Jews, and not due to the fact that “a lot of her friends are Hong Kong Chinese”.

If we follow Urbach’s interpretation, Jews living in Hong Kong simply ignore Hong Kong. Anyway, even for him it is Hong Kong which determines Jews to only stay inside the Jewish community. Because of the separation between Chinese and expatriates, Jews come closer to each other. The fact that there are a few expatriates who pretend to be linked to the Chinese is insignificant in relation to the general model which is that of the separation. Fact is that Hong Kong requires that Jews grow together, because it is not an environment where they could easily mix or where they would be interested to have a greater variety of connections. In this case, dynamics inside a diaspora community are influenced by the host country, but in an indirect way.

In conclusion, intercultural exchange processes bear the mark of the place where they happen. This mark can be either positive or negative. It is positive, if we follow Elisa's thought and understand Hong Kong as a pattern for mixture. It is negative, but still existing, if we understand Hong Kong as Chinese and as scarcely open to foreigners. The negative form of influence is in this case simply the separation between the newcomers and the host. It does not imply any form of hostility on the part of the host towards the expatriates. If migrants or expatriates found themselves in a hostile society, they would also stick to each other, but they would do this out of an exterior constrain. Even in that case, the impact of the host on the intercultural communication inside a diasporic community would be identifiable. Anyway, this is not the case for Hong Kong. This is what Deborah suggests.

Deborah: "Judaism is a very pure religion; it seeks pureness of man within himself, within his family, within his society. ... And we try to live, I think, peacefully with our neighbors, to contribute wherever we can, to be open ... That's it, I think. Yes, and I think that Hong Kong in a way, now that you're asking I'm thinking, you are stimulating my mind that in many times in the history, many regimes considered Jews as a problem. Like, if we go to the Nazi regime, they wanted to solve the Jewish problem. And I actually find it, as I speak with you, that where there is no anti-Semitism like in Hong Kong, then there is no Jewish problem. And this I find very interesting. That's it, I think."

It sounds as if the lack of a "Jewish problem" automatically enables natural developments, which may not be remarkable at first sight, but which can be perceived as a totally new experience. Deborah herself finds this setting "very interesting" and being in direct relation to all kinds of social interferences which Jews are part of.

Religion enters the scene again, since for Deborah Jewish attitude towards society is based on a religious ethos. Religion seemed to be missing in the reflections above, but in Deborah's view, religion has an impact on man "within himself, within his family, within his society" - the circle is extended from the individual towards the society. Religion underlies the peaceful attitude towards the neighbors, any form of social involvement and contribution, and a general unspecified openness, which implies, it can be only assumed, the openness towards the culture of the place of living. Religion is manifest in its products, in forms of behaviour which

mark the transformation processes in the diaspora. The religious ideal is a desired state (*Sollzustand*), expressed by phrases such as “it seeks”, “we try to live”. At the institutional level, as we have seen in the first fragment of the text, religion appears to segregate the different subgroups of the Jewish diaspora, used to different types of worship and different ways of practice. At the level of ethics and social interference, it seems, according to Deborah, to influence the attitudes and shape the social dynamics in a positive way.

The four fragments of the interview which were chosen for the analysis offer different perspectives on inner-Jewish relations. In the first fragment, the separation between different Jewish subgroups is strongly affirmed to be the general pattern, to be found “in most places in the world”. Here in Hong Kong, the separation persists at the level of congregations, and only some secular institutions seem to provide a link between them. The second and the third fragment point to a Jewish community which is growing in cohesion and even develops a united, combined style. This is due to the fact that Jews of different flavors meet in Hong Kong, the “fragrance harbour”, a place which catalyses such reactions. The fourth text speaks more about an ideal, the religious ideal of “purity”, peacefulness towards the neighbors and general openness. Shortly said, we have a general separation between Jewish groups, maintained on the level of congregations in Hong Kong. Secondly, we have a particular situation of coming together and mixing inside the Jewish community of Hong Kong, which simply has to do with the way expatriates come to behave in this host place. And thirdly, we have a nominal state which mainly has the value of a term of reference.

The second question is concerned with the value of generality of the observations related to the Jews. More precisely, it is to be asked whether similar forms of internal intercultural exchange can also be found within other diasporic groups, in Hong Kong and in other places of the world. One answer comes from Elisa: in the third quoted fragment, she says it was the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong to come together and to share, the Jews being just a particular case. She herself indicates that from this point of view, Jewish diaspora is a typical diaspora; it is not a special form of diasporic existence which lives according to different rules, at least not here, in Hong Kong.

Another important aspect is pointed to by Deborah in the fourth fragment. Here she emphasizes the lack of anti-Semitism, as a precondition for the good particular situation in this host place. She does not move on a more general level, speaking about the lack of

hostility towards a diasporic group. It would be a matter of study; it is only to be assumed that other ethnical groups in Hong Kong also feel they can share and grow together due to the fact that they don't feel threatened in Hong Kong.

The topic would be worth to be analyzed in other contexts, too. It is presumable that what these two ladies express here applies for every diaspora and for its relations to the surrounding new home. Even if they do not gather together from different parts of the world, members of an ethnic or religious diaspora group will still bring with themselves regional differences, and will have the chance to grow together on the new soil. In order for this to happen, a few conditions must be fulfilled. First, they would need to meet in a neutral, peaceful environment, where tensions between the majority of the population and the group of newcomers were not felt as a serious danger for the individual or for the group. Secondly, no internal group should be strong enough to impose its style to the others, and to give them the feeling of being a diaspora inside the diaspora.

Concluding, I would say that although it is impossible to speak about an outlined Chinese or Hong Kong Jewish diaspora, the research done on the Jewish communities there show many interesting aspects which may even have a more general value and which can put many diaspora related issues in a new light. Central concepts of the diaspora studies are challenged and enriched: not only the homeland must be relativized, but we can see that the concept of diaspora itself can be understood in a stratified way. The intercultural exchange itself comes to be seen as multidirectional, and the influence of the host context comes to be identified at more subtle levels. Religion plays a role in the various processes inside the community and towards the outside. All these aspects are to be deepened in my further research; my paper could only bring a few examples and indicate some directions in which the research should go on.

## **Bibliography**

Anna, Cara: L'Chayyim. A Jewish Wedding in Shanghai, in: *Points East* 23/2 (2008) 10-11.

Ehrlich, M. *Avrum: The Jewish-Chinese Nexus. A Meeting of Civilizations*, London: Routledge 2008.



Ehrlich, M. Avrum: *Jews and Judaism in Modern China*, London: Routledge 2010.

Green, Judy / Diestel, Judy: *Jews in Hong Kong*, in: M. Avrum Ehrlich (ed.): *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora. Origins, Experiences and Culture*. Vol. 3, Santa Barbara: ABC Clio 2009, 1186-1193.

Hutter, Manfred: *Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, in: Stephan Conermann (ed.): *Was ist Kulturwissenschaft? Zehn Antworten aus den "Kleinen Fächern"*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2012, 175-198.

*Jewish Community Centre of Hong Kong: A Vision Fulfilled*, Hong Kong: Jewish Community Centre 1995.

Klayman, Alison: *Kosher Certification. Made in China*, in: *Points East* 23/3 (2008) 9-10.

Leventhal, Dennis A.: *The Jewish Community of Hong Kong. An Introduction*, Hong Kong: Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong 1988.

Levin, Dan: *Jewish Beijing*, in: *Points East* 23/3 (2008) 4-5.

Pan Guang / Wang Jiam / Wang Shuming: *The New Wave of Jewish Migration to China since the Reform and Opening-Up*. Translated and adapted to English by Tiberiu Weisz, in: *Points East* 26/3 (2011) 1. 6-11.

Sheffer, Gabriel: *The Israeli Diaspora. 'Yordim' are the Authentic Diaspora*, in: Hugh Harris (ed.): *The Jewish Year-book*, London: Vallentine Mitchell 1998, 19-31.

Smith, Carl T.: *The Early Jewish Community in Hong Kong*, in: Carl T. Smith (ed.): *A Sense of History*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Education Publishing 1996, 398-413.

Vertovec, Steven: *Religion and Diaspora*, in: Peter Antes / Armin W. Geertz / Randi R. Warne (eds.): *New Approaches to the Study of Religion*. Vol. 2. Textual, Comparative, Sociological and Cognitive Approaches, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2008, 275-303.

Wade, Stephen: Beijing Kosher, in: *Points East* 23/3 (2008) 9.

Weingrod, Alex / Levy, André: *Social Thought and Commentary. Paradoxes of Homecoming. The Jews and Their Diasporas*, in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 79/4 (2004) 691-716.

Weisz, Tiberiu: *How the Chabad Began in China*. Translated from Hebrew by Tiberiu Weisz, in: *Points East* 26/3 (2011) 11-13.