

# Lit Picks for the Summer Holidays

An enjoyable summer to me is measured by the number of books I have read. There are a number of books on our shelves lined up for this summer and ready to review for the fall issue, namely Tracy Slater's *The Good Shufu*. That's top on my list for certain.

In addition, there are a number of others that are worth adding to your summer reading lists. Firstly, one of my all time favourites, *Peony: A Novel of China* (1948) by Pearl S. Buck. I've always been a big Pearl S. Buck fan (hooked when I first read *The Good Earth* as a child). *Peony* is interestingly set in the 1850s in the Jewish community of Kaifeng, China. The book is readily available in print and electronic formats.

Another older book that makes for an interesting read based on its setting is *Shulamith* (1975) by Meera Mehadevan. The novel is focused on a Bene Israel Indian family who struggles as they are pulled between worlds: Israel and India, modernity and traditional culture, Jewish observance and the non-Jewish world. In many ways the struggle of this family echoes dilemmas still faced today by people pulled between two worlds. *Shulamith* is no longer in print but it is fairly easy to find used copies online.

And as I tend to be drawn to the somewhat obscure, I recently was also able to track down a copy of *From Tokyo to Jerusalem - The Autobiography of a Japanese Convert to Judaism* (1964) by Abraham S. Kotsuji. This is an absolutely fascinating read about a life most



uncommon. Not surprisingly, this too is no longer in print but used copies are also available.

Newer titles on our list include *Pepper, Silk & Ivory* (2014) by Marvin Tokayer & Ellen Rodman, Ph.D. This book pulls together stories of some of the most interesting and captivating characters from the Jewish Far East into one fascinating read. We will explore this title in depth in a forthcoming issue of *Asian Jewish Life*.

Another of my personal favourite is *The Girl from Foreign* (2009) by Sadia Shepard. We spoke with Sadia back in 2010. You can find this *Asian Jewish Life* article, *Rescuing Shipwrecked Ancestors - A story in three generations*, online (<http://www.asianjewishlife.org/pages/articles/>

autumn2010/AJL\_Feature\_Rescuing\_Shipwrecked\_Ancestors.html ) but if you haven't read her book it is certainly one to add to the list.

As a huge fan of Middle Grade and Young Adult literature (and likely perhaps not coincidentally the parent of children of readers in this age range), no summer list would be complete without a couple of books for children/ young adults.

Long overdue is an in-depth *Asian Jewish Life* review of *Orchards* (2011) by Holly Thompson. There are so many things that I loved about this book starting with the fact that there is a wonderfully written multi-cultural protagonist (Japanese and Jewish), that it is set in Japan and it is written in verse. I do caution however that the book is centred around a suicide of a teen so please use your judgement before recommending this to younger children. Hopefully we will continue to see a number of other authors, not unlike Thomson, working multicultural characters into their stories.

Another book to add to the list is *Anya's War* (2011) by Andrea Alban Gosline. What I enjoyed most about this coming of age novel is the setting, Shanghai during World War II. The story is inspired by the author's father's Jewish childhood in Shanghai during this time. She is able to weave pieces of her family's true story into a compelling fictional narrative. *Anya's War* is a great way to interest younger readers in this unique episode in Jewish history.

Happy Reading! 🌟