

# CHINA

## THE SLEEPING GIANT AWAKENS

by Rabbi Aharon Steinberg

around the field. Corn is very important to the farmers in rural China. The dried stalks are piled up into pyramid shapes and deposited near the farmhouses in the village. The dried cornstalks are used for both heating and cooking. I have never seen anything so efficient; there is no waste.

I spend about three to four hours at the factory doing a routine inspection. Then I either return to the hotel for some rest, or go straight to the airport to catch a flight to the next city for the next inspection. No time for sightseeing yet. I wonder where the Mao-type clothing we think of when we think of modern day China is? Almost everyone is wearing designer jeans and imprinted t-shirts. Those who aren't are wearing fashionable business suits. Everyone carries a cell phone. And there is no idleness here. Even when waiting for a bus you see people doing Tai Chi exercises in unison.

After a two-hour car trip, I arrive at the next plant for an initial inspection, so I have to start at the beginning. The Chinese company or plant management does not really have a clue as to why I am there, other than the fact that their potential or actual customer has requested OU kosher certification.

Without it, their product is not acceptable. When I arrive, they ask, why? And they ask, what? This is followed by, when? Simple questions require simple answers if this initial inspection is ever going to get underway. The questions are WHY is kosher necessary for the customer? WHAT is kosher? WHEN does something become kosher? This now becomes the RFR's pulpit.

Let's begin with why. The world has become much more health conscious. This requires greater supervision over what is consumed. When looking for integrity, the world market quickly recognized that kosher supervision is the key. The  symbol is tantamount to having the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" on prepared foods and edible chemicals. Why is easy.

Next I have to define the terms. I tell them that in Hebrew—the language of the Jewish people—the word *kosher* means fit or proper. For an easier understanding, especially for the Chinese Buddhist culture, kosher takes on an interesting meaning, Keep Our Soul Healthy Eat Right. This the staff can understand. Kosher has nothing to do with the physical. If I eat their lunch, nothing physical would happen to me. I explain that I can only eat food prepared in a kosher

**T**raveling as a *mashgiach* (rabbinic field representative), I am absolutely fascinated by China. I have traveled around the globe, yet nothing compares to the vast beauty of China. It is hard to understand the life of a traveling *mashgiach*. I leave from any of the New York airports and twenty-six hours later I will finally arrive in either Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou. And then I have to travel by car another two to four hours to the city nearest the plant I will visit.

On the way to the factory for inspection, I pass field after field of many varieties of vegetables and flowers. Corn separates the fields that belong to different families, all of whom live in one village. The corn makes a beautiful fence

“ORTHODOX UNION” in Chinese characters

正統的聯合

kitchen with kosher ingredients, or which has been prepared by the Architect of the Universe (fruits and vegetables that only need to be peeled).

The term Architect of the Universe is new to them. I disseminate only logic, because modern Chinese only deal in logic, or so I have learned. I begin by explaining that 3,500 years ago, a great man (Moses) told his people to eat only specific animals, fish and birds. I list the animals to make my case. Moses said to eat only animals that have split hooves and ruminant (chew their cud). Moses said that there are only ten animals that have both those features: Cows, goats, sheep, deer, bison, gazelle, antelope, ibex, addax and giraffe. Moses said there are two animals that do not have split hooves, but do ruminant—the camel and the hare. He also said that there is only one animal that does have a split hoof but swallows its food whole—the pig. In 3,500



*“I stood on the top of the Great Wall and I could feel the power of its position.”*

years, the world has discovered many new species. Yet in all this time man has never found another animal with both features. How did Moses know this 3,500 years ago? Either he traveled the entire planet from the North to South Poles, and everywhere in between to document his findings, or he was taking dictation. Just follow the logic.

Now that my Chinese friends, with a new respect reflected in their eyes and manner, are ready to ask many more questions, I simply say, “after the inspection.” They have the why and the what. When comes after the inspection. No need to bore you with the details of going through an initial inspection, but suffice it to say the level of cooperation is perfect. After completing my work, the Chinese hospitality kicks in. They want to

wine and dine me. Perfect. Now is my opportunity to answer the when. I tell them that I do not mind accompanying them, but I will have to eat the food I have brought with me. Or perhaps some fruit just as the Creator prepared it. They have to learn that the factory I just inspected is nothing more than a kitchen. And the main course served from the kitchen is citric acid. I have just certified that all the cooking pots, utensils and ingredients pass kosher standards acceptable to the OU. Now they understand that I cannot eat from a kitchen that does not meet the same standards applied to their factory. It’s unbelievable how quickly they get it, understand it, and respect it.

There are six hours before my flight to Xian and a routine inspection of deodorized distillate. The management in Changchun wants to show me the palace of the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty. After the revolution and the establishment of the Republic of China by Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the Japanese whisked the emperor away to this city, which was the capital of Manchuria, the northern province held by the Japanese. The Japanese set up a puppet empire run by a puppet emperor. The palace is beautiful and kept in excellent repair as a museum.

Once in Xian, I am greeted by C.A.S.T with an English-speaking escort and interpreter. C.A.S.T is the Chinese Association of Science and Technology that has offices in every major city in China. Its function is to educate and encourage foreign interest in China in order to promote business. I have befriended these C.A.S.T. members through my years of OU work in China. It is a two-hour ride to the factory, through magnificent countryside. The hills are all terraced; the highway is manicured on both sides and

#### Among the companies in China certified by the Orthodox Union are:

- ① China BBKA Biochemical Group Corp.
- ① Cognis Nutrition & Health
- ① Hartog Foods Inc.
- ① Howenia Enterprise Co.Ltd.
- ① Lonzagroup Ltd.
- ① Ningxia Ningxiner Biological Engineering Co. Ltd.
- ① Qingdao Baofeng Co. Ltd.
- ① Roche Vitamins Inc.
- ① Shanghai McCormick Food Co. Ltd.
- ① Shiazhuang Pharma. Group
- ① Tomen America
- ① Weisheng Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.
- ① Xiamen Yongquan Group Co. Ltd.
- ① Zheijiang Linan Shengang Cable Chemical

down the middle. The factory is right in the middle of an agricultural community. It's hard to believe the changes that have taken place in the last seven years. When I first started working in China, everything I saw was 1950's Russian technology. Today I am in the middle of nowhere at a facility that is ISO9002, GMP.

On entering the conference room, I am greeted by the senior staff. The conference table is laden with bananas, grapes and oranges. Apparently they remember the lessons learned from their initial inspection. Lots of green tea in disposable cups. The Chinese drink an average of ten cups of green tea daily. After verifying both the Schedules A & B, I proceed to tour the entire plant. On this visit, I planned to stay overnight in Xian and fly to Shanghai on Friday morning. I try not to fly on Friday for fear of getting stuck somewhere for the Sabbath, like in an airport, which happened once in Taipei during a typhoon. But this time I wanted to be in the ancient city of Xian.

Xian is a walled city with a moat surrounding it. It is the very beginning of the Silk Road, where caravans left with the treasures of Cathay only to return with the spices of the Middle East. There is a phenomenal monument to those caravans, with life-sized handlers and animals. My driver from C.A.S.T. took me to see the Terra Cotta Soldiers—the eighth wonder of the world—just a few short kilometers from Xian. A peasant farmer trying to dig a well discovered the soldiers. The Ministry of Ancient Relics has unearthed the life-sized statues. So far, more than 4,000 have been discovered—generals, captains, lieutenants, horsemen and infantrymen. All in full uniform and in parade formation guarding the tomb of the emperor. I understand why it is one of the wonders of the world.

It is a four-hour car ride from Shanghai to Wuxi. I can't wait to watch how *aspergillus niger* on an agar slant fed with benign nutrients is turned into alpha amylase. I spend four hours in the factory and another four hours returning to Shanghai to catch an early flight to Qingdao. But Qingdao is a whole other story, coupled with German beer making. Qingdao is the site of the

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## Behind the Bamboo Curtain

**C**HINA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A LAND OF MYSTERY for Westerners—a far away and exotic place. However, it has also beckoned as a place offering untold potential. In the global economy, China, with its inexpensive, yet highly trained and motivated workforce, has become the awakening giant. In China, one sees the future. Businesses from all over the world are either already there, or are working to be there.

I went to China both to review operations there, and as an OU representative to the FI Asia China food show in Shanghai. The OU has been working in China for many years—primarily at the request of our established clients who source a variety of goods there—mainly raw materials. Recently, there has been an increased interest in kosher, much of it from within China.

The sheer volume of traffic at the show amazed me, as did the keen interest in kosher certification. The Chinese are realizing that one of the keys to successful marketing in the West is kosher approval. On more than one occasion, a company representative approached us proffering his business card, and requesting information.

I was also pleased to see how many of our established companies had representatives there looking for opportunities. Many were planning to integrate kosher into their China plans, and useful discussions were held. Some representatives, however, were unaware of the OU's relationship with other divisions of their companies. Others had not yet thought about integrating kosher into their operations—something that is best done early in the planning phases. If ingredients must be sourced, productions planned and plants visited, then advanced planning is critical. We are here to help you design operations in the most kosher friendly manner. This is especially critical in a country like China where rabbis are not locally available, and where communications and travel can be difficult. In Chicago, we can get someone to a plant at almost any time. In Chanchung, more advanced planning is needed.

Kosher certification, like production and other operations, should be handled through an integrated approach. Otherwise, it will become inefficient and, at times, difficulties may arise. For example, the kosher standards that one division works under may not meet the OU standards of another. When the question is asked if the OU can help in China—or in any other part of the world for that matter—the answer is an emphatic yes. We send representatives to 68 countries around the globe, and we are prepared to go wherever you may need us.

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New Companies Department.*

annual international beer festival every August. Coincidentally, this is right in the middle of the Shandong Province garlic season. At Key Food Ingredients' Qingdao facility I have sealed up my personal wok and all utensils. When it comes time for lunch, I turn on the fire in the factory kitchen and watch the chef prepare a variety of dishes in my wok, completely vegetarian. The management joins me in a kosher lunch.

Throughout China one may see a multitude of colors—with the exception of yellow. Yellow is reserved exclusively for imperial royalty. If you observe the Forbidden City (just across from Tienemen Square), you notice that all the roofs of the buildings and temples are yellow. The Forbidden City consists of 9,999 rooms. The number 9 is a mystical complete energy number to the Chinese. Any building with a yellow roof has some historical significance to the emperors of China.

The Great Wall of China is one of the original Seven Wonders of the World and is the only man-made artifact

that is visible from outer space. I stood on the top of the Great Wall and I could feel the power of its position. Whole battalions of soldiers were capable of marching 20 abreast along the top of the Wall. Horses, carriages and cannons went with them. Every 1,000 yards along the way are signal towers. The view is spectacular.

It seems that every major player in the food and edible chemical market is joint venturing or doing business in China. I am proud to represent the Orthodox Union in China and that our presence is known and respected throughout this amazing land. **U**

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