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Shapiro, Sidney oral history interview

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SIDNEY SHAPIRO

BEIJING, CHINA

APRIL 26, 1989

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

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Sidney Shapiro: . . . an American lawyer in Shanghai from 1947, mid-'47 to late '48. And I practiced law first as a partner with another American, and then I set up my own office. Some time early in '48, I was asked by the American Consulate to go to the Jewish community in Shanghai in Hongkew and speak to them and explain to them that getting visas to America would be very, very difficult. And many of them, most of them, I think, had applied for visas and they, they wanted me, as an American and as a Jew and as a lawyer, to just talk informally and explain to them that chances were not terribly good and to urge them, if they could get visas to other countries, to take them. As it turned out, most of them did that and went to places like Australia, but ultimately managed to get from countries like Australia to America anyhow. It took a couple years. So that was, that was the, that was good advice. Now when I went there, I met, must have been several hundred of them in a kind of a meeting hall and they familiarized me somewhat with the situation at that time. These people were of course [clanging of teapot] refugees from Nazi persecution from Germany, from Latvia, from Lithuania, maybe a few from Poland, I'm not sure. And what struck me was, was what a high intellectual level these people had. They were highly trained, highly qualified persons in the various professions. They were not only doctors, lawyers, and accountants, but they were heads of medical departments, they were hospital superintendents, they were people who were very eminent scholars in various fields. And I was moved by the absurdity of it and the pity of it, that, that here you had this wonderful group of very talented people just vegetating and going to waste. But of course this was Guomindang China, this was Chiang Kai-shek, which was a semi-fascist kind of organization itself, and it didn't have much respect for intellectuals and hadn't the faintest idea how to utilize the talents of these people.

Most of them lived in Hongkew, which is a rather poor section of China over the Garden Bridge there, in very modest conditions and some of them in quite poor conditions. There were some, of course, who had money, who brought money with them and who were set up in business and who made money. So they were really not an amorphous group, but different, quite different social and economic divisions amongst them as a community. I didn't get to know more than one or two of them personally and these were just people who came to me as an American lawyer in connection with contracts or corporations or import-export or that sort of thing, that they were interested in. Of course, everybody is very anxious to get to the United States and those who couldn't go themselves were anxious to get at least one member of the family over there, and usually it was the marr-, marriageable daughter of the family. So I was offered not a few young marriageable daughters, if I would marry her or them [laughs] individually or collectively and take them to the States as my wife as a *pro forma* kind of a thing, after which we would be divorced and they would remain as American citizens. But I didn't want to do that, I wasn't able to do that, and so nothing came of it. Some of them were in the black market in currency. That isn't perhaps as terrible as it sounds, because thirty or forty percent of the so-called business in Shanghai was black market and illegal. The whole economy and the whole administration was thoroughly corrupt, there was very little legitimate business. So, of course, these people were not, didn't, weren't any sizable number, there were some. That's about all I know about it and that's the extent of my dealings with them. I myself left Shanghai in November of '48 to come north and I never returned, except years later and only on visits. By that time they were, they were, they were gone.

Steve Hochstadt: When you were asked by the Americans there to go to Hongkew and, and tell the Jews who were there that they couldn't hope for visas, did, was that also meant to apply to the Jews who had not been in this Designated Area during the Japanese occupation, the Russian Jews, or the, the, the Baghdadi Jews, who were still living in the International Settlement? Were, were they going to be able to get visas, or, they were also stateless but not in the same situation.

SS: I don't think the Baghdad Jews were stateless and whether they were or not they certainly didn't want to go to America. They were doing very well. They were among the most prosperous members of the community. The Russian Jews [telephone rings] had [telephone rings] arrived in Shanghai considerably earlier [telephone rings] . That is there were [telephone rings] essentially two batches [telephone rings] one batch who had fled [telephone rings] from the 1905 Revolution traveling overland and then down, and the others from the October Revolution in 1917. So these people by the '30's and the '40's were very well established in their lives and in their businesses and, I don't know, there might have been some who wanted to go to America. I know some of the Russian Jews, after the Peoples' Republic was established, went to the Soviet Union, because the Soviets offered *carte blanche* to any former citizen of the Soviet Union or even Tsarist Russia who wanted to go back to the Soviet Union and would be, automatically be given citizenship and an opportunity. So many of them took, took up on that, both Jews and Gentiles. I don't know whether any of that gang wanted to go to the States or they did go to the States.¹

SH: Actually one of the people on our tour is someone who got to Shanghai in the early 1930's . . .

SS: Yeah.

SH: . . . fleeing from the end of NEP.

SS: But also of, from Nazi persecution.

SH: No, from Moscow.

SS: Oh, from Moscow.

SH: From Moscow, a Jewish family who was in trade and . . .

SS: Yeah.

SH: . . . the end of NEP meant potentially the end of, of their economic future and so they

¹ Although no precise statistics exist, it appears that the Baghdadi and Russian Jews tended to leave Shanghai for Israel, while the German-speaking refugees went to North America.

got to Shanghai.²

SS: Yeah.

SH: And the, or the man I talked to was just a boy then, but he, he's on this trip and he, they went then to the United States in '47 or something.

SS: Yeah, yeah, I don't know the, you know, the statistics on it. You probably . . .

SH: No, I don't know either.

SS: . . . could check it out, there's, how many were Russian Jews, how many were German Jews, how many were Baltic Jews. The, the Shanghai people should, the Chinese Jewish Studies Association should know that.

SH: Yeah, maybe they could unearth some census or something like that.

SS: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Did you think, I was under the, I must say, I was under the impression that the American Government was in fact more open to giving visas to Shanghai Jews, because it seems to me that a lot of the former Shanghai Jews have ended up in the United States. But you think that they mostly went through other countries.

² See interview with Boris Katz, Shanghai, April 21, 1989.

SS: I would guess so, I, I, the policy at that time was not to give visas out too freely. You know the whole attitude of, of the Roosevelt Administration was very bad towards the Jews. Terrible business about the ship that was sailing all around and, and they were, Roosevelt wouldn't take them and Cuba wouldn't take them and I think they eventually went back to Holland at some point.³ So I don't know. The, the, these things are checkable in America really.

SH: What was it like doing business in Shanghai? Was it any different than being a lawyer in other places?

SS: Oh yes. It was, it wasn't being a lawyer at all, it was being a sort of a lobbyist. And the, the government was hopelessly corrupt. And it was one of the main businesses of the lawyers, at least the man I worked for, who was an old China hand, was to be knowledgeable about whom to bribe and how much to pay in this or that given instance. He used to spend his weekends traveling from Shanghai to Nanking, which was the Guomindang capital, to make the deals. There was very little legitimate business. The, the, the economy was at a standstill. They had warehouses full of Packards and Buicks, just overflowing. In fact, there's an island in the Whangpoo River there, that was so stored with wonderful army surplus jeeps and trucks and so on, just piled up mountain high rusting away, couldn't be disposed of, wasn't any use for it. So the only thing that was really moving were bills of lading and letters of credit, that type of thing, just paper. I wrote a book called An American In China, which goes into that, in the, in the first chapter. Published as a paperback in the States by NAL in . . .

SH: I found out about that book just before I came.

SS: . . . '79 or '80, yeah, yeah. And the other book, the book about the Jews, while it doesn't really say anything about Shanghai, talks about almost everything else, I think you'll find it interesting. And I recommend it without fear of being immodest, because the, the entire content is researched by Chinese scholars on the Chinese Jews, which had never been done before for outside consumption. Before all of the research, and there was a lot of it on the Chinese Jews, it goes back about three hundred years, the bibliography in there shows that, that there were hundreds of articles and books and treatises written about the Chinese Jews in different European countries. But not one of them had anything by the Chinese themselves on it, so I, I did this book in order to present that and it's very interesting some, some of it has quite good scholarship in it, [buzzer sounds] a lot of information that hadn't appeared before. Of course, the whole analysis by a Chinese from a Chinese historical and cultural understanding is something that neither the missionaries or the Sinologists were capable of doing.

SH: The, the people that we met from the Shanghai Jewish Studies Association were, I thought, extraordinarily friendly towards us and many of them said in different ways at different times how much affinity they felt with Jewish people. One man I was sitting next

³ Shapiro refers here to the odyssey of the "S.S. St. Louis" in 1939.

to at lunch said, he thought the Jews and Chinese people shared the same fate, the Jews with the Germans and the Chinese with the Japanese. And this created an automatic kind of understanding between Chinese and Jews. And other Chinese people talked, other members of this group, talked about, about how much interest they had in Jews and how much sympathy they had for Jews. And then all the Jews that I've talked to, who had lived in Shanghai, all, every one of them said, "We had always had very friendly relations with Chinese. The only people who were troubles to us were Japanese."

SS: Yeah.

SH: Although I, I have gotten some different reports. Some people said the Japanese were brutal and nasty, and other people said it was possible to be on reasonable terms with them, depending on their own individual experiences. But I hadn't realized this, this bond between Chinese and Jews. And certainly the Chinese scholars felt something of an affinity for, for Jews.

SS: Well, you know the Chinese in the old days were known as the Jews of Asia and the reason was, was that when they, when they left China all through Southeast Asia and even in America, they were mistreated, persecuted, looked down upon, and also restricted in what amounted to ghettos in these various countries. So that they weren't allowed to enter this profession or that profession, etcetera, etcetera, and all they could do was have little shops or do money lending, that kind of thing. And then, of course, the whole family relationship is identical: the respect for the elders, the worship of learning, the parents sacrificing to send the oldest boy to college, at least so that he'll get a proper education, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And every, everyone who was a Jew who spent any time in China feels that immediately. And you feel very comfortable here. I mean, it's not, it's, it's very easy to be a Jew in China. And nobody cares whether you're a Jew or not. That's the, that's the remarkable thing about China, they don't care what you are. They have no concept of racial or religious prejudice. They haven't had ever in two thousand years, three thousand years. And it's a kind of ironic that probably for that very reason, the small Jewish community that existed a thousand years [buzzer sounds] ago was absorbed, you know, because there was no pressure on them forcing them to stick together and help one another and maintain their religion and their culture.

SH: Could I ask you why you came to Shanghai in the first place?

SS: Well, I, I was put into a Chinese language training program in the war, in World War Two. And I got hooked on it and I came out to see what I could see and, you know, just look around and, and maybe learn some more Chinese. And one thing led to another and I, I never left. There's a more detailed explanation in [An American In China](#).

SH: Oh, okay, I can consult that. Is there some, something else you could tell me about the, the atmosphere in Shanghai or the, the daily life, the social life for Jews in Shanghai, even for an American Jew, unlike the Central European Jews, that would help me?

SS: No, I'm afraid not. I didn't have really any, any social contact with the, with them, either the rich or the poor.

SH: Your social contacts were with other Americans while you were there or . . .

SS: Well, I knew a few Americans, but my main purpose in coming here was to learn more about Chinese culture, Chinese life, Chinese language. So I tended to have more and more friends and acquaintances among the Chinese.

SH: Can you say anything about how you felt the Chinese regarded these, the Jews in Shanghai, apart from, from what you've described in general?

SS: No, I don't, I, I, I think the, their attitude toward the Jews was their attitude toward any racial or religious grouping historically and traditionally. China has about fifty-some odd ethnic nationalities, very, very different north, east, south, and west of China. And so this has been going on for two, three thousand years. Sometimes some of them had conquered the Han Chinese and they were the emperors and they were the rulers. But they always were people who worshiped Han culture. They would, they would defeat the Hans and then use them as their ministers and as their viceroys and all that sort of thing. And they all learned Han Chinese and respected Chinese culture. So they would always be absorbed, after having conquered China, they would be absorbed. And I think all through Chinese history you have this assimilation, assimilation, assimilation. First of all, because the Han population was always enormous in proportion to the ethnic minorities. And also because they, they were more than happy to use the talents that these different races and religions produced. They did that with non-Asians, non-central Asians as well. I mean, they learned their astronomy and their mathematics and their medicine from the Persians and from the Arabs. Later on they learned things from the Jesuits, Matteo Ricci was a great very respected scholar in China in the seventeenth century, I think. So they found very early on that it was entirely to their advantage to tap the wisdom and knowledge of other races and other religions. And they have persisted with that policy, including the godless Reds who are presently in control here. That, that policy has never changed.

In fact, I have one little anecdote that might amuse you. Very shortly after the new Republic was established, must have been 1950 or '51, I traveled with a Jewish couple from Bensonhurst, which is part of New York, Abe Chapak and his wife, and they knew Yiddish very well, which I do not. And we were in Harbin, which had once had a very large Russian Jewish community. But by then, they, we thought they were all gone. And so we were wandering around the streets just idly and I said, "Let's see if we can find any Jews, are there any Jews left?" So there we were wandering around and there, lo and behold, we saw two gentlemen in silk coats and long beards and *peyes* and the hat, and we went up and spoke to them, that is Abe spoke to them, in Yiddish, and they said, yes, they were members of this community and they were the last of them, that everyone else had gone and that they remained in order to dispose of the property which belonged to the community. And the property consisted of the synagogue, to which they took us, which is a very large, very beautiful building, which I imagine is still standing, beautifully constructed, and a whole block of what we would call then luxury apartments. But the

Chinese Communist Government was treating these luxury apartments, which were commercial apartments, as religious property, so that they would be tax free and make it easier for them to sell for a good profit. So that, I think, you know, is, is sort of typical of the way this government has carried on the policies, religious and racial policies of the emperors and [laughs] people who've gone way back into Chinese history.

SH: The people that I'm with on this trip, who were in Shanghai, all left in the late '40's and . . .

SS: Did they go directly to America?

SH: Not all of them ever went to America, some of them went to Israel.

SS: Are they still in Israel?

SH: Yes.

SS: Oh really? I, I heard later that there was an association of Shanghai Jews in Jerusalem and if I had known at the time I would have looked them up.

SH: Yes, there is, and there's one in California.

SS: Yeah, are, they the ones that organized this?

SH: The Californians organized, actually someone who had nothing to do with, with Shanghai Jews organized the trip, a businessman . . .

SS: As a commercial tour then.

SH: . . . who does business with China and it was his idea to do this. And then he contacted people who were well known in the . . .

SS: Yeah.

SH: . . . Shanghai Jewish organizations. But anyway, what I was saying was, all these Jews, whether they went to Israel or the United States, whether they came from the Soviet Union, or whether they were Sephardim or whether they came from against, from, from Hitler's Germany, they were all terrified of the Communists and they all expressed that to me and they all expressed that in a very natural way, "Of course, the Communists were coming and we were terrified and we left." Obviously you had quite a different impression . . .

SS: Yeah.

SH: . . . or, or perception of the Communists. Could you, did you, did you sense from the Jews that you talked to in Shanghai when you were there, that they were worried about

the, the onset of Communism and do you, do you have some sense of what they were worried about and why that's different from your feeling?

SS: Well, I didn't get any, I didn't discuss it with any of the Jews in Shanghai, but I certainly heard plenty about it from American businessmen and European businessmen, and so on, and who, who had been subjected to horror stories put out by the, the Guomindang government people for, for years, and, of course, knew that the avowed aims of a Communist Party and Communist society was the elimination of private property and turning everything into government hands and so on. So these guys thought they would lose their shirts and lose their factories and lose their businesses or whatever they had, and they wanted to sell out and get out and cut their losses as best they could and most of them did. And so did a lot of the rich Chinese did, too, they ran off. But a few of them remained and they've found a delightful surprise, that not only were they not expropriated, but they were rather pampered and cosseted by the new administration, which was very practical and said, "Well, we don't know how to run factories and, and you guys are been doing this, and you have the connections of getting supplies and distribution, and you know the rates and so on. So why don't you stay on and, and get these factories going again?" Everything was closed. And they made a deal with them that, that, it was part of the law, you see, that the government would guarantee supplies of raw materials, keep the workers from getting too obstreperous and demanding impossibly high wages, and taking their entire outfit, and, and paying good or better than market prices and telling them they wouldn't have to worry about the ultimate distribution, the government did all that. So that the ones who stayed, like myself, saw that what actually happened was quite different from what people feared would happen. Now it's true that gradually over the years, another five years, another ten years, this property was taken over by the government in stages. And the next stage was that they went into partnership, the government went into partnership with the business people who had factories and so on, but again, giving these guys the lion's share of the profits. And finally when, when the country was more or less on its feet economically and the, the bureaucrats, the administrators of this Communist government, who were not, themselves not necessarily Communist party members, they're only a tiny fraction of the population are, are Communist. When these guys learned the sufficient know-how, then they took over management and administration all together, but they also offered these former owners, if they wanted it, to stay on very high salaries as engineers, technicians, advisors, and so on. And we, we have a few of these paid capitalists, who are still here and who are doing very nicely for themselves.

SH: Are some of them Jews or are you, you speaking about people who were just . . . ?

SS: No, these were all Chinese.

SH: These were Chinese.

SS: No, none of the Jews stayed around to, to see what would happen, you see. Now the Iraqi Jews, of course, were people who by then had quite substantial international connections, so they could just go to Hong Kong or England or wherever. So they didn't,

they didn't, I don't know how their property was disposed of. But I know that in general all of these people were paid extremely generously for their, for their stuff. So that's what I saw and I, you know, I found out that these guys weren't the bogeymen that they were supposed to be and, of course, the Chinese, the ordinary Chinese, took a lot of convincing, too. First because he'd heard all these stories and also because traditionally in China, the soldier was the lowest, was on the lowest rung of the social ladder. He was the, the dregs of Chinese society and these were usually ignorant boys, peasant boys, or, or people just shanghai'd off the street, no education, ignorant, dirty, put into the army. And when they had the chance, were allowed and encouraged to loot and rape and rob and burn, and this was the Chinese tradition throughout all of feudal history. So if anybody said, "The soldiers are coming," you know, the women and children were hidden and the shutters were put up and the doors were locked. And they found that these boys that came in were, were also mainly peasant boys, but they were scrubbed and they were clean and they were beautifully disciplined. And the first thing that, that they did or, or didn't do was to billet themselves in people's house and they just slept on the sidewalk, you see, even in big cities like Shanghai. So this was a tremendous shock and an unbelievable surprise to the, to the population. And this kind of behavior went on and the ripples went out. Garbage was removed right here in the, the, the garbage hadn't been collected in, God knows, a hundred years, it was piled up as high as the city wall, there used to be a wall around the city. And you couldn't walk in the lane. None of these lanes were paved, they were all dirt roads and since there were no toilets, the children would, you know, piss and shit right in the, in the lane. So you, you didn't dare walk at night in the dark for fear of getting yourself filthy. Now all of that was changed within a few months, so people had a very good impression of the new administration.

SH: Do you have some estimate of how many Jews stayed after 1949?

SS: No.

SH: Well do you think it was very few?

SS: Yeah, I would think very few. I think they were right to leave, I mean, there wasn't, you know, in the long term, there was not much of a future for them. They wouldn't have been persecuted or they might even have gotten along financially, but, but, you know, they would have been foreigners without any community of their own. And a Jew without a synagogue is really not a Jew, because traditionally and worldwide the synagogue is not only the religious center, center, but it's the social center and the cultural center and so on.

SH: Well, I think you've told me everything that, that you can about Shanghai. When, when I said that I was coming to see you, the, I should say that this trip, this group that I'm with, is, there's seven Shanghailanders and a coterie of journalists and people like myself who essentially wanted to ask questions and there's almost more of us than there are of the, of the real group. One of the journalists asked me to ask you a few questions. Here's his card. He was very interested when I said I was coming here.

SS: Why didn't he interview me in Israel?

SH: I don't know the answer. He may not have been in Israel, well, I don't, you know, he came from Israel, so I don't know the answer. He wrote down a few questions that he asked me to ask you, but I would only do this if you thought it was alright. I feel a little . . .

SS: That's alright.

SH: . . . uncomfortable with all this.

SS: That's alright, yeah. You know I was in "Ma'ariv", I was in the "Jerusalem Post", I was on television . . .

SH: He actually had, had the article, he had an article from, not from the "Jerusalem Post", but from another newspaper. He just showed it to me tonight before I came over here with your picture. And, but I suppose that these were not questions, well, I don't know if these were questions you were asked. I'll, I'll tell you what these questions are. He wondered how many Jews are left in China now and where are they and who are they?

SS: Well, you have to be a little more specific on a question like that, you see. If you're talking about the Jews who came here in the Tang and Song Dynasties or in the Ming Dynasty or the end of the Ming Dynasty and that is their descendants I would say none. You meet, there were two, two guys that they trot out for you when you go to Kaifeng and you say, "I want to see some Kaifeng Jews." That was the old community and they had these fellows who were completely Chinese in their appearance and language and culture and so on, who say, yes, that they know from their grandparents that they are descendants of the early Chinese Jews. Now, if you want to count these guys as Jews, that's maybe two or three or something, [laughs] but, of course, they are physically so intermarried that there is no, nothing non-Chinese looking about them.

SH: I think he meant more people like yourself.

SS: Oh, well, there are, I know of three or four or something, that is people who've come in the last forty, fifty years and who've stayed on. Yeah, I would say four or five. Of course there are many Jews who are transients, in that they're diplomats or work in offices of corporations that have, you know, places of business here, God knows how many those are. I went to a Seder at the home of an American Jewish woman the other night, a *Pesach* Seder, and she had about ten or fifteen people. But even the, even there these guy, these were people who were married to Chinese, you see, a Jewish girl married to a guy from Fukien with a little boy who asked the Four Questions, Chinese kid, you know. So do we count these people as Jews or not? According to the strict interpretation if the mother's a Jew, the kid's a Jew, and certainly he's being raised as a Jew, maybe five or six years old.

SH: These people are living in China rather than living in the United States?

SS: Yeah, yeah, well they, they won't be here all their lives, it's an American corporation and they're here and, you know, as sort of executives, so that kind of thing. Couple of years ago I went to another Seder and at, at the, in the apartment of the American Cultural Attaché, a woman, Windecker. She's gone now and this was also a, also a Passover Seder. There must have been fifty people in a room just about as big as these two together, all sitting around on the floor with their shoes off eating matzo and singing Hebrew songs [laughs] . Now these people were, I would say, about a third were from different embassies and consulates but more than half were, were students from America from various Western European, all Jewish kids, and just came to take part in the Seder. So the answer is, I don't know. [laughs] It's . . .

SH: Okay, well that's, I'm, he wonders whether you think that China will change its policy about, in regards to Israel?

SS: Will, will what?

SH: Will China change its policy with regards to Israel? Will it recognize it, will it make travel easier? Obviously your, in some ways your trip to Israel is a step in some direction.

SS: Yes, I think China has already modified its attitude toward Israel, I don't know whether it's changed, I don't think it's changed its policy. The policy is that the Israel and the Palestinians must come to some kind of a negotiated agreement before China will be able to give diplomatic, diplomatic recognition, but obviously China is encouraging cultural exchange between Chinese people and Israeli people on a, on a non-governmental basis. And my trip there was one indication of this.

SH: And this group also has some journalists, who are, who say they are the first Israeli journalists.

SS: Really, traveling on Israeli passports?

SH: No, wait one second, maybe it's more than that, it's, my guess is they're first Israelis traveling on Israeli passports, who could individually get visas to come to China.

SS: Oh, yeah, I, I, I believe that, and I think, as you do, that this is a further indication of closer cultural rapport between China and Israel.

SH: And certainly they've said, on this trip, they've called back to Israel to report on, or just to tell relatives about it. And people in Israel are apparently very excited about the ease with which people from Israel on Israeli passports could come . . .

SS: Yeah.

SH: . . . to China.

SS: Israeli tour groups have been coming and can come on Israeli passports, coming as a tour group. Israeli scholars coming to attend an international conference to which they are also invited can come, just as Chinese scholars can attend international conferences in, in Israel. You know, how, how much wider these parameters will be stretched remains to be seen, but it, it does seem to be moving towards a further relaxation of earlier restrictions on cultural exchange.

SH: Let me look at what else. Mr. Atzmon wondered what you are doing now, whether you are writing another book, what your professional plans are?

SS: I'm writing a biography of a wonderful doctor named George Hatem who is of Lebanese-Maronite-Arabic extraction, but an American born and raised in America, who all his life was particularly close to Jews. He started his medical career, which was a very distinguished medical career, by going with two Jewish boys to the American Medical School in Beirut in Lebanon at that time. This was in the '20's, it must have been, because there were quotas against Jews and people like him, children of immigrants, including Arab immigrants, in American medical schools. You know, it was unspoken but there it was. And these two guys after they finished med school came out to China with him and they opened up a clinic in Shanghai. Lazar Katz and Robert Levinson and George Hatem. These guys, they were his buddies and I have correspondence that he sent, he kept up with them. And all his life, he was very close to Jews. But, of course, that's just one indication of the character of the man. His medical accomplishments were fabulous. He's, I think in his own way, he was as great as Albert Schweitzer was, in, in, in other parts of the world. He was instrumental, I won't say he alone did it, but he was one of the leaders in wiping out venereal disease in China. And again, he led successfully the fight against leprosy in China and his accomplishments were such that he was, received the Damien-Dutton Award in Belgium and Lasker Award in America.⁴

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SS: . . . foundations were particularly happy. We stayed at the Mishkenot Ha'ashanim, which is the, Teddy Kolek's guest house for the great in literature and the arts. How I got in there God knows. And we stayed in the flat that had been formerly occupied by Arthur Rubenstein and the name was still on the door. So, I'm saying this more or less jocularly. I was very happy in Israel, I met some wonderful people, who were very kind to me and to my Chinese wife, and they made us feel very much at home and it was all very warm. But

⁴ The Damien-Dutton Award recognizes significant contributions toward the cure of leprosy. The Lasker Award is for medical research or work in public health.

I wouldn't want to live any place else but in China. Not because I love Israel less, but because I love China more and that also applies to the United States. I, I like, enjoy very much going back to the old country every couple of years and seeing friends and family and eating junk food and seeing Marx Brothers movies, [laughs] but after about three weeks I'm, I've had it and I can't wait to get back to Beijing. But it's simply the, the whole, whole cultural thing [rustling of papers] for me it has nothing to do with the merits of, of other countries.

SH: One of the, I'm going to turn this off.

END SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Sidney Shapiro was born in New York in 1915. He served in the U.S. Army and became a lawyer. In 1947, Shapiro arrived in Shanghai, having learned Chinese as preparation for doing translation for the military. He married a Chinese woman in 1948, and they left Shanghai later that year to settle permanently in Beijing. Shapiro was granted Chinese citizenship in 1963. He has written extensively on China, notably An American in China: Thirty Years in the People's Republic, and translated Chinese fiction into English.

This transcript is part of the Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project, an effort to collect and transcribe interviews with Jews who lived in Shanghai, directed by Steve Hochstadt at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. It was prepared with support from Bates College.