Silvia Pin, *Jews in Japan: Presence and Perception. Antisemitism, Philosemitism and International Relations* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), pp. 198.

by *Meron Medzini*

Jews settled in Japan in six waves. The first took place from 1858 and lasted until 1904, from the opening of Japan by the Western powers until the Russo-Japanese War. It consisted predominantly of Russian Jews fleeing from pogroms and persecution. The second wave (1917-1933) also consisted of Russian Jews escaping the October Revolution, civil war in Russia and pogroms. The third wave (1933-1941) consisted of German Jews who fled from Nazi Germany and were joined later by Jews escaping from Austria and Czechoslovakia. The fourth wave arrived after Japan surrendered in 1945 and consisted of American Jewish servicemen who served there during the occupation (1945-1952), and were joined by mostly Russian Jews who fled from the civil war in China and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The last wave began in the 1990s and consists of many Israelis who arrived after the improvement of Israel-Japan relations since the Gulf War. At no time did the number of Jews living in Japan exceed 2000 souls.

And yet, this tiny Jewish community attracted the attention of a growing number of scholars in Japan, America, Israel and Europe. At least three major works on this topic were published in English since 2020. The work under review was written originally as a master's thesis presented to the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. It is based on vast amount of books in Hebrew, English, French and even Italian. Missing are sources in Japanese, Chinese, Russian and German. Unlike a doctoral thesis, a master's thesis does not usually demand or contain new material or new interpretation, but this work is somewhat different. First and foremost for its voluminous bibliography that includes, for example, material from the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem, in addition to many newspaper citations as well as a huge number of secondary sources. Given the limitation imposed by a master's thesis, this is a very impressive book. Its strength lies in a succinct and accurate description of the origins, growth and development of the Jewish community in Japan and the local reaction to this phenomenon. That response consisted mainly of a mixture

of antisemitism and philosemitism that go back to the beginning of the 20th century.

The purpose and significance of the book, as described by the author, "lies in two main aspects. On the one hand it provides a systematization of existing material about Jews and their image in Japan." It attempts "to put together all or most aspects of the connections between Jews and Japan, including relations with the state of Israel" (p. 7). Chapter one deals with the arrival of the Jews in newly opened Japan and their very virtually non-existent role in its modernization following the Meiji Restoration. Clearly Jews played virtually no role in Japanese politics, media, academia, the arts, literature because they never made the effort of learning Japanese, one of the most difficult languages to acquire. This chapter also describes the attitude of the Japanese towards the Jews: they were seen as part of the foreign community. Chapter two describes how the views of Jews developed from the 1920's until the end of the second world war. This chapter also covers the meeting of Japanese soldiers with Jews in the territories occupied by Japan during the Pacific War, mostly in Shanghai. Chapter three explains why virtually all the Japanese were totally unaware of the Holocaust, and hence the need for a Jewish state to settle Holocaust survivors. This chapter also deals with the growth of both antisemitism and philosemitism, a growing admiration for the Jews based on their perceived "control" of international finance, politics and the media. Chapter four covers Israel-Japan relations. The final chapter deals with Japan's only "Righteous Gentile," the Japanese diplomat Sugihara Chiune, who issued some 2500 transit visas to Japan in July and August 1940.

Given the limitations imposed by the author on the scope of her work, she has managed well to describe the very complicated relationship between the Jews and their Japanese neighbors. She makes it quite clear that there has never been street antisemitism in Japan, since unlike in Europe and America, Jews living in Japan were not land lords, money lenders, politicians, bureaucrats, university professors, labor union activists or journalists. Most of them were traders sent to Japan by their companies for a limited tenure in that country. The first antisemitic tracts translated to Japanese were the notorious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," that was imported by Japanese soldiers who served in Siberia during the years of Japan's intervention in Russia following the October revolution. Nazi antisemitic propaganda also failed to make any significant headway in Japan. Before and

during the Pacific War, no major Japanese figure such as the Emperor, cabinet ministers, senior generals and admirals, ever made antisemitic remarks. The American scholar John Dower was right when he ascribed anti-Jewish propaganda in Japan during the war as part of a broader propaganda effort designed to explain to the Japanese people why they were fighting America and who the Americans were.

One could argue with the author over several aspects of her work. She ascribes Japan's initial hostility to Israel because of the latter's reliance on Arab oil. That is true but she omits mention of other ties that flourished during those years, mainly academic and cultural. When it came to relations with Israel from the early 1990's the change came about as a result of a different and far more positive view of Israel, by then a prosperous, flourishing industrial technological nation, something many Japanese could identify with and admire. Like many other writers who attempted to understand the deeds of Sugihara Chiune, she does not speculate on the possibility that he may have been a Russian agent in addition to being a Japanese intelligence officer since he studied Russian in Harbin the early 1920s. Sugihara was not a typical Japanese bureaucrat, and informed his superiors in Tokyo of his activities on behalf of Jewish refugees in Kaunas. He never referred to them as Jews, but as Polish refugees.

All this does not detract from the value of this book that joins a growing list of works on this subject, which gives their authors the chance to deal with Japan, Israel, antisemitism and the new phenomenon that is also affects prevalent in Communist China these days—philosemitism. Future writers will owe a great deal of gratitude for the excellent bibliography and for raising the key issues that have affected the ties between the Jews and Japanese.

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