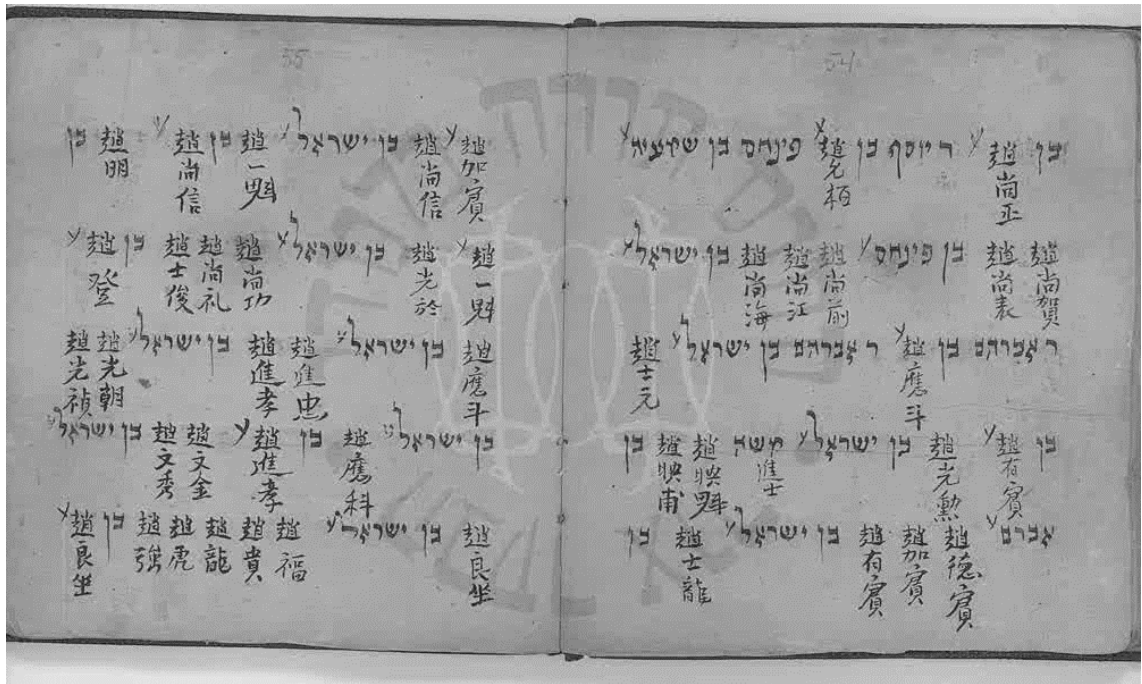


**Globalization, Translation and Transmission:
Sino-Judaic Cultural Identity in Kaifeng, China**



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the transmission of Sino-Judaic cultural identity in both its historical and contemporary forms. In the tenth century, a group of Jewish traders from Central Asia arrived in Kaifeng, then the Northern Song capital and world's largest metropolis. Unlike their European contemporaries, these Jews enjoyed a seamless integration into China's multi-ethnic society. Never numbering more than a few thousand at its apex, the small group gradually lost their native Judeo-Persian language skills. When in 1163 they erected their synagogue, their heritage was translated into Chinese linguistic, cultural and architectural symbols. Despite recurrent floods, the Kaifeng Jewish descendants managed to maintain a functional synagogue until it was finally ravaged by a severe deluge in 1849. The congregation—diminished in size, impoverished, and increasingly assimilated—could then no longer afford the repair costs. The synagogue's demise signified the end of tangible Sino-Judaic culture; yet, a thin notion of that cultural identity persisted within familial structures through the traditions of ancestral veneration, clan lineage and historical memory. Following China's 1978 policy of "reform and openness", the influx of various actors and organizations interested in the Kaifeng Jews revived Sino-Judaic identity from its dormancy. This dissertation juxtaposes the group's claims of cultural authenticity with the dominant constructs of authentication refuting them. Applying a theory of critical holism, it envisions culture as a dynamic flux between external processes of social, political and economic exchange and internal ones of shared symbols and meanings. The first part presents a historiographic analysis of external representations of the early Chinese Jews followed by an epigraphic exploration of the internal symbols generating the unique melange of Sino-Judaic culture. Through unstructured interviews and participant observation in fieldwork, the second part surveys the contemporary resurgence of Kaifeng Jewish identity in both the cultural politics spurring that revival and the communal activism proceeding from it. This thesis explores the reasons why the Kaifeng Jews consider themselves to be Jews knowing they are not recognized as such; it argues that only by situating their claims of Jewish identity outside the boundaries of authentication and within the contexts of Confucian culture can their claims be properly comprehended. Its conclusion validates the Kaifeng Jews' authenticity claims and suggests that their distinct, translated heritage has contributed significantly to both Diasporic and Chinese histories.

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(Hebrew Union College; <http://huc.edu/research/libraries/collections/rbr/kaifeng>)

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PREFACE

In 1984, twenty-five years prior to my first encounter with the Jews of Kaifeng, the issue of conflicting translations of identity manifested itself through an unfortunate incident. In that year the Israeli government, in conjunction with a number of other international agencies, organised Operation Moses, the covert evacuation of more than 8,000 Ethiopian Jews, known as the Beta Israel, from their refuge in famine-stricken Sudan. I was then a full-time student in a rabbinic academy for married men of the Zans-Klausenburg Hassidic group located in the Old City of Safed in the Upper Galilee. As an American-born latecomer to orthodoxy, with a longstanding interest in the African diaspora and cultural diversity, I was intrigued at the arrival in Israel of Jews from Africa. That enthusiasm, however, was not shared by my rabbinic colleagues, all of whom hailed from more insular *haredi* (ultra-orthodox) households and took a more circumspect view of the Chief Rabbinate's decision to grant the Ethiopians Israeli citizenship under the Right of Return.

When I learnt that a group of these new immigrants had been transferred to a tentative absorption centre in Safed, I was keen to volunteer my family as a host to support the recent arrivals' acclimation to their new environment. To that end, cognizant of the divergent view in the *haredi* world, I first consulted with the Rosh Kollel, the academy's dean, to seek his permission to make contact with the group. The latter listened cautiously to my request but determined it was a significant matter that would require his consultation with the sect's spiritual leader, the late Klausenburger Rebbe, who then resided in Netanya. Some days later the Rosh Kollel conveyed the Rebbe's response that, regarding contact with the Ethiopian immigrants, I was permitted to conduct myself according to the guidelines of the local rabbinate. Since the Safed rabbinate, in concurrence with the ruling of the nation's Chief Rabbi, had already approved the accommodation of the Beta Israel in Safed, I was given a somewhat ambivalent green light.

The next day I visited the absorption centre, set up in a former resort facility across from the municipality. I spoke with a woman in the administration office, who encouraged me to make direct contact with the residents. Strolling the grounds, I soon met a group of young teenage boys and attempted to strike up a conversation with

them. This was not a simple task, as their native tongue was Amharic, and they had only begun to learn some basic Hebrew in their *ulpan*, the language program provided them. One of the boys, Daniel, who wore a yarmulke on his head and had studied a bit of English in his high school in Gondar, displayed more interest in our conversation and curiosity toward religious life in his new homeland. He happily accepted my invitation to join my family at our home for Shabbat lunch in two days' time.

That Saturday, after the conclusion of the Shabbat morning service dressed in the customary Hassidic Sabbath finery of long, black *bekishe* and fur *shtreimel*, I walked through the Old City to the immigrant centre. The perplexed looks on the faces of the Ethiopians indicated their total unfamiliarity with my peculiar garb, otherwise a common feature of *haredi* neighbourhoods throughout Israel. Walking Daniel back to my home through the cobblestone lanes of the Old City, where he had yet to venture, I pointed out a few of the prominent sites and provided a historic overview of Safed in simple English. Religious passers-by on their way back from synagogue, dressed similarly to me, greeted us with expressions of bewilderment akin to those I had witnessed among the Ethiopian Jews.

At the Shabbat table, Daniel seemed to relish the home-cooked meal, taking a substantial second helping of the traditional *cholent*. He explained to us how his mother had died of illness several years earlier in Gondar, while his grandfather had passed away on the arduous overland trek to the Sudanese refugee camp the previous year. Several months earlier his father and younger siblings had moved to Addis Ababa, where they were lodging with paternal relations. He inquired about my *tzitzit*, the ritual fringes attached to the *tallit katan*, the undergarment worn by observant Jews; I explained the Torah commandment to attach fringes to any four-cornered garment and the subsequent rabbinic injunction to wear such a garment at all times. Before accompanying him back to the centre, I gave Daniel an extra *tallit katan* that had been tucked away in my closet. He was grateful for the gift, which he slipped on over his jersey.

No sooner had we exited the courtyard door when a small group of *haredi* Jews turned the corner of the adjacent alleyway. I recognized one of them as a rabbinic instructor and respected Talmudic scholar. A septuagenarian and one of the privileged few who

had managed to escape from the notorious Vilna Ghetto to make his way to Palestine, he, along with three disciples escorting him, literally stopped in their tracks when they spotted us. For a brief moment, the old rabbi seemed utterly befuddled, but this confusion quickly yielded to a palpable fury. His facial complexion turning crimson from rage, he angrily shouted at me in Yiddish: “*Er darf nisht truggen tzitzis! Er iz a goy!*” *He should not be wearing tzitzit! He is a goy!*

Stunned at his reaction, I hastily guided Daniel past the group through the narrow alleyway, averting both the eyes and taunts of his detractors. Daniel’s doleful eyes searched mine questioningly; I told him not to worry, that everything was okay. However, his demeanour clearly indicated that he knew that it was not. We walked in relative silence back to the absorption centre. I let him know how much we enjoyed having him as our guest and that he was welcome to return to visit us at any time whether during the week or on Shabbat. However, he never did so. Several weeks later I learned that the Ethiopian contingent in Safed had been moved from their makeshift accommodation to various established immigrant centres throughout the country. We did not see Daniel again.

Leaving aside its emotional impact, which has undoubtedly affected my position on marginalised Jewish communities, this occurrence discloses some of the anomalies that similarly permeate my research on the Chinese Jews. Looking back retrospectively to a time when the term “globalization” had yet to gain popular traction—and certainly not in the religious enclave of Old Safed—three Jews, from three different continents, all of whom possessed certainty as to the authenticity of their Jewishness, meet on the corner of an alleyway in a land that each of them now considers his homeland. To Daniel, who in Ethiopia had faced lifelong persecution as a despised *falasha* (literally “wanderers” or “exiles” in Amharic) his Jewish identity was always rooted in his family’s adherence to the traditions disseminated in the *Orit*, the Ge’ez translation of the Pentateuch, which guided the religious life of the Beta Israel for almost two millennia. For the rabbi, by contrast, true Jewish identity was rooted in the fundamentals of Talmudic study and Jewish law (*halakha*), epitomized in the yeshivas of the shtetls, where Yiddish served as the lingua franca and impermeable geographic and cultural boundaries largely sequestered Jews from contact with their Christian

neighbours. And there was I, then in the midst of a deeper exploration of my religious heritage in the Land of Israel, but brought up as a Conservative Jew in the United States, where my concept of Jewishness had more to do with the prophetic ideals of equality, tolerance and freedom, values reflecting the political culture of American liberalism more than the narrative of Jewish orthodoxy. How could all three of us maintain contradictory versions of an authentic Jewish identity? Which one of these versions, if any, was the genuine article, and what processes determined that assessment of authenticity?

It was sixteen years later that I would first learn of the existence of a small community of Jews in Old China. At that time, while employed as rabbi and Director of Jewish Studies at Perth's Carmel School, I stumbled across an article in the Israeli media about Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University. It described Xu's intellectual journey from a professor of English literature to his founding in 1992 of the first tertiary Jewish Studies institute in China. That article prompted an email correspondence with Xu, which eventually led to an invitation to speak to students at Nanjing University in December 2000, a visit which coincided with the holiday of Hanukkah. After I had addressed small groups of students in Xu's nascent department and some of the Philosophy postgraduates, Xu organised for me to present a talk on "The Cultural Survival of the Jews in Diaspora".

On the evening of the presentation, Xu had accompanied me through the spacious Yifu Building lecture hall to a smaller, adjacent conference room where I was served drinks and refreshments. Later, upon entering the hall to deliver my talk, I was surprised to find that it had been filled to its capacity of five-hundred seats with many more students either standing in the back or seated on the floor in the aisles. This was the first inkling I had that in China there is an unusual interest in the Jewish people. My lecture commenced with the lighting of the Hanukkah candles on the podium and, in describing the miracle commemorated in that holiday, I referred to the Hasmonean struggle against Hellenization and their ultimate defeat of the Seleucids. The evening ended with a lengthy question-and-answer period that extended well past the scheduled finishing time; the Jewish endeavour to maintain its traditional culture

appeared to resonate profoundly with the Chinese audience. At its conclusion, I had another surprise when Professor Xu presented me with his book *Legends of the Chinese-Jews of Kaifeng* (1995). This was the first instance I became aware of the millennial-long Jewish presence in Kaifeng. Xu informed me that the Kaifeng Jews had built a synagogue which had endured for seven centuries. Although the destruction of the synagogue in the mid-nineteenth century terminated any form of tangible culture, some of the Jewish descendants in Kaifeng remained cognizant of their historic identity and were attempting to revitalize it.

In some respects, that experience motivated my decision, following my early retirement from Carmel School, to enrol as a mature age student for an Asian Languages and Culture BA with a major in Mandarin Chinese. In the course of that program in 2009 I conducted undergraduate research on the extent to which the Judeo-Persian culture of the original Kaifeng settlers adapted to the linguistic shift of Mandarin Chinese (Bernstein 2009). Although most of that research focused on historical analysis, in July 2009, with the facilitation of Xu Xin, I made my first visit to Kaifeng. At that time, the community was largely centred on the Yicileye, or “Israelite”, School (一赐乐业学校), named eponymously after the epithet maintained by the group up until the twentieth century. I was introduced to the group as a rabbi, which has had an enduring effect on the community’s perception of me as a researcher. During that visit I delivered a brief talk in Chinese on elements of the weekly Torah portion; participated in the Friday night *Kiddush* meal celebrating the Jewish Sabbath; and observed the Hebrew language classes conducted at various levels in the school. Several of the young men were studying Hebrew in preparation for immigration to Israel (*aliyah*) under the auspices of Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), an organization dedicated to assisting diffuse, marginal Jewish communities across the globe. (These activities were conducted discretely behind closed curtains in a rented second-floor storefront of a neglected shopping mall.) Four young women had already made *aliyah* the previous year with that group’s support. Even though the main focus of my research at that time was historical, I nonetheless made mention in my paper of the modern revival of both Hebrew language skills and Sino-Judaic cultural identity I had witnessed in Kaifeng.

My Honours thesis (Bernstein 2010) commenced a foray into the contemporary cultural revival of Kaifeng's Yicileye descendants. This marked an attempt to locate the factors that enabled the preservation and restoration of a Sino-Judaic cultural identity among an increasing number of community members, despite its repudiation by both the Chinese authorities and the Israeli rabbinate and regardless of the political risk. While those factors included the more recent stimuli of foreign contacts and the resultant emotions, perceptions and interests, they also entailed the traditional Chinese notion of ancestral veneration and the awakening of collective memory. Contrary to the hypotheses of previous research that ascribed the community's demise to "assimilation", I argued that it was the translation of Judaism into the language and culture of its Chinese hosts that had in fact enabled this tiny minority to reinvent and maintain their traditions for a remarkable seven centuries.

In the course of the aforementioned research project, I made a second visit to Kaifeng in July 2011. Several months' earlier the community had undergone a dramatic split. Alleging that Christian missionaries were supporting and influencing the Yicileye School, a breakaway faction called the Beit Hatikvah (Hebrew for "House of Hope") established itself in an apartment block not far from the site of its ancient synagogue. In contrast to the secrecy that shrouded the Yicileye School, Beit Hatikvah posted a sign in Chinese, Hebrew and English, and decorated with the Star-of-David, by its entranceway boldly proclaiming its Sino-Judaic identity. Furthermore, while the Yicileye School enabled a Friday night social gathering of Kaifeng's Jewish descendants but did not undertake much religious instruction, the Beit Hatikvah's gathering was a Friday evening (*Kabbalat Shabbat*) prayer service, reviving forms of ritual and worship after a hiatus of more than two centuries. Participating in this service, I was duly impressed at how in a matter of months the congregants had mastered the intricacies of the traditional Sabbath-eve liturgy and melodies, despite a somewhat flawed pronunciation. The service had been adapted to their needs with significant sections of the ritual translated and recited in unison in their native tongue. Finally, the schools differed in the degree to which they looked outward for sources of legitimacy, support and religious instruction. The Yicileye School collaborated with evangelical Christian Zionists and Shavei Israel to establish a direct connection with Israel, and by 2011 had already facilitated the *aliyah* of fifteen community members to Israel. The Beit Hatikvah

School, on the other hand, coordinated with some American NGOs to provide more online educational programs and initiate religious services conducive to the maintenance of a localised Sino-Judaic presence in Kaifeng itself.

This dissertation examines in greater depth some of the issues raised in my previous research. In particular, it addresses the question as to how and why this Chinese-Jewish identity has been constructed in recent decades, even though that identity continues to be officially unrecognized and unauthenticated. The effects of globalization, a process in which China has become a fuller participant since the advent of Deng Xiaoping's 1978 policy of "Reform and Opening", assume a paramount role in addressing this question. Included in any discussion of these transnational influences is the translation of external representations of "Jewishness" into the semiotics of contemporary Chinese culture. Just as the historical Yicileye constructed a hybrid, hyphenated identity through its translation of Judaism into Chinese language and culture, the contemporary Kaifeng Jews (i.e. the descendants and their spouses) have retranslated the polysemous, global discourse on Jewishness into a mixed identity that yet accommodates their self-representation as Chinese citizens. Furthermore, the factoring of globalization and hybridity in the production of cultural identity inevitably evokes the issue of how that identity is transmitted. In this regard, transmission is a reciprocal process: it not only involves the group's internal transmission of that identity and its self-representation externally but also encompasses the diffusion of external perceptions of the group by others.

Western and Chinese academics frequently deny claims that a contemporary Jewish community in Kaifeng exists today (Wen 2014). Indeed, neither the Chinese policy on minorities nor the legalistic approach of the Israeli rabbinate recognizes this community. There is, nevertheless, a small but growing number of Jewish descendants who are aware that they are not considered to be Jews, yet still persist in maintaining that sense of identity and, over the past two decades, have actively sought to reproduce a tangible Sino-Judaic culture in Kaifeng today. Another common assumption, echoed in both the media and by certain scholars, is that the present-day descendants are motivated by "economic opportunism" or "financial motivators" (ibid 2014). While that claim has some validity, it does not thoroughly depict the cultural

revival of the Kaifeng Jews. To complete that picture, during my most recent fieldwork in September-October 2013, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with twenty-four community members who gave voice to their own view as to the meaning of their cultural identity as Chinese-Jews. During that period, I was also privileged as a participant-observer to partake in the celebration of the Jewish festival of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles), coinciding in that year with the Chinese celebration of Mid-Autumn Festival. My personal experience of this fieldwork is recounted in the final chapter of this thesis.

Any research and fieldwork on the living descendants of the Yicileye is not without controversy. In accord with government policy recognizing only the historical presence of Jews in China, the subject of the contemporary Kaifeng Jews is taboo for Chinese academics. Furthermore, while there has been some Western scholarship on the history and preserved artefacts of the bygone community, inquiries into the current revival of Sino-Judaic identity have been scant. The most recent such study deals exclusively with the cultural politics in Kaifeng surrounding the ephemeral Construction Office of the Jewish History Museum in the mid-1990s. The investigation that follows is thus designed as a more comprehensive inquiry into the transmission of Sino-Judaic cultural identity from its inception in Kaifeng a thousand years ago during the Northern Song Dynasty until its dynamic, present-day perpetuation among the living descendants of those early Jewish settlers.

Finally, contrary to the protocol employed in my previous research, in this thesis I have opted to apply the nomenclature of “Kaifeng Jews” or “Chinese Jews” to refer to the group. The term “Jew”, or *youtai* (犹太) is a relatively recent linguistic innovation in China, the implications of which will be discussed in chapter three. I have avoided using this terminology in previous research lest it be assumed that, similar to other hyphenated Jewish identities (American- Jews; French-Jews, Yemenite- Jews, etc.), it is one universally recognized and authenticated by the global mother-group. This is clearly not the case, and, as mentioned, the Kaifeng Jews are aware of that reality. Nonetheless, among themselves and to others, they consistently represent themselves with this designation. Accordingly, as this thesis argues the authenticity of the

community's subjective identity, in spite of official non-recognition, I have deferred to their preferred mode of self-representation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the assistance, support and inspiration offered by supervisors, Professors Gary Sigley and Debra McDougall. Not unlike the complementarity of *yang* and *yin*, the contrasting approaches of both of these mentors mirror the theory of paradox—critical holism—upon which this dissertation is grounded.

When I first met Gary in 2010 in his capacity as supervisor for my Honours thesis, I had proposed as my topic the contradiction between didacticism and debauchery prevalent in the Late-Ming erotic novellas. Citing practical and logistical reasons, Gary succeeded in dissuading me from this topic. When later during that conversation I incidentally touched on the subject of the Kaifeng Jews, he was duly intrigued. Having conducted considerable fieldwork in Yunnan Province with its high level of ethnic diversity, he was familiar with many of China's minorities yet had never heard of the Kaifeng Jews. His initial encouragement to pursue Sino-Judaic identity as a focus of my research, his comprehensive knowledge of Chinese politics and his suggestions of sources which contextualised a potentially narrow topic within broader issues of historical and contemporary China have all augmented this dissertation with greater scope and depth. Additionally, Gary's elegant tea ceremonies during our meetings in his office functioned as a meditative palliative to the tensions often associated with the dissertation process.

Because she is not a China specialist, Debra was initially somewhat hesitant to accept the position as supervisor. I count myself very fortunate that she did. Her extraordinary talent as an anthropological researcher has amply compensated my deficit in that area and provided invaluable guidance in composing this ethnographic history. Her comments, critiques and counsels have challenged me to think critically about culture, identity and authenticity; moreover, they have helped crystallise my advocacy for recognition of the Kaifeng Jews as an authentic cultural identity. Debra's incisive attention to detail has also helped transform my writing style into a more legible, academic format with a finer cognizance of syntax and phraseology.

As recounted in the preface, fifteen years ago Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University first introduced me to the history of China's Jews. Over the years we have shared many conversations in his office at the university's Glazer Institute of Jewish Studies about the history and contemporary revival of Sino-Judaic identity. During his recent lecture tour in Australia in 2014, I had the honour of hosting Xu in my home, where we had the opportunity to explore many of the complex and controversial issues embedded in the identity politics of Kaifeng's Jewish descendants. I am very grateful for his knowledge, advice and support, all of which have greatly assisted me in my work.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of several colleagues in the field of Sino-Judaic studies. Israeli sinologist Noam Urbach was kind enough to share with me private film footage of interviews with Shlomo Jin, the first Kaifeng Jew to undergo Orthodox conversion and become an Israeli citizen. During a symposium at Ohio State University in April 2015 I shared an accommodation with Noam, who is arguably the foremost expert on the political intrigues in the 1990s attending the re-emergence of Sino-Judaic identity and the aborted project for a museum of Jewish history in Kaifeng. Our discussions at that time were both provocative and enlightening. I am likewise grateful to Professor Emeritus Jordan Paper of York University, author of *The Theology of the Chinese Jews*, who has engaged with me in vibrant email debates on the nature of the hybridised Judaism practiced in historical Kaifeng. Rabbi Anson Laytner, past president of the Sino-Judaic Institute, has given me considerable encouragement and has published some of my articles in the institute's quarterly, *Points East*.

For others who were kind enough to share their thoughts and ideas with me, I want to express my deep appreciation: Michael Freund, chairman of Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), an organization which has facilitated the *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) of fifteen Kaifeng Jews; Eran Barzilai, the Shavei Israel envoy to Kaifeng; and Shi Lei, one of the more prominent Kaifeng Jewish descendants and director of Jewish Heritage Tours of China. I am especially indebted to Dr Su Xiaoyan of Luoyang University, who recently completed her doctorate here at the University of Western Australia. Our many discussions on tourism in Henan Province, her field of expertise, provided me with a better understanding of the Kaifeng municipality's persistent efforts to foster Jewish tourism. In that regard, during a recent conference at Murdoch University for the

International Tourism Studies Association, she organised for me to lunch and dialogue with Professor Wu Bihu, Secretary General of ITSA and Director of the Research Centre for Tourism Development and Planning at Peking University. We discussed the perennial interest in the project to establish a Kaifeng museum of Sino-Judaic history, which Wu believed would be of great cultural and economic benefit to both the city and the surrounding region.

Barnaby Yeh, the emissary to Kaifeng from the Sino-Judaic Institute from 2013-2015 merits a special vote of thanks. A devoted idealist committed to the preservation of the distinctive form of Sino-Judaic history and practice, Barnaby has been an invaluable asset to Kaifeng Judaism generally and to me personally. He assisted me in many of the audio interviews I conducted with members of the community and over the past two years has maintained contact with me through Skype, updating me on local developments and often consulting on various issues that have arisen. He left Kaifeng somewhat bruised by the predictable communal squabbles, but, in spite of these, his accomplishments in nurturing Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic heritage have been considerable.

I would also be remiss to omit the unanticipated assistance imparted me by Zhang Tabin, former First Secretary of Culture at the Embassy of China in Washington D.C. After a morning swim in the pool in the Kaifeng Grand Century Hotel on China's National Day in 2013, I met Zhang by chance in the men's changing room. During our conversation it transpired that he had worked as Deputy Director of Kaifeng's Foreign Office and in the early 1980s had been instrumental in organizing the first visits of foreigners with representatives of the Sino-Judaic community. We met thereafter on three occasions during my stay, twice in his penthouse studio. Zhang unabashedly supported the promulgation of Kaifeng's Jewish history and the potential tourism bonanza that went with it, while expressing some of the widely held reservations in China regarding the veracity of the living descendants. Our animated but amiable exchanges allowed me to better understand the governmental perspectives that have guided the policy-making on issues proximate to the Kaifeng Jews.

The most significant acknowledgement must go to the men and women to whose identity this research is dedicated. All of the Jewish descendants I interviewed agreed and sought to be mentioned by name, despite the possible complications inherent any

public affirmation of a Sino-Judaic identity. I would like to thank them all for allowing me access to their homes, hearts and hopes for the future. In examining the many anomalies of their remarkable identity, I have come to better understand my own. While appreciating the welcome given to me by the entire community, I wish to express my special gratitude to those who agreed to be interviewed: Bai Xiaojun, Bai Yongnian, Chen Zhilan, Gao Chao, Guo Yan, Li Bo, Li Feng, Li Jing, Li Suisheng, Li Wei, Li Wenxiang, Li Xiuzhen, Li Xiuzhi, Li Yuan, Peng Wenxia, Shi Mingxia, Wang Jiabin, You Yong, Yue Ting, Zhang Jing and Zhang Xiuying.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the support of my family in the research and writing of this thesis. While writing a dissertation is never easy, there are particular difficulties encountered when beginning such a process as a mature-age student. My wife Batsheva has been unwavering in her reassurances that managed to keep me on track, even in those moments of doubt in my own capabilities. To my children, Sara and Eli, I owe a measure of gratitude for their indulgence in their father's eccentricities which may have detracted from attention otherwise cast upon them and their wonderful families. For my mother this project represents a dream she had harboured for me since my youth but which had to be abandoned during my anti-academic, rebellious phase during the countercultural zeitgeist of the 70s.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the influence of my late father in both my acceptance of this scholastic challenge at a later stage in life as well as for the subject matter of this thesis. I have yet to meet a person with the patience, perseverance, humility and kindness which characterized my father. One of the most important life lessons he taught me—and I can vividly remember this conversation as a teenager seated with him at the kitchen table—was that every person had a story to tell, and that every person's story has something worthwhile to learn from. I have attempted to keep this lesson in mind in relating this account of the Kaifeng Jews, and it is my sincere hope that the reader will come away having learned something of value from their unique story.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation traces the transmission of Chinese-Jewish cultural identity in Kaifeng, China from the arrival of the first Jewish settlers in the late tenth century until the contemporary revitalization of that identity by a group of their descendants. It argues that linguistic and cultural translation has facilitated the transmission of both historical and contemporary Sino-Judaic cultural identity. These translations of identity, both past and present, are a result of intercultural exchanges expedited by globalization, both of the historical form that characterized the mercantilism of the Silk Road caravans and the postmodern version typified by jet travel, the Internet and global communication systems. Unlike other translations producing hyphenated Diasporic identities, Sino-Judaic identity remains unauthenticated either as a religion or an ethnicity by the respective officialdom in Israel and China. This thesis aims to situate the cultural authenticity of the Kaifeng Jews within the particular context of indigenous Confucian beliefs, values and practices and to advocate recognition of its contribution to Jewish and Chinese histories.

A question of identity

Descendants of the Jewish merchants who settled in Kaifeng are not recognized as Jews by the Chinese state: their 1953 attempt to gain recognition from the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a distinct ethnic minority was unsuccessful. Nor are they widely recognized as Jews by other Diasporan Jews or the State of Israel. In struggling with questions of Jewish identity, though, they engage in a question of prime importance to Jews all over the world.

Prior to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, this issue did not arise. Jews then lived apart from their Christian or Muslim neighbours, and intermarriage was rare. According to Jewish law, any child born of a Jewish mother was routinely deemed to be Jewish. Furthermore, prior to the Enlightenment, the denominational divisions which characterise contemporary Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc.—did not exist. To varying extents, Jews simply preserved the traditions of their forebears without the need for denominational categorization. Since the advent of the Enlightenment, however, there has been a continued increase both in

intermarriages and of different Jewish denominations. Most of these modern denominations reject the strict traditions of Jewish law and instead espouse the humanistic aspects of Judaism that conform with contemporary liberal values. Reform Judaism, for example, has discarded the traditional notion of matrilineal descent as a criterion of Jewish status in favour of a bilineal model.

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, its largely secular leadership created a novel political institution to mould the fledgling nation's Jewish: the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Whereas most major Diasporic communities also have a Chief Rabbi, in the world's sole Jewish state this new institution assumed a paramount significance. Although only 20% of the Jewish population is Orthodox, the Chief Rabbinate is guided by halakha, the Orthodox interpretation of Jewish law. Over the years, it has provoked controversy by denying legal status to marriages, conversions and divorces performed by non-Orthodox groups, which constitute the overwhelming majority in Diasporic communities. The Chief Rabbinate defines Jewish identity in terms of matrilineal descent. Because their ancestors married Han Chinese women soon after settling in Kaifeng, the Jewish descendants do not qualify for recognition as Jews under the Rabbinate's current procedures.

As mentioned in the Preface, prior to my undertaking rabbinic studies, I hailed from a somewhat traditional, though definitively non-Orthodox, Jewish family background. Yet, with the secure knowledge that my mother was Jewish, I never entertained a moment of uncertainty regarding my Jewish identity. Thus I was surprised when Neta, an ethnic Han woman married to a Jewish descendant, cast doubt on my Jewishness. This occurred in 2011 when I had organised a meeting with the members at the new Beit Hatikvah (House of Hope), a splinter group disassociating itself from purported missionary influences at the former Yicileye School. The intent of this gathering was to distribute the mandatory Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms and to explain to them the basics of my Honours research. Unconsciously, there was perhaps a determination on my part to reinvent my persona from the rabbinic image I had projected during my initial visit to Kaifeng two years earlier to the more impartial persona of an academic that I wished to present at that time. After I had finished a much-rehearsed explicatory monologue in Chinese, to my dismay, I was confronted

with a row of grim expressions and a troubling silence. Finally, Neta, who was one of the Beit Hatikvah board members, broke that quiet asking me: "*Ni shi youtairen ma?*" *Are you a Jew?*

I was momentarily dumbfounded, first, with the stark realization that my attempt to negotiate the distanced role of a neutral observer had unwittingly constructed a wall of mistrust. What struck me even more, however, was the sheer irony: my Jewish-American identity, which was universally acknowledged and had heretofore seemed indubitable, was suddenly being challenged by a Chinese woman whose own tenuous claims to Jewish identity were indisputably rejected by the rabbinic authorities and the Jewish public generally. Quickly recovering my composure, I rattled off the Hebrew *shma yisrael*, the Jewish declaration of monotheistic faith; this bridged the cognitive divide and lightened the sombre mood in the room. This incident, however, allowed me to experience—albeit fleetingly—what it felt like to have my own subjective identity questioned. It also alerted me that to maintain the mutual trust necessary to continue my research, I could not discard my role as rabbi and teacher. In fact, despite some disadvantages, on the whole, that ongoing role has provided a distinctive perspective in terms of participant observation in my fieldwork in Kaifeng.

In addition to highlighting the anomalies of my particular position, that incident raises the main questions that are the focus of this research. When Neta probed my Jewish identity, she understood full well that her own claim to that status has been denied not only by the Chinese government but by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Yet, her question clearly implied that it was I, rather than she, who might be denied status as a Jew. How did Neta and her cohorts develop such certainty in a sense of Jewishness despite the lack of external endorsement? What political, social and economic interactions coupled with any cultural conceptions have contributed to that sense? Finally, in what ways has the particular Chinese context of their hyphenated identity affected both its construction and perpetuation? I will argue that this strong sense of identity as Jewish derives from the long history of the Jewish community but that the resurgence of interest in cultural identity must be understood in the context of more recent engagements with global actors and influences.

Historical background

Around the beginning of the tenth century a group of Jewish merchants from Central Asia arrived in Kaifeng, at that time the world's largest metropolis and a major trading hub on the Silk Road (Chandler and Fox 1974, 342). According to their oral histories, they were welcomed by the Emperor Zhenzong to settle in China and “revere and preserve the traditions” of their ancestors. A century later they constructed a synagogue initially called the Temple of Purity and Truth. Due to inundations of the Yellow River, this structure was destroyed and rebuilt several times in the course of its seven-hundred-year history. Contrary to the experiences of their Jewish brethren in Europe, the Jews in Kaifeng—who identified themselves as Yicileye, or “Israelites”—suffered no discrimination or persecution (Leslie 1972, 111-112; Pollak 1998, 60-61; Xu 2003, 131-132).

Although geographic isolation and small numbers contributed to early language shift from their native Judeo-Persian to Chinese, the Yicileye, with the help of subsequent caravans of Jewish traders traversing the Silk Road, managed to acquire Torah scrolls and books to maintain rudimentary Hebrew reading skills. Inter-marriage probably occurred as early as the first generation, and, following the patrilineal custom, Chinese wives would adopt the traditions of their Yicileye husbands (Xu 2003). According to the inscriptions of the synagogue stela, the first Jewish settlers brought with them swathes of dyed cotton and were thus encouraged by the Emperor to engage in the commercial production of dyed textiles. By the early Ming Dynasty, a disproportionate number of Yicileye had attained the superlative *jinshi* rank in the Imperial Exams and were assigned to significant governmental posts (Pollak 1998, 320-321; Xu 2003, 91). Prior to that time, according to tradition, imperial decree had bestowed upon the Yicileye the seven clan names that identify them to this day.¹

¹ Ai 艾, Gao 高, Jin 金, Li 李, Shi 石, Zhang 张, Zhao 赵 are the names of the seven clans. There is some evidence that most of the Zhang clan assimilated with the Muslim Hui in the 18th century (Xu 2003).

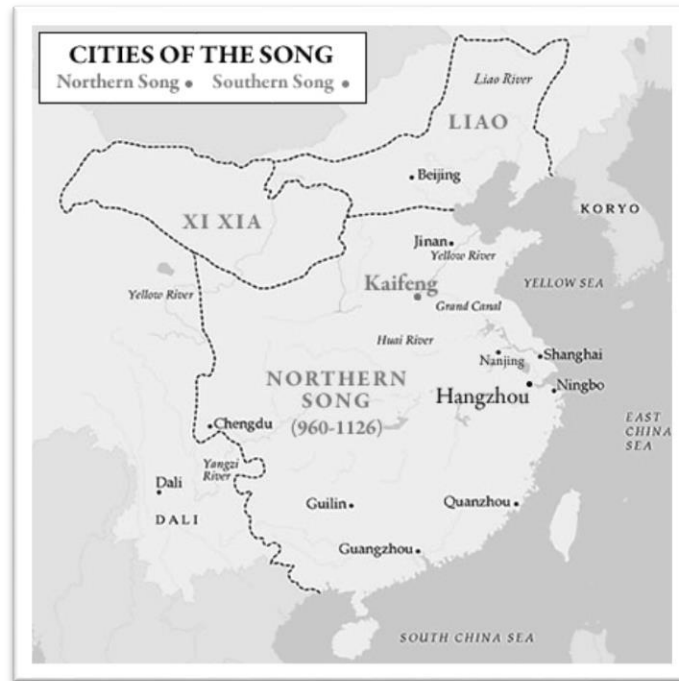


FIGURE 1. Cities of the Northern Song Dynasty, including the capital city of Kaifeng (Asia for Educators n.d.)

The seamless integration into Chinese society, coupled with the syncretistic nature of China's religious culture, also generated a unique, hybridized theology that contrasted to that which developed amongst European Jewry during that period. The synagogal stelae frequently refer to the similarities between Confucianism and Judaism. In the synagogue's interior, the placard use of the Chinese terms *tian* (Heaven) and *dao* (the Way) to refer to God contrast sharply with the anthropomorphic depiction of the deity in Western scriptural translations. Furthermore, this utilization of such abstract Daoist terminology in the portrayal of divinity impacted certain aspects of the Yicileye's cosmogony, philosophy and ethics (Sharot 2007, 185-186; Paper 2011, 100-102). When Jesuit missionaries arrived in China in the late sixteenth century, Father Matteo Ricci inadvertently "discovered" Kaifeng's Chinese-Jews in 1605. Until the Qing Emperor Kangxi's restrictions on Christian missionizing 120 years later, several Jesuits visited Kaifeng for various periods of time. These Jesuits sketched blueprints of the synagogue's interior and exterior layout; created rubbings of its stelae and placards; catalogued the community's Torah scrolls and library; and, significantly, documented the religious practices of the Chinese-Jews. This documentation appeared in subsequent Jesuit publications in eighteenth century Europe (Pollak 1998, 34-35).

The Jesuits were not the only Europeans present in China. With the fragmentation of the Mongol empire in the fourteenth century, the significance of the Silk Road gradually diminished, ultimately replaced by port cities along the southern China coast frequented by foreign merchants. These developments — the precursors of today's globalization — adversely affected the Kaifeng economy and led to migratory patterns that depleted the Sino-Judaic community's small population, which never numbered more than five thousand at its apex during the early Ming. Increasing poverty, dwindling numbers and Hebrew language attrition continued unabated for almost two centuries. The destruction of the synagogue by flooding in 1848 and the death of the last rabbi a few years later led to the eventual demise of the Kaifeng congregation (Pollak 1998; Xu 2003, 52-53). With no tangible heritage for more than a century, many twentieth century researchers and historians predicted the eventual extinction of Sino-Judaic culture (White 1966; Leslie 1972). However, within the Confucian structures of ancestral veneration, clan lineage and oral histories, together with the preservation of a few Jewish customs — such as abstention from pork — an internal, familial notion of a "Jewish" identity persisted (Eber 1999; Plaks 1999; Xu 2003). It would take the policies of "Reform and Openness" advocated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to trigger an externalization and revitalization of that dormant identity. In the wake of China's new openness, representatives of various NGOs visited Kaifeng and established contacts with some of its Jewish descendants. Amongst the latter were the Sino-Judaic Institute (SJI), established by scholars in 1985 in Palo Alto; Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), a Zionist organization founded in 2000 and based in Jerusalem; and the Association of Kaifeng Jews (AKJ), an evangelical Christian group launched in Hayes, Virginia in 2004 but with operatives in Hong Kong. As will be discussed further on, these organizations often presented conflicting representations of Sino-Judaic culture and promulgated contradictory objectives (Ehrlich and Liang 2008; Urbach 2008).

This surge of global interest, particularly by Jewish tourists, stimulated the gradual reconstruction of a communal Sino-Judaic identity and caught the attention of administrators at the Kaifeng branch of the China International Travel Service (CITS), the official government agency managing Chinese tourism. With a per capita GDP less than 20% that of Beijing, Kaifeng had been bypassed in the spectacular urban development prevalent in other Chinese cities; municipal officials viewed Jewish

tourism as a remedy for its depressed economy. In 1993, the municipality inaugurated the Construction Office of the Kaifeng Jewish History Museum with the aim of creating a replica of the ancient synagogue. After three years, however, the project was summarily suspended. There is speculation that the suspension was instigated from governmental agencies in Beijing, where there were apparent concerns that a revival of Sino-Judaic cultural identity induced through overseas Jewish networks could have adverse ramifications on China's domestic affairs (Urbach 2008, 119).

Estimates of the number of remaining Chinese-Jews in Kaifeng range between five hundred and two thousand; approximately one hundred of these identify culturally as Jewish and participate at varying levels in educational, religious or social forms of communal activity. The community's 1953 petition to be officially recognised as a "Jewish" ethnicity was denied by the PRC leadership, and, following the closure of the Construction Office, a governmental order mandated the expurgation of "Jewish" as an ethnic categorization that appeared in many of the descendants' household registry cards (户口本, *hukouben*). Nonetheless, government policy was ambivalent: it acknowledged the community's historical origins and discouraged any discrimination against them by the majority Han (Ehrlich and Liang 2008; Urbach 2008). Despite the official erasure of its identity by the Chinese government and continued non-recognition by Israeli authorities, the past decade has witnessed a significant increase in the activities of the *youtai houyi* (Jewish descendants) of Kaifeng. These developments include increased tourism, Jewish education, religious practice, *aliyah* (immigration to Israel), Hebrew language skills and renewed interest—in Kaifeng and abroad—in rebuilding a synagogue (Ehrlich and Liang 2008; Urbach 2008).

Periodising globalization

In exploring the question of the reproduction of Sino-Judaic historical and contemporary identity, this thesis engages with theories about the interrelated processes of globalization, translation and transmission. Nederveen Pieterse (2009, 43) offers a broad definition of globalization as "the trend of growing worldwide interconnectness". Within the current research on globalization some scholars take a "discontinuist" view that globalization is a distinctly modern or postmodern phenomenon disengaged from earlier history and producing social, economic and

cultural effects unique to contemporaneous events (Beck 1992; Castells 1997; Giddens 1999; Wallerstein 1999). In contrast, “continuists” argue that today’s globalization constitutes an extension of processes that precede our epoch by many centuries. Osterhammel and Petersson (2005) trace the origin of globalization to the Yuan Dynasty, when the Mongols established the first global market. Going back more than four thousand years earlier, Frank and Gills (1993) plot the onset of our present-day globalization to connectivity and migratory developments emanating from Africa, from whence “there is an unbroken historical continuity between the central civilization [Afro-Eurasian] and world system of the Bronze Age and our contemporary modern capitalist world system” (ibid, 392).

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Start time</i>	<i>Central nodes</i>	<i>Dynamics</i>
<i>Eurasian globalization</i>	3000 BCE	Eurasia	Agricultural and urban revolutions, migrations, trade, ancient empires
<i>Afro-Eurasian</i>	1000 BCE	Greco-Roman world, West Asia, East Africa	Commercial revolution
<i>Oriental globalization 1</i>	500 CE	Middle East	Emergence of a world economy, caravan trade
<i>Oriental globalization 2</i>	1100	East and South Asia and multicentric	Productivity, technology, urbanization; Silk Routes
<i>Multicentric</i>	1500	Atlantic expansion	Triangular trade, Americas
<i>Euro-Atlantic</i>	1800	Euro-Atlantic economy	Industrialization, colonial division of labor
<i>20C globalization</i>	1950	US, Europe, Japan: Trilateral globalization	Multinational corporations, (end of) cold war, global value chains
<i>21C globalization</i>	2000	East Asia, BRICS, emerging societies, petro economies	New geography of trade, global rebalancing

FIGURE 2. Nederveen Pieterse’s phases of globalization (2012, 19)

Nederveen Pieterse (2012) problematizes both of these positions. He critiques the discontinuist view for its presentism and Eurocentrism, eclipsing as it does the

systemic expansion historically generated from the Orient. Furthermore, this Eurocentric view privileges an endogenous globalization over the exogenous variant (Nederveen Pieterse 2012, 8). On the other hand, he criticises the continuist stance as forming “too wide and general a category” (ibid, 17). Instead, adopting a comparative historical view that identifies emergent connectivity processes, both Eastern and Western, he lists eight particular phases of globalization, from as early as the Bronze Age—*Eurasian globalization*—to the ascendancy of China, BRICS and other emerging economies at the onset of the 21st century—*21C globalization*.²

In the first part of this thesis, I focus on a period that Nederveen Pieterse calls *Oriental globalization 1* and *2*, which begins with the caravan trade around 500 CE and culminates with the mercantilism of the Silk Routes. The arrival of Jewish merchants in China from Central Asia, whether via the Silk Road, or, as some scholars suggest, by the sea route from India, was a part of this eastward expansion of commercial economies. In the second part of the thesis, I concentrate on the period Nederveen Pieterse calls *21C globalization*. In this phase, Sino-Judaic identity is being revived in ways that reflect both the accelerated speed of connectivity unique to present-day technologies as well as the prominence of China in that process.

Cultural hybridity as translation

Globalization is closely related to the phenomenon of cultural hybridity:

Hybridization as a process is as old as history, but the pace of mixing accelerates and its scope widens in the wake of major structural changes, such as new technologies, that enable new phases of intercultural contact. Contemporary accelerated globalization is such a new phase (Nederveen Pieterse 2001).

The hybridization of Chinese and Jewish identities was markedly different in the *Oriental globalization 1* phase and the contemporary *21C globalization*. In the former, the Persian-Jewish culture of migrants from Central Asia adapted to and mixed with that of the prevalent Song Dynasty. In cosmopolitan Kaifeng, which at the time was a dynamic melting pot for numerous ethnicities and nationalities as well as a wide

² BRICS is the acronym BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

variety of religious sects, Chinese culture was hardly standardized. In the current phase, in which Chinese identities have been categorized and authenticated by the state, the bounded notion of Han identity—forcibly stamped onto the household registration cards of Kaifeng Jews—commingles through the aforementioned “new technologies” with various global articulations on the meaning of Jewishness.

The original title of this dissertation was *Globalization, hybridity and translation*. Early on one of my mentors, Dr Lyn Parker, called my attention to the anomaly that biological hybridity, from whence the cultural term has been appropriated, inevitably produces a sterile outcome. Yet, in the case of the Chinese Jews, the potential for mixture has creatively enabled both the long-term survival of the historical community and the present-day revival of its contemporary progenies. Peter Burke problematizes the “hybridity” metaphor as suggesting an absence of human agency in the process of cultural mixture. In its stead, Burke favours the linguistic allegory of “translation”:

Of the different metaphors used to describe the subject of this essay, it is the linguistic one that appears, to me at least, to be the most helpful and the least misleading. One form that it takes is the phrase ‘cultural translation’ first used by anthropologists. Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), for example, a Pole who migrated to England and carried out fieldwork in Melanesia, claimed that ‘the learning of a foreign culture is like the learning of a foreign tongue’ and that, through his books, he was attempting ‘to translate Melanesian conditions into our own’ (Burke 2001, 55).

In the case of the Kaifeng Jews the metaphor of “translation” seems particularly pertinent because of the centrality of the Hebrew language to notions of identity. As the Yicileye were a negligible, isolated minority in China, their language shift proceeded with relative rapidity and impelled the utilization of Chinese language to reinterpret their Jewish culture. Although the Torah scrolls and manuscripts recovered from Kaifeng are in Hebrew, the stelae in the synagogue’s courtyards and the placards that adorned its interior were all in Chinese. Parallel and intrinsic to this linguistic translation was a cultural appropriation of confluent Confucian and Daoist concepts that resonated with the community’s Jewish traditions. Conversely, the contemporary transmission of their cultural identity invokes processes of translating multiple, and sometimes contradictory, discourses on meanings of Jewish identity from several different organizations and individuals worldwide into a coherent Chinese context.

Alluding to the fecundity of hybridity referred to above, Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1995,102) opts for the term “transculturation” to describe the phenomenon of amalgamated cultures:

I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. In the end, as the school of Malinowski’s followers maintains, the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.

I argue that cultural hybridity—whether expressed as translation, transculturation or other terminologies—functions as a vigorous, subversive challenge to the fetishization of objectified boundaries:

Hybridity is unremarkable and is noteworthy only from a point of view of boundaries that have been essentialized. What hybridity means varies not only over time but also in different cultures, and this informs different patterns of hybridity. Then we come back to the original question: so what? *The importance of hybridity is that it problematizes boundaries* (Nederveen Pieterse 2001, 2). [Italics mine]

The historical translation of Chinese-Jewishness problematized the cultural boundaries delineating the group’s identity constructed by their Han hosts; their Hui neighbours; assorted delegations of Christian missionaries; and, in its final years, by European and American Jewish communities. The modern translation in the current revitalization challenges the authenticated boundaries fabricated by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate; the Communist Party of China (CPC); and those of different denominations of worldwide Jewry. It is only in contrast to artificially defined and delimited identity categories that hybridity is accentuated; this accentuation then highlights the artificiality of those categorical boundaries.

Transmissions of cultural identity

Any conversation on the transmission of Sino-Judaic cultural identity operates in the framework of a dynamic process rather than a reified entity. It follows the contours of social identity proposed by Richard Jenkins as “[a] multi-dimensional classification or

mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivity. It is a process—identification—not a ‘thing’” (2004, 6). As Jenkins elaborates, the map is deemed multi-dimensional because it is constructed not only through the group’s perception of itself but also through the manner in which it is perceived by others.

In his discussion of the ethnic identity of the Yi minority in Southwest China, Stevan Harrell (1990) further expounds this conception of identity as a multi-dimensional map primarily constructed and transmitted through political and economic interaction with other groups:

Ethnic groups in action, as political and economic collectivities, are defined not so much by their internal characteristics of shared descent and common culture but more by their external relationships with other ethnic groups and with the state. It is this relationship between groups that makes ethnicity important in the everyday lives of ethnic group members; and in a very real sense it is impossible for a social system to contain only one ethnic group: the characteristics that define ethnicity—culture and descent—become important only when they serve to solidify a group that acts in a political and economic system that also contains other groups. So when we observe the interaction of ethnic groups, we must realize that as much as the nature of the groups defines the relationship, the relationship also defines the nature of the groups (Harrell 1990, 516).

From this dynamic Harrell asserts that there are three relevant parties in any local social system, whether in China or elsewhere. These are 1) the people in question (i.e. the ethnic group to be identified), 2) other people in the local social system, the neighbours who interact with the group in question, and 3) the state.

He further suggests that in China the influence of the state in ethnic identity is greater than in most countries (1990). In addition to these three vertices on the map of identity, Noam Urbach (2008) adds a fourth, particularly pertinent to the unique situation of Kaifeng’s Jewish descendants: the foreign “mother-group” with which the group desires to be affiliated. In this case, both the desire within Kaifeng for that affiliation, and the response of the mother-group to that desire, have had profound social, cultural and political implications for the reconstruction, both past and present, of the group’s cultural identity. Accordingly, in the subsequent discussion of the transmission of Sino-Judaic identity, I follow Harrell’s approach by endeavouring to balance the

external political, economic and social relationships with the internal dynamics of culture and descent.

Globalization, translation and transmission are thus interrelated mechanisms in the process of reproducing Sino-Judaic cultural identity. Both the historical and contemporary phases of globalization have linked the Kaifeng Jews with other cultures: in the past conjoining them with their Chinese hosts and, at present, linking them through tourism, travel and social media to the transnational network of global Jewry. Translation has enabled them to reproduce a unique cultural *mélange* distinct from other hyphenated, diasporic Jewish identities. This mixture, with its adaptability to Chinese contexts, has proven remarkably resilient in both its historical longevity and its current capacity to regenerate. Finally, its authenticity within the particular Chinese context has facilitated its enduring transmission, despite its ongoing challenge to the externally constructed boundaries of authentication that deny it.

Critical holism and integration of paradox

In his paper *Critical Holism and the Tao of Development*, Nederveen Pieterse (1999, 75) is critical of the dichotomous thinking that pervades development studies. Through the formulation of a theory of critical holism, he attempts to reconcile these perceived dichotomies, which he views as vestiges of the Cartesian paradigm still prevalent in Western thought:

The antidotes to high modernism tend to suffer from reproducing dichotomous thinking, skipping levels and framing contemporary dilemmas in anachronistic terms. Wholeness in development should not be expected from a short cut towards an undivided whole in a divided world, but should be sought in a new balance combining wholeness and difference. One way of achieving this is the Tao of development, which means acknowledging paradox as part of development realities.

In the conclusion of his essay Nederveen Pieterse proposes that a theory of critical holism “as a balancing act involves balance, in a wider and more fundamental sense, across dimensions of existence from the epistemological to the practical.” This type of balancing act can take various forms, including what he refers to as a “multidimensional approach”, defined as “a balance between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of collective existence. The horizontal refers to the worldly and

social spheres; the vertical refers to the inner dimension of subjectivities and meanings" (ibid, 94).

This particular form of Nederveen Pieterse's critical holism concurs with the aforementioned multidimensional map. Its horizontal, critical axis delineates the political, social and economic interactions of power relations in which cultural identity is incubated; the vertical, constructivist axis describes the view of that identity from within the social womb and the symbols that imbue its meaning to its individual agents.

The underlying paradigm of Nederveen Pieterse's critical holism, which dwells on the paradoxical combination of wholeness and difference, is Daoism. Daoism acknowledges "paradox in development realities" and not only in its narrow application to development studies but, more importantly, in the broader epistemological sense as well. Whereas the Cartesian divide perceives opposing principles such as *structure* and *agency* as irreconcilable, a Daoist paradigm perceives them as inextricably entwined with a chiaroscuro of dynamic combinations linking the two poles. Furthermore, a Daoist model does not privilege any particular theoretical perspective, because any particular perspective is just that: a way of viewing reality as opposed to reality itself, which, in the Daoist sense, is ultimately unknowable. It renders the veracity of any theoretical or philosophical viewpoint as inherently partial, since the existence of any specific view immediately musters its opposite to sustain it.

The trend in Western academia to favour a particular theoretical mode, frequently influenced by political persuasions, has proved problematic for me in the discussion of culture in a Chinese context. While the tendency among scholars is to view the more visible, hierarchical Confucian paradigm as the key to understanding China, and one that has undeniably had a more tangible effect on the translated identity of the Kaifeng Jews, the subtler Daoist influence still exerts a powerful hold on China's collective psyche. The unification of *yin* and *yang* permeates the Chinese language, where numerous words are formed by the conjoining of opposites: *dàxiǎo* (big; small) as "size"; *dōngxī* (east; west) as "thing"; *kuàimàn* (fast; slow) as "speed"; *qīngzhòng* (light; heavy) as "severity"; *zuǒyòu* (left; right) as "approximately"; *dòngjìng* (move; still) as "activity"; and numerous other examples of linguistic compounds. Traditional Chinese

medicine, brush painting, the culinary arts, *taiqi* and *qigong*. orchestral composition, and *fengshui* are all sourced in achieving a harmonious balance of opposite *yin* and *yang* elements. Finally, unlike Western religions, where the symbols of one are rarely found integrated into the sacred space of another, in China the presence in one shrine of representations of the Buddha, Confucius and Laozi is a common occurrence, despite the fact that their respective philosophies frequently controvert one another.

The last point is particularly salient in any discussion of the religious pluralism that was prevalent during the Song Dynasty when the first Jewish settlers arrived in Kaifeng. According to Stephen Sharot (2007, 183), the fluidity and syncretism of Chinese culture contrasted sharply with the “insularity and limited pluralism of the religious environment of most of Europe”:

The relatively permeable boundaries and high level of religious pluralism in traditional China are evident from the fact that the vast majority of the Chinese population, past and present and from all strata, cannot be identified with, or internally distinguished by, specific religious traditions (*Ibid*).

This important aspect of Chinese culture is vital in understanding how a translated Jewish identity by an insignificant minority was able to perpetuate and reproduce in Kaifeng for over seven centuries. It also accounts for the resilience of that identity to revive itself in its contemporary embodiment, in spite of official policies denying both its validity and existence.

While Western theory frequently views structure and agency as contradictory, the core Daoist paradigm of critical holism regards them as indissolubly linked. In the analysis that follows, by necessity, I have separated the examinations of the external dimensions of Sino-Judaic identity formulated through political, economic and social relationships from those probing the internal characteristics of shared cultural meanings. However, to the extent possible, and in keeping with both critical holism and Harrell’s analysis of the components of ethnic identity intrinsic to social systems, I strive to emphasize the complementarity of these two processes.

Research methods

For this ethnographic history I have relied on a critical review of literature to track the reproduction of Sino-Judaic history in Kaifeng’s past. These various texts trace the

external perceptions of the Yicileye by their Han Chinese hosts, their Hui Muslim neighbours and the Christian missionaries and emissaries who periodically visited Kaifeng. Understanding internal views of the Yicileye in framing their own culture necessitates a more speculative approach that attempts to interpret the stelae in the synagogue courtyard, the only extant evidence of that historical identity. A few contemporary academics such as Xu Xin and Jordan Paper have attempted to delineate those speculative cultural—and theological—parameters. At the other end of this history, I examine the revival of Sino-Judaic identity among Kaifeng's Jewish descendants through interviews with the descendants, representatives of foreign NGOs and government officials. Participant observation during Sabbath and festival celebrations, home visits and communal classes have also contributed to my research.

Plotting Nederveen Pieterse's horizontal dimension of the social interactions of the Yicileye from the Northern Song until the mid-nineteenth century demise of its tangible culture entails a historiography derived from critical literary and archival analysis. Until the arrival of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, reference to the Chinese Jews is ambiguous and scant. The extant early evidence that mentions Jews, both in China and Kaifeng, is derived primarily from official Chinese annals. These references seem to indicate that rather than examining how the Chinese Jews were perceived by outsiders, the real question is whether they were perceived at all. There is evidence that seems to indicate that perceptions of a unique Jewish identity were subsumed under the sobriquet "Blue Hat Hui-Hui", considered as a subset of the Hui Muslims.³ Given the many cultural and theological similarities between Jews and Muslims, it is hardly surprising that Chinese officials saw them as part of the same group. Yet there is evidence that the Kaifeng Jews periodically sought to assert a distinct identity. Sidney Shapiro's *Jews in Old China - Studies by Chinese Scholars* (1984) has been an invaluable source in analysing these earliest references to the Chinese Jews, including discussions of their origin and date of arrival in China and Kaifeng. Xu Xin (2003) argues that some imperial records indicate that Han Chinese in Kaifeng recognized Jews as a distinct group. Donald Leslie's comprehensive study *The Survival of the Chinese Jews: The Jewish Community of Kaifeng* (1972) further analyses external

³ Xu Xin refutes this assertion and claims that the term "Hui" was utilised as a moniker for any foreign group in China (personal conversation, December 2 2014).

references to the Kaifeng Jews in official Chinese records as well as allusions to their relationship with the Chinese authorities that feature in the synagogal stelae. The most extensive research examining the historiography of interactions with both Christian missionaries and, in the years leading up to its expiration, the nineteenth century Jewish Diaspora can be found in Michael Pollak's *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (1998).

Nederveen Pieterse's subjective vertical dimension, the interpretation of the group's internal view of their descent and culture, is examined through the synagogal stelae of 1489, 1512 and 1663; the placards (*lián biàn*, 联遍) gracing the synagogue's interior; and the Kaifeng Memorial Book, which listed the names of the community's deceased. The stelae are now in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, but they were once in the external courtyard of the synagogue. Written in the classical style accessible only to the mandarin elite, these stelae publicly chronicled the Sino-Judaic historical narrative and to affirm its adherence to the cultural norms of Imperial China. Most scholars have seen them as part of a public relations engagement with the host culture (White 1966; Leslie 1972; Plaks 1998; Pollak 1999; Xu 2003).

According to the 1663 stele, two brothers, Zhao Yingcheng and Zhao Yingdou, each authored works on Jewish theology: the former, *The Vicissitudes of the Holy Scriptures*, and the latter, *Preface to Clarifying the Law*. Unfortunately, both of these texts have been lost to posterity. In 1851 *The Chinese Repository*, a journal of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, first published an English translation of the 1489 and 1512 stelae; Bishop William C. White later embellished this translation in his 1942 magnum opus *Chinese-Jews: A Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of Kài-Feng Fu*. White's English translation has been criticised by some as overly florid, and "those aspects relevant to theology are somewhat suffused with Christian missionary urges and interpretations" (Paper 2012, 20).

In 2006 Tiberiu Weisz published a new arguably more readable, translation. In contrast to White and most other scholars, Weisz speculated that these monuments were encrypted theological and liturgical missives intended for posterity to ensure the

perpetuation of Jewish heritage in Kaifeng.⁴ Xu Xin, in collaboration with a group of Chinese scholars of Classical Mandarin, is considering a future translation that might reconcile any inaccuracies of the previous versions (personal conversation October 19, 2013). For this study, I have made use of Weisz's more decipherable translation, while circumventing some of his more questionable interpretations.

A number of scholars have examined the commonalities between Confucianism and Judaism discernible in the epigraphic records of the three stelae (White 1966; Leslie 1972; Abraham 1989; Eber 1999; Plaks 1999; Xu 2003; Sharot 2007; Patt-Shamir 2008). A more comprehensive exploration of a speculative Sino-Judaic theology, one first solicited seventy years ago by Bishop White, was recently undertaken by Jordan Paper in *The Theology of the Chinese Jews, 1000-1850* (2012). Paper's research on the synagogal epigraphy of the stelae and placards suggests they draw on aspects of Daoism and popular Chinese religion, his field of expertise.

As I argue elsewhere (Bernstein 2012), Paper adopts what I consider an anachronistic model of orthodoxy onto the historic Sino-Judaic community. Contrary to assertions made in his book, I do not believe there is historical evidence for a Talmudic culture, formal conversions or a strict adherence to Jewish law (*halakha*). While both Paper and Xu (2003) submit that the confluent Confucian practices adapted by the Kaifeng Jews remained within the parameters of normative Judaism, I tend to agree with Sharot's (2007, 188-189) assertion that the pervasiveness of popular Chinese religion suggests that the Kaifeng Jews may have also engaged in certain forms of shamanistic ritual normally prohibited by Jewish law.

The ethnographic literature on the contemporary revival of Sino-Judaic identity is scant. Abraham (1999) was the first researcher to interview six heads of Kaifeng's Jewish clans in 1985; she recounts some of their memories and oral histories in a paper appearing in the anthology *The Jews of China, vol.1: Historical and Comparative*

⁴ One of Weisz's primary assumptions that the stelae contained coded theological and liturgical information for Sino-Judaic posterity is factually incorrect: "Carving in stone was contrary to the Jewish precept against idolatry, and the Israelites in China faced the dilemma of either vanishing without a trace or incising their religious beliefs in stone to be preserved for perpetuity" (Weisz 2006, xvii). As a visit to any Jewish cemetery makes clear, carving in stone is a common Jewish practice with scriptural antecedents (Exodus 34:4; Joshua 8:32).

Perspectives. Ehrlich and Liang (2008) contributed a chapter to *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* describing some of the developments that led to the founding of the Yicelye School by Nafatali (Tim) Lerner in 2001. Noam Urbach (2008, 119-123) describes the political configurations that spawned both the inauguration and abrupt suspension of the Construction Office of the Kaifeng Jewish History Museum (1993-1996).⁵ Along with interviews and conversations with individuals central to that episode, these latter two texts provide the basis for the horizontal dimension analysing the political, economic and social discourse on contemporary Sino-Judaic cultural identity in the wake of Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Openness".

For the contemporary period, the vertical dimension, exploring the internal semiotics driving the fluid processes reconstructing present-day Sino-Judaic identity, has been established through fieldwork activity. I have thus far made three visits to Kaifeng in 2009, 2011 and 2013; during the most recent, of the longest duration of three weeks, I conducted audio interviews with twenty-two Kaifeng Jewish descendants and spouses. In addition to invitations to several homes, I have been a participant observer in celebrations of *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and the Festival of *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths). Due to the unrecognized status of the Kaifeng Jews and ongoing surveillance by the city's internal security apparatus, the traditional "fieldwork concept" mandating long-term immersion is neither feasible nor altogether necessary. The Kaifeng Jews of today are dispersed in different locales throughout the city. Moreover, apart from the Israeli flags or Judaica items found in their homes, there is little that outwardly distinguishes them from their Chinese neighbours. Their cultural identity comes visibly into focus when they meet as a group to celebrate the Shabbat or festivals, or when questioned about their beliefs, ancestry and history.

More importantly, as this dissertation seeks to analyse the global influences on the translation of Sino-Judaic culture, the description of symbols and meetings motivating the cultural activism of the Kaifeng Jews entails a "multi-sited ethnography", utilizing Internet communications and social media to connect with sources in China, Israel, the USA and Canada. Mimicking the multidimensional approach mentioned previously, a

⁵*Kāifēng youtài lìshǐ wénwù bówùguǎn*, 开封犹太历史文物博物馆.

multi-sited ethnography evades the linearity of an orthodox focus of the group itself in its geographic locality. According to George E. Marcus, such an ethnography

[m]oves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation (Marcus 1995, 96).

I maintain regular contact with individual members of the Kaifeng Jewish community on Skype, exercising that resource weekly for several months in 2012 to conduct online classes teaching Mishnah.⁶ Together with most members of the community I am also part of a forum on QQ, the Chinese technological equivalent of Skype, called the Kaifeng Jewish Community QQ Group (*Kāifēng yóutài shèqū QQ qún*, 开封犹太社区 QQ 群). More importantly, I maintain frequent email, telephonic and social media correspondence with Barnaby Yeh, the SJI envoy stationed in Kaifeng since August 2013. More than simply updating me as to events and progress in communal affairs, Barnaby often consults with me on problematic issues that arise within the community. Anson Laytner, past president of the SJI and faculty member at Seattle University's School of Theology & Ministry, has requested my contributions to the SJI Journal Points East as well as reports on my fieldwork. I have conducted a telephone interview with Michael Freund, chairman of Shavei Israel, and am linked through social media to several of the Kaifeng Jews now living in Israel through Shavei's assistance. These are but a few examples of the networking that has developed through a multidimensional approach to a multi-sited ethnography. James Clifford's (1986) claim that "'Cultures' do not hold still for their portraits" infers that the portraiture should strive to reflect that movement, all the more when that culture itself is largely a product of globalized, multi-sited influences.

⁶ Mishnah is the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral traditions known as the "Oral Torah" and a primary component of the Talmud.

Thesis structure and significance

The dissertation that follows is divided into two parts. Part One examines the translation and transmission of Sino-Judaic heritage of the Yicileye from their arrival in Kaifeng during the Northern Song Dynasty until the final ruin of the communal synagogue in the mid-nineteenth century. Part Two surveys the effects of Deng Xiaoping's policy of "Reform and Openness" on the ongoing retranslation of a revitalized Sino-Judaic cultural identity.

The first chapter is a historiographic depiction of the construct of Sino-Judaic identity formulated through the external gaze of the host Han culture: the neighbouring Hui, Jesuit and Anglican missionaries, and, at its nadir, of the European, American and Shanghai Jewish communities which failed to heed the Kaifeng Jews' plea for outside assistance. Elaborating on the horizontal dimension of political, social and economic interactions with the host culture, the chapter portrays the contours of external perceptions of the Chinese Jews. Chapter Two turns to the vertical dimension of cultural identity, analysing the Kaifeng synagogal epigraphy for confluences with aspects of Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese folk-religion. This analysis presents both the view on Sino-Judaic identity reproduced for internal consumption and that constructed for the purpose of external transmission. Chapter Three is an exploration of the boundaries of state authentication delineating Chinese and Jewish identities respectively. It begins with a presentation of the current division of fifty-six minority groups in China juxtaposed with the Orthodox-Jewish criterion of matrilineal descent. The chapter then moves backward in time to retrace the historical developments giving rise to these boundaries, while simultaneously identifying the hegemony and hybridity inherent in their respective constructions.

The fourth chapter returns to the horizontal dimension of identity, focusing on the contemporary component and examining the emergent, polysemous articulations on the uses and meaning of Sino-Judaic culture in the aftermath of "Reform and Openness". This critical analysis reveals how academics, tourists, evangelists and entrepreneurs posed multiple challenges to the dominant discourse from both the CPC and State of Israel repudiating Sino-Judaic identity. These resistant discourses played a role in facilitating the revival of a dormant Sino-Judaic identity; that revival entailed

initiatives, in particular the Kaifeng Construction Office, launched by the municipality to draw Jewish tourism to the city. Chapter 5 progresses to the cultural activism that has occurred in Kaifeng since the 1996 rescission of the official *youtai* (Jewish) status from the group's local residency cards. The vertical dimension of the present-day community mapping the gradual restoration of "their internal characteristics of shared descent and common culture": these characteristic symbols of cultural identity include communal gatherings; the celebration of Shabbat and Jewish festivals; the acquisition of Hebrew language skills; shared ritual of the prayer service; collective history; participation in domestic seminars and online classes on Judaism; *aliyah* and official conversions in Israel. The final chapter highlights my own role as cultural translator through a subjective, first person account of my fieldwork in Kaifeng during the convergent Sukkot and Mid-Autumn festivals. In a sense this sixth chapter compacts much of the empirical data supplied in the previous five into an experiential account designed to permit the reader a firsthand vignette into the contemporary life of the Kaifeng Jews. The conclusion offers a prognosis for the continuity of a Kaifeng Jewish cultural identity, a critique of current policies that hinder its preservation and an advocacy of why and how that identity should be maintained.

Challenging boundaries

Although there are a few scholarly works on the history of Kaifeng's Jews, this is the first comprehensive research connecting the historical Sino-Judaic community with its descendants' revival of their cultural identity and heritage beginning in the late twentieth century. Of greater significance is the framing of this research in terms of the past and present-day translations of cultural identity generated through the corresponding intercultural exchanges. That significance, however, does not reflect any uniqueness in the processes of cultural translation, which are occurring continuously, as Nederveen Pieterse has indicated above, and is reiterated by Burke and other scholars. Rather, it is significant in the narrow context of Sino-Judaic identity and the larger context of identity politics in general, because of its capacity to challenge the reification of boundaries.

In a conceptual sense, the significance of this challenge can be understood by returning to the Daoist paradigm integrating polar elements of paradox. The *yin-yang* symbol,

while revealing a boundary between its dichotomous elements, views that boundary as constantly in flux. Moreover, each polar element is contained within the fluid parameters of its counterpart:



Both *yin* and *yang*, and the boundary that separates and identifies them as apparently disparate, are therefore never constructed as essentialised entities. The dynamic blending of the two polar elements in unending, creative combinations thus problematizes the depiction of the boundary between them as stagnant or concretized. In this dissertation, as is the case with any hyphenated identity, the blending of Chinese and Jewish polarities problematizes the metaphorical hyphen that arbitrarily divides them. However, the more significant contestation is of the boundaries demarcating authenticated forms of hyphenated Jewish identities with the unauthenticated—yet authentic—Chinese variety. Thus, an understanding of the authenticity of the Sino-Judaic cultural mixture, positioned outside the boundaries of official authentication, not only transgresses the divisive quality of those synthetic boundaries but also contests the hegemonic project of boundary construction itself.

The expansive (*yang*) process of globalization, coupled with its contractive (*yin*) inverse, localization, have in recent years underscored issues of national, religious and socio-cultural identities. Glocalization, a term depicting local adaptations to global forces, or, in the words of sociologist Robert Robertson (1997), “the simultaneity—the co-presence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies”, accurately reflects the Daoist paradigm of an integral paradox. The political, social and economic implications of the glocalization paradox signify an increase in the speed and frequency of transculturation. With it comes the dissolution of obsolete cultural identities and the configuration of new ones. The rapid proliferation of reconfigured cultural boundaries, bolstered by unprecedented migration, simultaneously produces both intracultural and intercultural contestations of identities. Issues such as “Who is a Jew?”, “The real Islam” or “Defining Chinese culture” produce millions of results in a

Google search and, like never before, suffuse global consciousness. The validation of translated identities like the Kaifeng Jews', outside of the boundaries of official authentication, assists in probing the construct of these cultural boundaries, in contravening them and in better understanding the identities of those situated beyond their demarcations.

Translation and translator

Translation is more than a metaphor for hybridity or mixture. According to Clifford (1986), the ethnographic process itself is a means of "cross-cultural translation". As such, the filter of the translator can have a significant impact on the quality of the translation. In the case of the Kaifeng Jews, an ethnographer who focused solely on financial motivations, or, by contrast, one who contrived to position the group within the boundaries of official authentication, would produce a different account than I have. Furthermore, an ethnography is to the culture under scrutiny, what a map is to the actual territory. There are many different kinds of maps, with various factors of emphases while others are obscured or excluded. Therefore, in keeping with the practice of reflexivity, particularly as the focus of my research is concerning translations between Jewish and Chinese cultures, it is doubly appropriate for me to articulate my perspective of the terrain, or, returning to the linguistic metaphor, my position as translator.

As can be deduced from the anecdote of Neta's remarks at the beginning of this introduction, my account of the transmission of the cultural identity of the Kaifeng Jews takes an advocatory stance. That position arises foremost from an identification with my Jewish heritage and an appreciation of its rich history. Having visited the Alt-Neu Synagogue in Prague, the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, the Ibn Danan Synagogue in Fez, the Spanish Schola in Venice, and many other cross-cultural manifestations of Jewish life, I was duly intrigued at the revelation that a synagogue had existed in Kaifeng for nearly seven centuries. More intriguing still was the discovery that the Jesuits had elaborately sketched its design, and that the late activist Zhao Pingyu had produced a three-dimensional model based on those sketches. As will be explained further on, in 1996 that model came tantalizingly close to becoming a full-scale replication with the launching of the municipal project of the Construction

Office of the Kaifeng Jewish History Museum. Unlike the Jewish Diasporic presence in Prague, Amsterdam, Venice, Fez, and other places, however, most Jews I encounter (along with most academics) remain unaware that as early as a thousand years ago, and probably well before that time, there has also been a Jewish presence in China. Thus, this dissertation advocates in favour of recognition of the community because I believe that Kaifeng Jews, both past and present, merit a place on the map of world cultures generally and in Jewish history particularly.

However, it is not merely the assignment of Kaifeng Jewry to a deserved historical eminence that has motivated my research. Particular Jewish communities throughout the Diaspora have each made a specific theological contribution to the overall culture of Judaism. Whether it is German pietism, Moroccan mysticism, Lithuanian legalism, Polish Hasidism or Venetian eclecticism, each transculturation of Judaism into its host culture has produced and contributed a unique trope in the global discourse of Judaism. Sino-Judaic culture has likewise generated its own distinct notion of Jewish theology, ethics and values. However, because of both ignorance of its very existence and, more importantly, its marginalization as an unauthenticated identity, the content of this unique articulation receives negligible attention. Yet, there is much that is informative, revelatory and very relevant in the interpretation of Judaism propagated by the Kaifeng Jews. As described by Rabbi Anson Laytner in the postscript to Paper's (2012, 144) treatise on Sino-Judaic theology:

In sum, I believe that there is much we can learn from the Jews of Kaifeng that can be of value for our own search for meaning in this post-Holocaust, science-based world. Far from serving as a warning to us about the dangers of integration, intermarriage and assimilation – or, ironically, demonstrating our supposed need of anti-Semitism to ensure our continuity – the Kaifeng Jews show that a successful Jewish culture can flourish in an open society, without hostility, by absorbing the best of the dominant culture and making it one's own.

The lessons of the Kaifeng Jews, regardless of their official status, are therefore such that could intellectually benefit not only the collective Jewish narrative but also the universal repository of knowledge.

Despite positioning myself as both translator and advocate, I would like to emphasize that I have not shirked from camouflaging any of the inadequacies and flaws inherent

in the reproduction of Sino-Judaic cultural identity, particularly in its current manifestation. I have not concealed the communal squabbles, the internecine power struggles, the hierarchies of clan descent, or the blatant quests for material support; but rather, in relating these, I attempt to contextualize them with other characteristics which reveal an authentic wish of the Kaifeng Jews to celebrate their collective history and cultural heritage. In the same way that self-reflection, warts and all, is meant to facilitate ultimate self-acceptance, it is my hope that through my efforts to impart a voice for the Kaifeng Jews by narrating their story, those who read it will gain a greater understanding, appreciation and acceptance of a group of people whose situation outside the margins contrives until this day to obscure that story and to stifle that voice.

PART ONE

The Yicileye: Translation and Transmission Of Sino-Judaic Heritage (1000-1850 CE)

CHAPTER ONE

A historiography of perception, representation and recognition of the Chinese Jews

This chapter explores the historiographic representations of the Yicileye, the ancestors of today's Kaifeng Jews, from the time of their settlement in Kaifeng during the Northern Song Dynasty until the dissolution of tangible Sino-Judaic culture in the mid nineteenth century. These external representations typify Nederveen Pieterse's horizontal axis of social and political relations in a multidimensional approach to identity construction and transmission. The main historiographic depictions of Sino-Judaic culture emanate from three sources: the Yicileye's Han Chinese hosts, their Hui Muslim neighbours and the Christian missionaries who recurrently interacted with them.

The Han Chinese perception of Kaifeng's Yicileye is notable for its deficiency. A tiny minority in Kaifeng's teeming population, never numbering more than a few thousand at its apex in the fifteenth century, the Jews of Kaifeng are scarcely perceptible in China's imperial annals and local gazettes. Furthermore, there is considerable disagreement among scholars as to the various terminologies that might indicate the historic Jewish community; nowhere in the records is the self-referent term "Yicileye" mentioned. There are, however, indications that the Chinese, who were unacquainted with the Abrahamic faiths of Western monotheism, tended to subsume the Yicileye's unique Jewish identity under that of the more conspicuous group of Hui Muslims, whose beliefs, customs and practices would appear very similar from an outsider's perspective. Although some scholars have argued that the Chinese have historically tolerated its small Jewish minority (Xu 2003, 129-131; White 1966, 128), it was not until the late nineteenth century that the image of Jews as a distinct religious ethnicity actually emerges into focus in mainstream Chinese culture (Zhou 2001, 14-15).

Arriving in Kaifeng about the same time as the first Jewish migrants, the Hui Muslims became a more significant minority than the latter.⁷ In contrast to the Jews in Muslim lands in the Middle East and Central Asia who were subject to laws that imparted an inferior *dhimmi* status, in Kaifeng both the Hui and Yicileye held equivalent positions

⁷ The Hui comprise 2.5% of Kaifeng's present-day population and 1% of that of Henan Province.

as monotheistic minorities in a predominantly polytheistic culture; they forged peaceful social relations, despite occasional reports of hostile sentiments. The Hui had a greater knowledge of the Jewish faith than did the Han Chinese, because much of the Qur'anic narrative is derived from that of the Torah and because there is considerable overlap between Islamic *sharia* and Jewish *halakha*. Yet, counterintuitively, rather than facilitating a binding relationship between these two groups, their similarities provoked efforts, particularly on the part of the less numerous Yicileye, to assert their own distinctiveness and, more importantly, their allegiance to Han Imperial culture.

The most extensive historiographic representations of Sino-Judaic culture come from Christian missionaries, who were not indigenous inhabitants of Kaifeng but rather periodically visited to probe its unusual adaptation of Judaism. The various Jesuit monks who visited in the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries displayed a keen interest in the Yicileye's religious traditions, assiduously recording numerous aspects of their tangible culture and dutifully exporting that knowledge to the West. In the nineteenth century, just prior to the demise of the communal synagogue, Protestant missionaries engaged in futile attempts to resuscitate the Yicileye's fading culture and in more fruitful ones to preserve some of its religious artefacts. Yet, Christian interest in the Jews of Kaifeng was tainted by certain preconceptions.

The Jesuits were interested in how an Abrahamic faith had translated its monotheistic beliefs into Chinese linguistic and cultural concepts, since they sought to mimic those translations in their own missionizing efforts toward the local population. Indeed, the Chinese Jews' linguistic translation of terminologies depicting a Supreme Being into the lexis of Chinese polytheism would serve to validate the Jesuits' defence of idiomatic translation of scriptures in the Rites Controversy, which beleaguered the Catholic Church for nearly three centuries. Furthermore, the early Jesuits and their later Protestant successors both believed that the Jews of Kaifeng continued to practice a pre-Talmudic heritage. Furthermore, there was a widespread belief among European Christians that the Jews possessed a corrupted version of Torah which had expunged any prophetic references to the advent of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, several prominent Christians theorised that the Torah scrolls in Kaifeng might divulge an earlier version which would substantiate Christian eschatology. Despite repeated attempts, the Jesuits

could not persuade the Yicileye to grant them a perusal of the group's revered Torah scrolls; endeavours to convince the Chinese Jews of the belief in Christ as the Messiah were similarly unsuccessful. However, following the community's eventual dissolution and synagogue's desolation in 1849, emissaries of the Anglican Church succeeded in procuring fourteen of those scrolls along with other sacred texts.⁸

The translated cultural identity of the Yicileye was ultimately filtered through the divergent perspectives of the Han majority, the Hui minority and the Christian missionaries. The Han Chinese were generally unable to perceive the small Jewish minority in Kaifeng as a distinct social or cultural entity; when on the occasions when they were able to do so, they often portrayed the group as a subset of the Hui. On the contrary, the Hui Muslims understood their Jewish neighbours as fellow monotheists who shared many similarities in their religious beliefs and practices, but these similarities did not prevent certain frictions, as each minority grappled with its own distinctiveness and its claim to national loyalty. The intense Jesuit and Evangelical fascination with Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic culture was largely a means to inform and substantiate Christian theological ends. Nonetheless, that interest resulted in the transmission of Sino-Judaic identity to the West and the preservation of significant aspects of Kaifeng Jewish cultural artefacts.

Lost in translations: the perspective of the Han Chinese

To understand why the Yicileye remained largely indiscernible among China's vast and diverse populace in the early eleventh century, it is important to contextualize the city of Kaifeng with the economic, social and cultural processes of globalization of that time period. Kaifeng, or Bianliang (汴梁) as it was referred to when it was the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, was transiting between the two phases of globalization that Nederveen Pieterse identifies as *Oriental Globalization 1* and 2. The first phase is said to have commenced around 500 CE with the emergence of a global caravan trade

⁸ *The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*, founded in 1809, was at the forefront of these efforts to procure the Kaifeng Torah scrolls and to promote Christian belief among the Yicileye. This evangelical interest was grounded in the doctrine that conversion of the Jews and their return to the Land of Israel were prerequisites for the Second Coming. Part Two will explore how these same eschatological views influenced Christian Zionists in their engagement with the revival of Kaifeng Jewish identity in the twenty-first century.

across the Middle East, primarily eastward toward Asia; the second, beginning around 1100 CE is marked by a westward shift, “from Asia towards the Middle East, resuming the early Silk Routes and with additional maritime spice routes” and is characterised by productivity, urbanization and technology (Nederveen Pieterse 2012, 18).

With over one million inhabitants, Kaifeng is reputed to have been the world’s largest metropolis when Jewish traders first arrived there at the close of the tenth century (Chandler 1987). According to Fairbank and Goldman (2006, 89), its geographic location spurred its economic and demographic growth:

Such an urban concentration could be fed because Kaifeng was near the junction of the early Grand Canal and the Yellow River, at the head of barge transport from Lower Yangzi grain basket. China’s domestic and interregional trade was facilitated by cheap transportation on the Grand Canal, the Yangzi, its tributaries and lakes, and other river and canal systems. These waterways stretched for something like 30,000 miles and created the world’s most populous trading area. Foreign trade would be at all times an offshoot of this great commerce within China.

Coupled with the geographic advantages rendering it a major centre for foreign and domestic trade, Kaifeng’s status as the dynastic capital and the ensuing demand for logistic supplies—particularly those needed for the Chinese Imperial Army—helped to make it a site of industrial innovation. Due to the depletion of forest cover during this period, Song ironworkers switched to burning coal in their smelts and consequently innovated the production of decarbonized steel. In 1078 North China had an annual production rate of 114,000 tons of pig-iron (Fairbanks and Goldman 1987, 89); seven centuries later England would achieve only half of that annual production rate.

Apart from Jews, Hui Muslims, Nestorians and other Asian residents who migrated to the thriving mercantile hub of Kaifeng, the wide array of ethnic groups comprising the China’s native populace flourished together with these foreigner immigrants. The Jewish traders who settled in Kaifeng established intercultural relationships—social, economic and personal—with these various ethnic groups (Xu 2003, 134-135).

Moreover, as Sharot argues, Kaifeng not only accommodated multiple ethnicities but also a plethora of sects (*jiao* 教) syncretising elements of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and popular Chinese religion in various combinations (2007, 182). As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, the permeable cultural boundaries distinctive of

China's pluralistic and syncretic culture allowed the small Jewish minority to preserve distinctive practices, although, paradoxically, this very same feature ultimately led to its gradual acculturation (Sharot 2007, 183).

In contrast to the Jewry of Europe and the Levant, the Jewish Diaspora in China did not face discrimination and persecution (Leslie 1972; Shapiro 1984; Xu 2003; Sharot 2007). Over the centuries, Jews in the West were variously excluded from guilds, prohibited from mingling socially with gentiles, forced to reside in separate ghettos, and lived in fear of the next blood libel, pogrom or inquisition. In China, the Jewish migrants were to experience a millennium of tolerance, integration and relative stability. In his comparison of the acculturation of Kaifeng Jews with that of Hui Muslims and Nestorian Christians, Sharot proposes that this historical tolerance in China was the result of "the relatively permeable religious boundaries and high level of religious pluralism":

[T]he vast majority of the Chinese population, past and present and from all strata, cannot be identified with, or internally distinguished by, specific religious traditions. The majority of Chinese participated in religions that have been portrayed as syncretistic amalgams of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism as well as additional elements that cannot be linked to the three major traditions (Sharot 2007, 183).

As both Sharot and Xu (2003, 38-39) concur, there were limits to this traditional tolerance of the Chinese. All ethnicities residing in China were required to recognize both the Emperor's divine status and the ancestral cult, the latter pivotal to the hierarchical order prescribed by Confucianism. Kupfer (2008, 9-11) questions the ascription of "tolerance" to the attitude prevalent in China and wonders whether the Chinese were simply ignorant of both Jewish existence and identity. First, the existence of a group of Kaifeng settlers numbering only a few hundred was unlikely to attract attention in a teeming city of a million people, let alone among China's vast population. Moreover, the most common Chinese appellation used to refer to the Sino-Judaic group was "Blue Hat Muslims" (*lanmao hui-hui*, 蓝帽回回), due to the distinction of the blue turbans worn by the Jews as opposed to the white of the Muslim Hui. Furthermore, the commonalities between Judaism and Islam—belief in one God, circumcision, daily prayer and abstention from pork (a mainstay of Chinese cuisine)—would tend to overshadow differences between them from the Han perspective.

Whether due to their insignificant numbers or the obfuscation of their actual identity, the Chinese gazettes and imperial annals are overwhelmingly silent on the presence of Jewish residents in China. The Arab traveller and historian Abu Zaid makes reference to Jews who were among 120,000 people killed by the rebel Huang Chao in the 877 CE Guangdong massacre, and Marco Polo describes the presence of Jews in Khanbalik (Beijing) in Kublai Khan's palace in 1286 CE. Chinese scholars, however, unanimously claim that these Jews were probably temporary merchant colonies from Central Asia rather than permanent residents of China (Shapiro 1984, 60-61).⁹ In his 1897 *A Survey of the Various Religious Sects during the Yuan Dynasty*, Hong Jun asserts that the Chinese *wotuo* (斡脫) frequently appearing in the Administrative Codes of the Yuan Dynasty referred to "Jewish religionists" (Shapiro 1984, 5). However, more recent research by both Western and Chinese scholars seems to indicate that the term was in fact an epithet for an Islamic merchant guild (Leslie 1972, 201-201; Löwenthal 1971, 80).

The earliest of just a few, definitive reference to Jews, and the only historical evidence of discrimination, occurs under Mongol rule in a Yuan Dynasty regulation issued on January 27, 1280:¹⁰

Henceforth, Muslims and Jews, no matter who kills the meat, will eat it, and cease killing sheep by their own hands, and will cease the rite of Sunnah, such as the *namaz* (prayers) five worships per day (Xu 2003, 31).¹¹

Löwenthal (1971, 70-71) points out that in this initial edict the term Jew is translated into Chinese as *shuhu huihui* (朮忽回回), where the usage of the duplicated suffix, at that time a generic term for foreigners from Central Asia that developed into the more recent and exclusive reference to Muslims, alludes to the conflation of these two groups (Xu 2003, 144). Leslie (1972, 20) explains that the *shuhu* is a phonetic

⁹ Although Western researchers postulate dates of early Jewish settlement in other parts of China as far back as the Zhou dynasty, most Chinese academics maintain that the earliest evidence of Jewish settlement is from the community in Kaifeng (Shapiro 1984; Xu 2003).

¹⁰ During the Mongolian rule of the Yuan, Jews and Muslims enjoyed a higher status than did the defeated Han. The ethnic hierarchy consisted of: 1) Mongols 2) Central Asians (including the Muslims and Jews) 3) Han Chinese and some minorities of Northern China, including Koreans 4) Southern Chinese minorities (Morgan 1982, 124-126).

¹¹ The Mongol leaders no doubt were offended that the dietary laws of these two groups proscribed the eating of animals not ritually slaughtered and, therefore, considered the Mongol meat as un-kosher or *haram*. Xu (2003, 32) suggests that though these prohibitions may have had some impact, because of the limited number of Mongols in China it is uncertain as to what extent laws against ritual slaughter, prayer or levirate marriage could be enforced.

transliteration of *djuhud*, the term in colloquial Persian for Jews.¹² With the ascendancy of the Ming Dynasty in 1368, all reference in Chinese texts to Jews as a specific ethnic or religious group in China ceases until the early twentieth century, although the individual achievements of specific Kaifeng Jews are chronicled in some gazettes and official histories of the Ming (Löwenthal 1971, 206).

As discussed, the Han Chinese who interacted with the Kaifeng Jews never knew them as “*youtai*”, or “Jews”, as the community referred to itself as “Yicileye”. The term *youtai* was only introduced to China in the early nineteenth century by a German missionary (Zhang 2008, 148).¹³ Even so, it was not until the 1990s and the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the State of Israel that the term entered into the lexicon of the popular Chinese imagination. In recent years, researchers have begun to explore Chinese cultural perceptions of Jews as a powerful, influential and affluent minority (Zhou 2001; Song and Ross 2015). A 2010 article in *Newsweek* by Isaac Stone Fish (“In China, Pushing the Talmud as a Business Guide”) describes the contemporary fascination of the Chinese with the Jews:

Jewish visitors to China often receive a snap greeting when they reveal their religion: “Very smart, very clever, and very good at business,” the Chinese person says. Last year’s Google Zeitgeist China rankings listed “why are Jews excellent?” in fourth place in the “why” questions category, just behind “why should I enter the party” and above “why should I get married?” (Google didn’t publish a “why” category in Mandarin this year.) And the apparent affection for Jewishness has led to a surprising trend in publishing over the last few years: books purporting to reveal the business secrets of the Talmud that capitalize on the widespread impression among Chinese that attributes of Judaism lead to success in the financial arts.

However, this philosemitic view, which often seems to take stereotypical tropes from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and imbues them with a respectable veneer, applies

¹² Although further Yuan decrees dating from 1329 and 1354 relating to taxation drop the *huihui* suffix, a final reference to *shuhu huihui* (主鹵回回) in a gazette article by Yang Yu (杨瑀) on the officers of the Hangzhou Sugar Bureau reinsert it, while changing the initial characters for *shuhu*. Löwenthal is uncertain whether the *huihui* suffix suggests a tautology referring exclusively to Jews or rather a term suggesting both Jewish and Muslim ethnicities. Chinese grammar could support either definition.

¹³ Zhang Ping (2008, 112-113) points out the appearance of the “dog” radical (犭), frequently etymologically employed to depict “barbarian” foreigners, in the character for *youtai* 犹太. Some denizens of the Chinese internet, disturbed by the perception of racism with the inclusion of this radical, have in protest commenced the practice of writing the character for *youtai* minus the “dog” component.

only to Western Jewry. The Kaifeng Jews, who are not officially recognized as such and whose physiognomy resembles that of most Han Chinese, are, in this respect, not similarly included under the *youtai* moniker, although they retain that appellation to refer to themselves.

Neighbours and rivals: the ambiguous link with the Hui

Historically, Jewish migrants to Kaifeng and other areas of China have inevitably settled in regions with a large concentration of Hui Muslims. The relationship between the Sino-Judaic and Hui Muslim communities, the two Abrahamic faiths in China generally living in close proximity, has been fraught with ambiguity. On the one hand, as Leslie suggests, a natural cultural affinity exists between the two: the original Kaifeng Jewish settlers hailed from a Muslim country in Central Asia, probably Persia, spoke a Persian dialect and shared similar terms of religious reference, such as *qingzhensi*(清真寺), literally, “temple of purity and truth”, as a term for both mosques and synagogues (Leslie 1972, 111).¹⁴ In religious values and practices, both groups refrained from pork, practiced circumcision and shared the monotheistic belief in an unseen Creator; these similarities led the Han Chinese to blur the distinctions between the two.

Paradoxically, these commonalities led the subordinate group to seek “to keep its identity distinct, so as not to be swallowed up by the much larger” (Xu 2003, 142). Accordingly, in the 1512 inscriptions the name of the synagogue has changed from *qingzhensi*, Temple of Purity and Truth, to *zunchong daojing*si(尊崇道经寺), Temple Respecting the Scriptures of the Way, in order to distinguish it from the Hui structures (Xu 2003, 142). They also preferred to be known as the “sect that plucks out the sinews” (*tiao-jinjiao*, 挑筋教), since the removal of the sciatic nerve was a distinctive

¹⁴ Leslie (1972, 111 -112) finds no evidence indicating which group originally used the term. Xu (2003, 141- 142) brings a document from Professor Zhao Xiangru, himself a Kaifeng Jew, suggesting the term was used as early as 1163 in the initial establishment of the synagogue. He claims that in records from the Hongzhi Period (1488-1521) of the Ming Dynasty there were several other Chinese compounds used to depict a mosque, such as *qingjing* 清静 (pure and quiet), *qingxue* 清学 (pure study) and *zhenjiao* 真教 (true teaching). Zhao quotes Ma Shouqian, a scholar of the Muslim Hui, who proposes that the terms *qingzhensi* 清真寺 for mosque and *qingzhenjiao* 清真教 for the Islamic religion came into usage much later.

custom of Jewish dietary law based on a scriptural commandment.¹⁵ Aware of the dangers of cultural absorption, the Yicileye *seem* to have refrained from intermarriage with the more numerous Hui, despite conflicting reports in that regard.¹⁶ Scholars like White (1966), Leslie (1972), Pollak (1998) and Xu (2003) all agree that there was indeed intermarriage with both Han and Hui ethnic groups, most probably well before the earliest documentation of in the communal Memorial Book during the Ming Dynasty.¹⁷

Though Kaifeng's Hui Muslims do not seem to have openly expressed anti-Jewish sentiments, there were nonetheless some isolated incidents of hostilities. Pollak (1972, 165) describes the 1866 encounter with a Kaifeng mufti by the Protestant missionary, Reverend W.A.P. Martin, who became the first Caucasian to reach Kaifeng since Père Jean-Paul Gozani at the end of the seventeenth century:

The mufti, it turned out, knew about the Jews but had nothing good to say about them; to him the Jews were unbelievers. As for their synagogue, he announced with relish and to Martin's dismay that it was no longer in existence. The mufti said it had been totally razed and that the people who worshipped there were now impoverished and totally dispersed.

Martin and subsequent visitors to Kaifeng, most notably Liebermann, also claim that certain items from the former Jewish synagogue were appropriated, either through

¹⁵ Genesis 32: 25-33 describes the confrontation of the patriarch Jacob with an angelic being who wrestled with the former all night long until dawn, injuring him in the sciatic nerve before finally accepting defeat, then blessing him and changing his name from Jacob to Israel (*Yisrael*, ישראל, means "one who wrestles with God"). In the same passage his descendants are forbidden to eat this *gid ha-nasheh*, גיד הנשה, i.e. the sciatic nerve and surrounding tendons and fats.

¹⁶ The monk Gozani reported in 1704 that "these [Jewish] families marry one among another, and never with the hui-hui, or Mohammedans, with whom they have nothing in common [sic], either with regard to books or religious ceremonies. They even turn up their whiskers in a different manner (Xu 2003, 142- 143)." Leslie, however, infers the contrary from a report dated 1606 from Ricci who puts forth that such intermarriage was not infrequent. Moreover, the synagogue's 17th century Memorial Book registered a sizable number of mixed marriages, although Leslie admits that there are few recognizably Hui names in that register. He also mentions the statement made by a Muslim sergeant Tie Tingan in Kaifeng in 1849 that "six [Jewish] families have intermarried with the Chinese. Two families marry with Chinese Mohammedans only. The Jews give their daughters to the Mohammedans; the Mohammedans do not give their daughters to the Jews" (Leslie 1972, 113). This assertion, however, is countered in the 1851 report of the Anglican Bishop George Smith, who had taken up his episcopacy in Hong Kong in 1849. According to Smith, the Kaifeng Jewish descendants "...are not allowed to intermarry with heathens and Mohammedans, neither are they allowed to marry two wives; they are forbidden to eat pork, as also to mix with the Mohammedans..." (Leslie 1972, 57)

¹⁷ Pollak suggests that, arriving in Kaifeng as traders, presumably in a caravan of mostly males, intermarriage may have been common from the start of their sojourn in Kaifeng (Pollak 1998, 316).

purchase or theft, by the Kaifeng Muslims.¹⁸ Pollak (1998, 324) seems to accept at face value the 1907 account of Oliver Bainbridge, a National Geographic reporter, who was investigating the disappearance of items from the demolished synagogue, when he was attacked by a mob of angry Kaifeng Muslims during a visit to a mosque to locate these relics:

After much difficulty and tipping I persuaded my visitors to be photographed, and then accompanied by Mr. Shields, My Hu (my interpreter), and two soldiers, I visited mosque after mosque, which excited and annoyed the Mohammedans, who mistook me for a Jewish rabbi in disguise. The fourth proved to be the one I wanted, for in a small room I saw the ark on a table, and made toward it, when the crowd objected and pushed me out, emphasizing their disapproval in no uncertain manner. The soldiers were helpless, but I had a strong suspicion that they were at heart with the mob. The climax came when I clambered on the roof of the mosque and began to examine the tiles, for thousands of Chinese surrounded the mosque, yelling out, 'Kick the devil's stomach!' 'Batter his devil's brain on the stones!' 'Kill the Jew!' 'Choke the sinew-puller!' 'Tear the foreign devil's entrails out!' and other diabolical things too numerous and too disgusting to mention. The majority were armed with bricks, clubs, or knives and were mad with rage. Every second I thought would be my last, for the fury of the Chinese mob beggars all description. A happy thought flashed through my mind and, quick as lightning, I pulled out my folding camera and turned it toward them, thinking to photograph the murderous beasts before they butchered me. The shock was tremendous; they dropped their bricks, knives, and clubs, and crushed and jammed one another in their rush from the "devil's glass." My friend, interpreter, and soldiers very discreetly banged and fastened the doors after them, and the interpreter explained to the Mohammedan priests that I was not a Jew, but a British traveller, and only wanted to see these things. They said if I would promise that in the event of the Jewish synagogue being rebuilt their mosque would not be interfered with, the people would be pacified and permit me to see the ark and examine the tiles. They are much afraid their mosque will be destroyed if the synagogue is rebuilt, in order to get tiles which they have stolen. I promised everything they asked.

Pollak (1998, 322) furthermore suggests that the increasing anti-foreign sentiment invoked following the Chinese expulsion of missionaries in 1724 led to hostility by the Hui against Kaifeng's Jews, as a means of asserting their own patriotic opposition to anything foreign. In the aftermath of the Muslim rebellions in the southwest and northwest China between 1855 and 1878, the Kaifeng Jewish descendants feared that due to their misidentification as Muslims, they might be targeted in government

¹⁸ Guo Yan, a contemporary Sino-Judaic activist, claims to have located some of these items in one of the local mosques.

reprisals. During the subsequent Boxer Rebellion (1900), when violence against Christians and foreigners was not uncommon, “they carefully and neatly chiselled their names off of the memorial stelae that had stood in the synagogue compound for hundreds of years” (Xu 2003, 53-54). Indeed, that symbolic eradication of their Sino-Judaic identity, coupled with the previous flooding, razing of the synagogue, violent rebellions and continuing economic deterioration, marked the eclipse of Sino-Judaic cultural identity that would be revitalised only towards the end of the twentieth century.

The missionary encounters

Due to their monastic training and to the Jewish presence in their European countries of origin, the Christian missionaries — unlike the indigenous Han or Hui — were suitably equipped to apprehend the unique brand of identity manifested by Kaifeng’s Sino-Judaic *kehillah* (congregation). From the initial meeting of the Jesuit Mateo Ricci in 1605 with the Kaifeng Jew Ai Tian (艾田) until the end of William Charles White’s 25-year Anglican episcopacy in 1935, most of the primary source historical information comes from either the early Jesuit or later Protestant missionaries. They not only introduced the “discovery” of this ancient and remote outpost of the Judaic Diaspora to the West but also chronicled information concerning its customs, holiday celebrations, synagogue architecture, Hebrew library and other aspects of Sino-Judaic life. Their reports also inform us that in the beginning of the eighteenth century, 600 years after the establishment of the Kaifeng synagogue, despite erosion in Hebrew language skills, religious observance was still surprisingly intact (Leslie 1972, 225; Xu 2003, 146-148).¹⁹

In his seminal work *Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries*, Pollak carefully scrutinizes the motives and context of the Christian interest in this small, isolated enclave. In actuality,

¹⁹ Yet, as Laytner (2008, 207) points out, referring to the introduction of White’s magnum opus *Chinese Jews*, no serious attempt was made to analyse “the permeation and influence of Chinese non-Jewish ideas upon their beliefs, as may be revealed in these inscriptions [of the synagogue stelae].” White claimed in that such a study “would require considerable time, and would bring this monograph to undue dimensions.” Laytner convincingly argues of a cultural bias against more “exotic” Jewish denominations such as Chinese Jews and proposes “a complete examination of the religious ideas of the Kaifeng Jews, treating them with the respect they inherently deserve” (Laytner 2008, 207).

the missionaries' motivation and consequent interest in Kaifeng Jews is far more invidious than is apparent, coinciding as they did with intensifying Church persecution of European Jews. That oppression was accompanied by increased ecclesiastical opposition to Judaism's Oral Law embodied in the text of the Talmud (Pollak 1998, 25-28). For centuries the conundrum as to why the Five Books of Moses comprising the Torah made no apparent reference to the coming of Christ had vexed the Vatican. Various Christian leaders invented a conspiracy by the Talmudic rabbis to alter the original scriptural text.²⁰ Pope Paul IV (reigned 1555- 1559) oversaw the establishment of Europe's first ghetto and the destruction of tens of thousands of their religious books. He did not, however, order the burning of the Torah, which, after all, was referred to as the Old Testament and constituted the foundation of later Christian theology.²¹

In 1642, Alvarez Semmedo, a Jesuit monk who had been stationed in Nanjing and was familiar with Ricci's encounter with the Kaifeng Jews, suggested that the Torah scrolls in Kaifeng might be exemplars of an uncorrupted version of more ancient origin than those in found Europe; he postulated that these more pristine versions might possibly contain confirmation of the advent of the Christian saviour.²² In light of Semmedo's

²⁰ Islamic hadith likewise asserts that both the Torah and the New Testament, which mention nothing about the ultimate prophet Mohammed, are later forgeries engineered respectively by the Talmudic rabbis and the Church leaders (Pollak 1998, 26).

²¹ Fifty years prior to the meeting of Ricci and Ai Tian, Gian Petro Carrafa, head of the Roman Inquisition, was elected as Pope Paul IV. In his capacity as chief inquisitor, Carrafa had ordered the burning of the Talmud and other rabbinic literature along with scores of *conversos*, i.e. forced Jewish converts to Christianity who were suspected of relapsing to their former faith (Carroll 2001, 373). In 1555 the newly-elected Paul IV issued the papal bull *Cum Nimis Absurdum* which denied Jews ownership of real estate, forbade their attendance at universities, banned the Talmud, and required them to wear distinctive clothing (yellow conical hats) and badges. This decree resulted in the Jews being forcefully confined into the world's first ghetto. Another result was that the Talmud, along with any other rabbinic works apart from the Bible, was listed in the Vatican Index of Forbidden Books (Carroll 2001, 375). According to Carroll (2001, 377- 378), by making the Jews suffer, the pope expected that they would view their tribulations as fulfilment of prophecy condemning them to subjugation due to their rebellious rejection of Christ's divinity and thus, of their own accord, select conversion to the sublime Christian faith. The papal stance protecting the Old Testament notwithstanding, the Duke of Alva, more than a decade after Pope Paul IV's death, exceeded the latter's hatred in ordering the burning of any and all Hebrew books, the Torah included (Pollak 1998, 28).

²² Semmedo explained that the Kaifeng Jews "...have no knowledge at all of Christ, so that it seemeth they entered into China before he came into the World..." Consequently, it would be imperative "to see their Bible, for perhaps they have not corrupted it, as our Jews [in Europe] have done, to obscure the glories of the Redeemer" (Pollak 1998, 28- 30). One of the

remarks, on January 1, 1700 the renowned philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz asked Père Antoine Verjus to request that the Jesuit mission in China solicit a copy of the “Old Testament of the Chinese Jews”. He hoped that it might

[b]e possible to come upon certain hitherto unknown details of the Chinese texts, since it would seem that for such a long time the Chinese Jews have had absolutely no contact with the Jews of Europe... the Chinese Jews may still hold some of those books or passages which the European Jews have perhaps altered or suppressed out of hatred for Christianity.

Leibniz apparently felt this issue was significant enough to raise it again in two ensuing letters dated 1705 and 1707. In that same year le Gobien reiterated and reinforced Leibniz’s pleas in his introduction to the publication of *Lettres édifiantes*. Le Gobien was an ardent opponent of the Talmud and was convinced that the revelation of a more pristine Torah in Kaifeng would break its throttlehold on the Jewish psyche (Pollak 1998, 31-32). He wrote:

[I]t is hard to believe that the customs of the Chinese Jews can be identical with those we encounter with revulsion in that monstrous jumble of frivolous, impure, superstitious, and sometimes impious statements with which the Talmud is filled. It is of course quite likely that the Chinese Jews are just as fatuously minded as the Jews of Europe, but it is simply not possible that two sets of dreamers who have absolutely no means of communicating with one another could each come up with precisely the same hallucinations (ibid, 32-33).²³

Although the Christian missionaries from Europe were better equipped to comprehend the distinctive Jewishness of the Yicileye than the Han Chinese, they were predisposed with an historical bias. In transmitting knowledge of this unique form of Jewish culture to the West, these emissaries attempted to utilise that culture to confirm Christian doctrine and undermine the influence of the Talmud on its Jewish inhabitants.

misconceptions of the Jesuits, one further exaggerated by their Western readership, was that Jewish settlement in China was of a far more ancient origin. Based on a mistranslation of Isaiah, it was presumed that they hailed from one of the 10 Lost Tribes of Israel, exiled by the Assyrians around 730 BCE. The 19th century prelate and historian Alexei Vinogradov assumed an even earlier date of 1000 BCE during the reign of King David and the Zhou Dynasty (Shapiro 1984, 28).

²³ Leslie (1972, 153-154), Pollak (1998, 298) and Xu (2003, 86) concur from the lists retrieved from the synagogue library mentioning the names of several Mishnaic tractates that the Kaifeng Jews may have known of the existence of the Talmud, though there is no evidence that they possessed copies of it.

A case of mistaken identities

The 1605 meeting between Ai Tian and Ricci is a parody of mistaken identities that in many respects characterized subsequent encounters in which each party's view of the other was clouded with certain misconceptions. Hearing that a group of Europeans had arrived in Beijing to promulgate the belief in one God and unaware of the existence of Christianity, Ai Tian assumed that these new arrivals were Jewish compatriots. On a visit to the capital to inquire about a teaching position in Yangzhou, he arranged an appointment to meet with Ricci. The latter, assuming this Chinese monotheist must be one of the lost Nestorian Christians, warmly welcomed his guest, who, judging from the priest's majestic garments was now convinced he was in the presence of a distinguished rabbi. Initially surprised that his host bowed and genuflected before a painting of Jesus, Mary and John the Baptist, Ai Tian nonetheless followed suit mistakenly supposing that this was the European manner of showing obeisance to the Jewish ancestors Rebecca and her sons Jacob and Esau. When the situation was ultimately clarified, Ricci became the first Westerner to ascertain the existence of Jews in China (Xu 2003, 1-3; Pollak 1998, 3-5; Leslie 32-34).²⁴

In his journals Ricci described his encounter with Ai Tian and confirmed the existence of Jews in China. After his death in 1610, the Vatican assigned Père Nicholas Trigault the task of collating Ricci's journals. Trigault published these in *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* (On the Christian Mission among the Chinese by the Society of Jesus) in 1615. By the middle of the seventeenth century news of the Chinese Jews caught the attention of the Rabbi Manasseh Ben Israel of Amsterdam. The rabbi was a charismatic figure, the mentor of Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza and, among other works, author of a 1652 treatise called *Hope of Israel*. Based on both a prophecy of Isaiah (11:12) and spurious rumours of the discovery of a Lost Tribe of Israel in the remote Amazon jungles, his book promoted an eschatological vision of the imminent return of the ten lost tribes from "the four corners of the earth"

²⁴ Ricci sent back messengers together with Ai to meet with the Kaifeng rabbi. They brought with them copies of the New Testament, informing the rabbi that the Messiah had arrived some 1600 years prior. The rabbi did not believe this was possible, as it was known the Messiah was not expected for another 10,000 years. He did, however, send a message back to Ricci offering him, despite his odd messianic contentions, the rabbinical seat in Kaifeng on the condition that he give up the despicable habit of eating pork (Xu 2003, 2-3).

to the Land of Israel.²⁵ That vision resonated with the emergent Millenarian sects of that time and, significantly, with the Lord of the Exchequer, Oliver Cromwell. In 1655 Rabbi Manasseh Ben-Israel moved to London, where he attempted to convince Cromwell and his council to allow Jews to return to the British Isles, from whence they had been barred since 1290 CE. Using the verse from Isaiah as his premise, he argued that the Jesuits' discovery of Jews in the remote corner of China necessitated the presence of Jews in the corner of Britain for the prophecy to be realised. Although the rabbi succeeded in convincing Cromwell, his proposition generated intense opposition with an anti-Jewish campaign intimating a Jewish conspiracy to acquire both the Bodleian Library at Oxford and St. Paul's Cathedral, the latter to be converted into a synagogue (Pollak 1998, 53-54). Despite the antagonism, Cromwell nonetheless allowed for a limited number of Jewish families to repatriate.²⁶

In the century that followed, several Jesuits visited Kaifeng not only to document its peculiar form of Judaism but to convince its practitioners to accept Christ as the Messiah of the "New Israel". Simultaneously, prompted by the anti-Talmudic trends in the Vatican, they sought to clarify whether the Torah scrolls in Kaifeng rendered more authentic versions substantiating the foundations of later Christian theology. The most notable contributions came from Père Jean-Paul Gozani, who arrived in Kaifeng in 1698 and lived there intermittently for over 20 years; Père Jean Domenge, who in 1721 lived in Kaifeng for eight months; and Père Antoine Gaubil, who made two brief visits, the first, after arriving in China in 1722 and again in March 1723. Gozani is credited with sending rubbings of the synagogal stelae, which are extant in the Jesuit Archives in Rome today. His letters, first published in 1707 in *Lettres édifiantes* by Père Charles B and subsequently in 1771 in *Mémoire* by Abbé Gabriel Brotier, contained a wealth of information on Kaifeng Jewish history, religion and culture (Leslie 1972, 177-178).²⁷ He observed that the Kaifeng Jews still practiced circumcision, abstained from pork,

²⁵ The full verse reads: "And He will set up an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12).

²⁶ As will be discussed in Chapter Five, more than three centuries later both Christian and Jewish groups would cite this same scriptural verse to justify promoting and assisting the immigration of Kaifeng Jews to Israel.

²⁷ Western historians of China such as Prévost, de Mailla and Grosier based their accounts of the Chinese Jews almost entirely on Gozani's letters.

observed the Sabbath by refraining from lighting fires, avoided intermarriage and celebrated the annual scriptural festivals. He further reported that they believed their ancestors had arrived in China during the Han dynasty, a thousand years before they settled in Kaifeng, and of their origins from *Xiyu*(西域), the Western Regions.²⁸ Gozani affirmed the Kaifeng Jews were labelled by the Han as the “*tiaojin jiao*”, or “sect that plucks out the sinews”, an epithet of cultural distinction they approved of. He also documented their practice of certain Confucian rituals (Pollak 1998, 94-95).

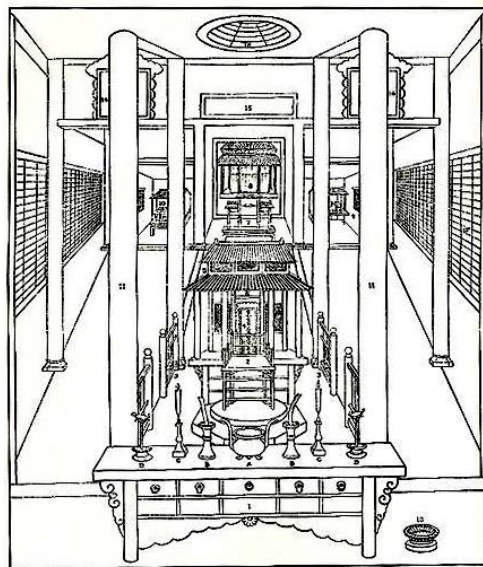
I asked them if they honoured Confucius. All, including their *zhangjiao* [religious leader or chief rabbi], answered me without hesitation that they did indeed, and that they also, in the same manner of the greatest pagan scholars, took part in the solemn offerings which are made to Confucius. Similarly, for the worship of the ancestors, they answered me in the affirmative; and that, in spring and autumn, they make the solemn offerings—without pork, but with oxen and sheep—in the ancestral hall which they have near the synagogue. (Pollak 1998, 96)

Unlike Gozani, Domenge was fluent in Hebrew and was able to add extensively to the knowledge of the communal library and to comment on the sinicization of certain Hebrew vowels and consonants still utilised in the synagogue liturgy. Significantly, he copied a colophon from a Pentateuch, later identified by scholars as Judeo-Persian and considered by Xu (2003), Leslie (1972), Pan (1983) and others as evidence for Persian origins. Elaborating further on the traditional liturgy and festival celebrations, Domenge also employed his artistic skills to render sketches of the synagogue’s interior and exterior design.

Gaubil’s visit in 1723 lasted only a day and a half, yet, due to his knowledge of Hebrew and the utilization of Gozani as interpreter, he relayed considerable information in letters to his superior, Abbé Etienne Souciet. On the one hand, he was highly critical of the *kehillah*’s adulterated pronunciation of Hebrew, their conception—or lack of it—of the Messiah, and their complete ignorance of Jesus.²⁹ On the other hand, he affirmed

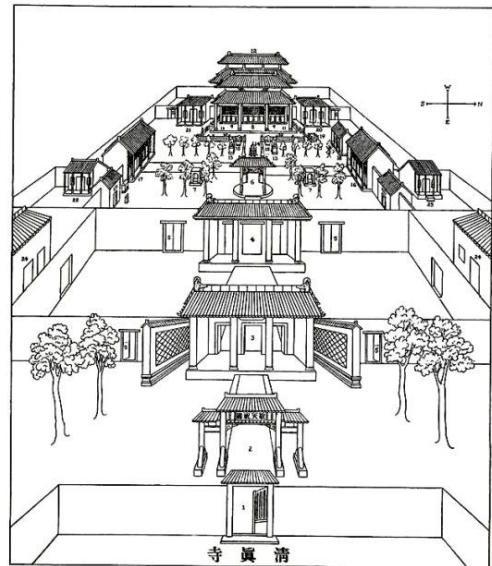
²⁸ The Western Regions may refer to Persia, India or other areas of Central Asia.

²⁹ On the subject of the communal recitation of the *Shma*, the main Hebrew prayer expressing the unity of God, Gaubil wrote: “If I had not had the Hebrew text in front of my eyes, I would never have recognized that it was Hebrew they were reading.” He described their messianic teleology as “terribly confused” and their rabbis as “complete ignoramuses” (Pollak 1998, 106-109).



2. Interior view of the K'ai-féng synagogue

Copied by Père J. Brucker, S.J., from drawings prepared by Père Jean Domenge, S.J., who visited the K'ai-féng synagogue in 1722. Reproduced from *Inscriptions Juives* of Père Jérôme Tobar, S.J., with emendations (cp. Chap. IV, p. 53).



1. Exterior view of the K'ai-féng synagogue

Copied by Père J. Brucker, S.J., from drawings prepared by Père Jean Domenge, S.J., who visited the K'ai-féng synagogue in 1722. Reproduced from *Inscriptions Juives* of Père Jérôme Tobar, S.J. (cp. Chap. IV, p. 53).

FIGURE 3. Interior and exterior design of the synagogue, as sketched by Domenge in 1721.
(The Sino-Judaic Institute n.d.)

that the Kaifeng Jews still circumcised their sons, observed the Sabbath and festivals.

The rabbi (*zhangjiao*) had plied him with numerous queries on the complexities of Hebrew grammar.³⁰ More significantly, his hosts agreed to show Gaubil their thirteen Torah scrolls, one of which, the *Xiyu* Torah, was purported to be a gift from centuries before, when the group still had contact with their co-religionists from Central Asia; furthermore, while rejecting Gaubil's offer to purchase a Torah scroll, they consented to a commission to transcribe its contents.³¹ Considering the European controversy over the Talmud and the belief in a conspiracy to conceal a more authentic version of the Torah, Gaubil's agreement to have a duplication of the oldest Kaifeng scroll transcribed was considered to be of great significance to the Church. Unfortunately, the undertaking, which would have taken up to a year to complete, was interrupted by the untimely decree of Kangxi in 1725, that deported most missionaries from China and

³⁰ Gozani had confirmed in a letter from August 25, 1712 that the Kaifeng Jews "start learning Hebrew from childhood, and many of them know how to write it; I have seen them reading and writing with my own eyes." That the Kaifeng Jews were able to maintain their Hebrew language, in spite of a pidgin pronunciation, after 600 years is an accomplishment that seems to have escaped Gaubil's consideration.

³¹ A similar request in 1613 by the Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni had been curtly rejected. Pollak questions whether Aleni's negative experience could be attributed to insufficient linguistic skills in Chinese (Pollak 1998, 16).

severely restricted travel on those who remained. Christendom would have to wait for more than a century before they could acquire the desired scrolls from Kaifeng. Ironically, Kangxi's decree of expulsion was the end result of an ongoing controversy involving the Yicileye and the way in which they had translated Judaic monotheism into the Chinese vernacular. Ricci and his successors realised that in order to convert the Chinese to Christianity, it would be necessary to incorporate various aspects of Chinese culture and terminology into the Catholic ritual. When they realized that the Jews had adapted certain Confucian rites and terms into their rituals in the Kaifeng synagogue, the Jesuits pointed to these as a model for their own proselytizing in China.³² This liberal view first espoused by Ricci in his Sinification Policy was vehemently opposed by the Dominicans and Franciscans, who feared that it would open the door to heterodoxy and schism. The ensuing controversy, known as the Rites Controversy and Terms Question, often resembled more of a bitter political power struggle than a theological discussion. The controversy gripped the Vatican for over three hundred years but was most heated at the beginning of the eighteenth century when the Jesuit Society in Rome urged its Beijing mission to make contact with the Jews of Kaifeng to establish their views on the reconciliation of their Confucian adaptations with monotheistic faith.³³ Before the request could be implemented, however, the Vatican issued its Congregation of Rites, unequivocally condemning Confucian ritual and terminology. Kangxi, angered at the foreigner's impudence, countered with a declaration that missionaries must either conform to Ricci's Sinification Policy or leave the country.

Nevertheless, it was neither the position of the Kaifeng Jews regarding the Rites Controversy nor the acquisition of their Torah scrolls that constituted the primary concern of the Jesuits. As stated in Ricci's initial letter, that interest was to make the

³² Specifically, the debate revolved on the permissibility of ancestor-worship and the usage of non-anthropomorphic terms to depict the Divine.

³³ In 1701 the Jesuits in Beijing had petitioned the Emperor himself to provide his views on the matter; his response, published in Rome that same year, supported the position of the Jesuits that Confucianism was a secular rather than a religious philosophy (Pollak 1998, 83). It was not until December 8, 1939 that the Vatican officially rescinded the papal bull of Benedict XIV (reigned 1740-1758), *Ex quo singulari*, which had revoked any previous concessions made to the Jesuit's Sinification Policy. By that time, with the Communist forces set to take power in China, the revocation was of little significance (Pollak 1998, 81).

Kaifeng Jews aware of the arrival of Jesus Christ, convince them of the error of their ways and facilitate their conversion to Christianity. According to Pollak (1998, 37), however, the following three centuries “of sporadic missionary effort, first by Catholics and later by both Catholics and Protestants, were to bring very few Jews to the cross.” Most of those who did dispose of their Judaism did so after leaving Kaifeng in the wake of its economic decline and, then, would inexorably choose either Islam or popular Chinese religion over Christianity.

Following Gaubil’s disrupted mission, there was no external contact with the Kaifeng Jews until 1850.³⁴ In the interim Kaifeng’s economy, already in decline since the fifteenth century with the termination of the Silk Road, suffered further with establishment of treaty ports on China’s coast. Many of the Sino-Judaic community left Kaifeng for other locations. In addition, the death of its last Hebrew-speaking rabbi and the subsequent destruction of its neglected synagogue after three floods of the Yellow River in 1841, 1849 and 1860 spelled the beginning of the end for the group’s religious culture. In 1850 Bishop George Smith of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews sent two Chinese Protestant converts from Shanghai to Kaifeng.³⁵ Under dubious circumstances, they succeeded in that initial visit in procuring eight manuscripts of Pentateuchal text as well as copies of some of the Chinese horizontal and vertical inscriptions from the dilapidated synagogue interior.³⁶ Returning again in 1851, these Chinese delegates succeeded where the Jesuits had failed: for a handful of silver coins they were able to purchase six Torah scrolls, sixty manuscripts and the *kehillah’s* Memorial Book (Xu 2003, 55). When the precious Torah scrolls were finally scrutinized, they were found to be, apart from a number of scribal

³⁴ Leslie (1972, 52) refers to this period as “the lost century”

³⁵ This visit was financed by a £500 donation from the proceeds of the 1843 publication *Jews in China*, authored by one of the society’s more prominent members, James Finn. Although Finn expressed abhorrence at the anti-Semitic attitudes of the Jesuit missionaries of the previous century, his aim remained the conversion of the Kaifeng Jews in the greater project of a Protestantized China. Finn, whose letter to the Sino-Judaic community in 1845 elicited the reply referred to below in 2.2 (p. 33) was appointed Ambassador to Palestine in that same year (Pollak 1998, 134- 135).

³⁶ Later reports from the Kaifeng Jews and from reports that were themselves questionable claimed that two Zhao brothers surreptitiously sold these items to the delegates. Another report, later published in a New York newspaper, claimed that the delegates had actually swindled these manuscripts from the Kaifeng Jewish community (Pollak 172-174). In Chinese these inscriptions are referred to respectively as *bian* (匾) and *lian* (联).

orthographic errors, in accord with those venerated by Jews the world over (Pollak 1998, 163).³⁷

Bishop White was the last missionary presence to make contact with the Kaifeng Jews before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and his engagement was more extensive than any of his predecessors. After his return to Canada in 1935, he published *Chinese Jews: a compilation of matters relating to the Jews of Kai-feng Fu*, arguably one of the most comprehensive works on the subject. Following his arrival in Kaifeng in 1910, he had tried to negotiate a price with the remnants of the *kehillah*, who still possessed the land deed, to purchase the site of the former synagogue, but they were unable to conclude a deal. However, in 1912 he negotiated the transfer of the 1489/1512 and 1679 stelae to his custodianship in the courtyard of the Trinity Cathedral mission.³⁸ In befriending the individual Jewish descendants, White (1966, 1: xiii) frequently urged them to revive their lost traditions but to no avail: "No spark of interest in their history and in the divine heritage of Israel could be aroused in them. They were Jews no longer, either in a religious sense or as a community." In 1919 he invited representatives of the seven clans, who had gradually lost contact with one another, to attend a conference. The five-fold purpose of the conference was elucidated in a missionary periodical:

1. of making them mutually acquainted and organising them
2. of making them of acquainted with their own history
3. of making them acquainted with the religion of their forefathers and the Scriptures
4. of making them realise their connections with their coreligionists throughout the world

³⁷ Bishop Gorge Smith, who sent the delegates and later examined the manuscripts, wrote in the 1851 publication of *The Jews of K'aie-fung-foo: being a Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jewish Synagogue at K'aie-fung-foo, on Behalf of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*: "The cursory examination which we have been already enabled to bestow on them leads to the belief that they will be found by Western biblical scholars to be remarkable for their generally exact agreement with the received text of the Hebrew Old Testament" (Pollak 1998, 155- 156).

³⁸ The sale caused a scandal in Kaifeng, with the municipal police arresting Zhao Yunzhong for making the sale and confiscating the stone monuments. Only following an agreement by the Anglican bishop never to remove the stelae from Kaifeng was Zhao released and the monuments returned to the courtyard of Trinity Cathedral (Pollak 1998, 219).

5. of teaching them *that Jesus Christ was a Jew, and that he came to save the world*
[emphasis added]

Disappointed at both the poor attendance and general apathy, White commented that the conference “failed to achieve its purpose, and not a spark of interest in the glorious past and the prophetic future of Israel could be evoked” (Pollak 1998, 219- 222).

In conclusion, outsiders often misrepresented Sino-Judaic identity, either unintentionally or deliberately. The Han lacked both the interest and the knowledge of monotheistic religions to distinguish this group from the Muslim Hui or any of the other sectarian groups so numerous in China’s syncretic religious culture. Although the Hui shared many affinities with the Yicileye, the two groups were in frequent competition to preserve their distinctive and indigenous status. Finally, the Christian missionaries, conveyed a wealth of objective information on the Kaifeng Jews to the West but invariably perceived their contact with them as strategic means to accomplish hegemonic objectives of Christian chauvinism. In the next chapter, examining the contents of the lapidary inscriptions, we will explore Nederveen Pieterse’s vertical axis of a critical holism depicting the “inner dimension of subjectivities and meanings” to better understand how the Kaifeng Jews identified themselves to others. This investigation will also examine the negligible Jewish Diasporic response in the mid-nineteenth century to the revelation of that mystifying identity and an appeal to rescue the *kehillah* from the seemingly inexorable fate of cultural extinction.

CHAPTER TWO

The epigraphic account: translations, confluences and transmissions

Apart from a single letter written to the British consul in Amoy (*Xiamen*, 厦门) requesting assistance at the onset of its cultural deterioration in 1850, the historical Yicileye community left few documents in which they reflect on their own identity and religion. Although several Torah scrolls, prayer books and Passover Haggadoth have been preserved at various institutions, many more were lost to the perennial flooding of the Yellow River. Two texts that appear to be theological treatises were among those lost to posterity in the floods. Thus the stelae adorning the courtyard of its synagogue are its primary source of self-representation. The 1489, 1512 and 1663 inscriptions are a curious amalgam of the group's historical, religious and cultural roots. Included in this mix are accounts of its arrival in China, the synagogue's repeated destruction and reconstruction due to treacherous floods, and commemorations of particular individuals who contributed significantly to the latter task. They further discuss the transmission of the Torah, or "the Way" (*dao*, 道), from Adam to Ezra with frequent mentions to fasting, repentance, worship, and other practices as mainstays of religious life. However, the stelae also commend those within the *kehillah* (congregation) who achieved high rank in both the Imperial Exams and the military. All three stelae contain several references in to the similarities between Confucianism and Judaism (White 1966; Leslie 1972; Pollak 1998; Eber 1999; Plaks 1999; Xu 2003).³⁹

Before examining this vertical axis of "subjectivities and meanings" through which the historical Yicileye represented themselves, it is instructive to consider comparable data available in a European, North African or Middle Eastern Jewish community during a similar period. Although extensive archaeological and epigraphic records from synagogues throughout the Diaspora are available, literary evidence from these communities provide the more comprehensive and definitive study of any shared

³⁹ The 1489 stele mentions the Song Dynasty (960–1127) as the time of arrival; the 1512 monument records the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE); and the 1663 inscription lists the earliest arrival during the Zhou (1046–256 BC). Leslie (1972, 19-21), Pollak (1998, 265-267) and Xu (2003, 18-19) all concur that the earlier dates may be an indication of the groups desire to express an indigenous status in the increasingly xenophobic atmosphere of the Qing Dynasty.

subjectivities and meanings. From 1000 CE until 1850 CE, the period marking the approximate arrival of Jewish traders in Kaifeng until the final disassembling of the synagogue, a dynamic Jewish literary culture from the West's Diasporic communities flourished. Extensive writings by Talmudic luminaries, commentators and cross-commentators established the culture of religious legalism that persists to this day. Letters in the form of *halakhic responsa* defined the contours of civil, marital and ritual law and simultaneously served to connect multiple communities in disparate geographic locations. The *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, or German pietists, produced works in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries encouraging ascetic praxes to achieve saintliness. Philosophical works such as Yehuda Ha-levi's *The Kuzari* (c.1140) or Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* (c. 1190), both written in the vernacular Judeo-Arabic, offered rational explanations for the foundational theology of Judaism. The Golden Age in Andalusia produced many renowned Sephardic poets like Solomon ibn Gabriol, Abraham ibn Ezra, Moshe ibn Ezra, Samuel Ha-Nagid ibn Nagrela, Yosef ibn Hasdai and Yehuda Ha-levi.⁴⁰ Furthermore, while the Yicileye were constructing their synagogue in twelfth century Kaifeng, in Provence the kabbalists were circulating the mystical treatise known as *Sefer Ha-Bahir* ("Book of the Brightness"); in the next century the monumental kabbalistic commentary on the entire Torah, *Sefer Ha-Zohar* ("Book of Radiance") emerged from Castile, Spain; finally, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from Safed, Israel numerous rabbis authored manuscripts expounding earlier mystical texts and practices, culminating in the meditative system of the *sephirot* (divine emanations) of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (the "*Ari Hakodesh*", or "holy lion").

By contrast, Kaifeng Jews are known to have written only two literary works, neither of which is extant: *Record of the Vicissitudes of the Holy Scriptures* by the *jinshi* (mandarin) Zhao Yingcheng and *Preface to The Illustrious Way* by his younger brother Zhao Yingdou of similar rank. According to the stelae, the former text described the deliberate 1642 flooding of Kaifeng by Ming forces attempting to dislodge the rebel troops of Li Zicheng. The flood destroyed the synagogue and caused severe damage to the Torah scrolls. A decade later he is also purported to have facilitated both the rebuilding of the synagogue and the repair of the damaged scrolls. The work by the

⁴⁰ Nagrela also served as vizier of state and top general for the Berber king Badis ben Habus (reigned 1038- 1073 CE).

younger Zhao Yingdou was said to have discussed the meaning and practice of various Torah precepts. Compared with the profusion of texts from Western Diasporic communities during the eight centuries of tangible Sino-Judaic culture in Kaifeng, the Yicileye's literary contribution, ultimately lost to posterity, was negligible. However, the dearth of Sino-Judaic textual production can be better understood by analysing the qualitative differences in the cultural milieus in which these texts were produced.

Unlike the permeable cultural boundaries in China which enabled integration of the Yicileye, the boundaries circumscribing Western Jewry were more opaque. These permeable boundaries enabled Kaifeng Jews to marry Chinese women in emulation of the patrilocal custom, attain the highest *jinsi* rank in the Imperial Exams and enjoy unrestricted economic and social participation. In contrast, canonical laws prevented a similar level of interaction for Jews in Europe:

As is well known, canon law subjected Jews to numerous disabilities: for example, they were ineligible to hold public office or to exercise authority over Christians; likewise, Jews could not own Christian slaves, employ Christian servants in their houses, or even live in the same dwelling with a Christian. Converts from Judaism were forbidden to leave legacies to Jewish relatives or to have further contact with unconverted members of their families of origin. After 1215, moreover, the canons required Jews and Saracens to wear a distinguishing badge whenever they appeared in public, so that they could not be mistaken for Christians. The Church seems to have borrowed this discriminatory tactic from the Islamic world, where Christians and Jews were required to wear variously colored sashes or headgear (Brundage 1988, 27).

Intermarriage was infrequent due to the threat of penalties in both canonical and civil law:

A few Christians, notwithstanding the ban, "married" Jews anyway, but the consequences were grave if the matter came to the attention of the authorities of either religion. Canon law could excommunicate them, and they were of course, socially isolated. Jewish law was equally intolerant of marriage to outsiders. Secular law was harsher still: marriage between Christian and Jew was a capital crime, and in aggravated or notorious cases, one or both of the parties could be burnt to death. Fortunately, those who married across religious lines were not often executed. Much more commonly, their marriages were pronounced void and they were forced to separate, unless the non-Christian partner promised to accept baptism. (Brundage 1988, 28).

Paradoxically, the restrictive insularity imposed on Western Jewry provided a fertile environment for the development of a Talmudic, or legalistic, culture. The Talmud,

referred to in Hebrew as the *Torah sh'baal-peh*, or the “oral law”, consists of two sections, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah, which in Hebrew translates to “study by repetition”, was redacted by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi (Judah the Prince) in the second century CE. It contains six orders, each with a number of tractates providing terse summations of oral traditions that explicate details of the Written Law of the Five Books of Moses.⁴¹ Two centuries after the publication of the Mishnah, the extensive rabbinical analyses and commentaries on the Mishnah, in both the Land of Israel and Babylonia, produced the Gemara, which, unlike the Hebrew language prevalent in the Mishnah, was composed almost entirely in the Aramaic vernacular.⁴² The Babylonian Talmud, containing thirty-six tractates and encyclopaedic in both scope and size, is written without diacritic markings or punctuation. Moreover, stylistically, its narrative mode resembles stream of consciousness, drifting from one topic to another, its legal debates frequently interrupted with illustrative anecdotes. Due to its language, structure and style, the Talmud was accessible only to an elite group of rabbinic scholars, who communicated its rulings and worldview to their various congregations.⁴³ Moreover, the Talmud generated a particular semiotics that enabled the rabbinic leadership of disparate communities to consult one another on points of Jewish law.

It was precisely this cultural development—the proliferation of the Jews’ peculiar “Oral Torah”—which imbued Jewish identity in Europe with a qualitative sense of profound difference, a sense that is conspicuously absent from the Kaifeng stelae where it is the quality of cultural similarity which is recurrently emphasized. Many European clerics and philosophers resented the Talmud not so much for its denial of Jesus’ divine status but rather because it served as a means of vigorous cultural

⁴¹ The six orders are titled *Zeraim* (“Seeds”), *Mo’ed* (“Festival”), *Nashim* (“Women”), *Nezikin* (“Damages”), *Kodashim* (“Holy things”) and *Tohorot* (“Purities”).

⁴² These two versions of rabbinical exegesis on the Mishnah resulted in the publication of both a Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud. The latter generally forms the basis of *halakhic* rulings and is the text more commonly studied.

⁴³ Even fluent Hebrew speakers frequently find the cryptic language of the Talmud undecipherable. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz has published a version of the Babylonian Talmud with a Hebrew translation of both its text and subsequent cross-commentaries. The Schottenstein edition, published in the United States by Art Scroll (Mesorah), has rendered a similar service for English speakers.

reproduction for a group the Church canon had fated to disenfranchisement, displacement and, ultimately, eradication.

One of the unanswered questions of Kaifeng's Jewish history was whether or not the *kehillah* there similarly possessed a Talmudic culture. Leslie (1972, 153-154) doubts this and maintains that a list of the six Mishnaic orders forming the categorical divisions of Talmudic tractates discovered prior to the synagogue's demise may have been brought there by Jesuits to test the Kaifeng Jews' knowledge. Xu (2003, 87) is unsure about this possibility. Although no copies of Talmudic manuscripts or publications were ever retrieved from Kaifeng, it is clear from the description of the Jesuits that many aspects of Jewish life in Kaifeng were sourced in rabbinic law. Because of this fact, some scholars have suggested that the Kaifeng Jews must have had access to the Talmud and studied its laws. In correspondence with Jordan Paper I have robustly argued that, for a number of reasons, such a hypothesis is highly unlikely.⁴⁴ What is more probable is that the first Jewish settlers in Kaifeng carried with them traditional practices originating in the rabbinic law of the Talmud. Up until the closure of the Silk Road, visiting caravans of Jewish traders to Kaifeng may have buttressed, augmented or altered these original traditions. Just as these visitors provided the remote Yicileye with *siddurim* (prayer books), Passover Haggadoth and Torah scrolls, it is reasonable to assume that they would also supply oral information on beliefs, values and practices that would make Talmudic study superfluous to the Kaifeng community's basic spiritual needs. Rather than fostering an insular culture of Talmudic legalism which defined itself as oppositional to that of its European hosts, the Yicileye reproduced a traditional culture which was nonetheless capable of absorbing confluent values and practices through the permeable cultural boundaries of the dominant host:

The Kaifeng Jews wanted very much to have their faith and practices be understood in light of the dominant culture, much as Jews everywhere always

⁴⁴ First, on a practical level, the transport by land or sea routes of the thirty-six tractates of the Talmud, first published in and of a size similar to the contemporary Encyclopaedia Britannica, would have been difficult. Secondly, the Jesuits commented on the limited Hebrew-language skills of the Sino-Judaic leadership. This would have posed problems in understanding the unpunctuated Aramaic text of the Gemara, the main Talmudic text based on the Hebrew Mishnah. Finally, the Jesuits would have been well aware of any indications of a Talmudic culture in Kaifeng, yet none has been recorded. In fact, the efforts of the Jesuit and later Protestant missionaries to obtain a Torah scroll from Kaifeng were based on the certainty that the *Yicileye* did not possess a copy of the Talmud nor a culture of Talmudic learning.

have. It is not only a matter of community relations, but also a matter of spiritual survival, because, by comparing and contrasting one faith with another, what it means to be a Jew is more clearly delineated. In the Chinese situation, they were fortunate to live in a society which fostered syncretism and *was indifferent to doctrinal differences in a way unimaginable in the Middle East or Europe* [emphasis added]. Consequently, the Kaifeng community was able to embrace basic Confucian and Daoist concepts, and blend them relatively easily with their own Jewish ones (Laytner 2008, 218-219).

What follows is a general discussion of Jewish values which have been translated, linguistically and culturally, in the lapidary inscriptions of the synagogal stelae into their Chinese confluents. Those values include honouring parents and elders, respect for the sovereign head of state, the pre-eminence of scholarship, family cohesion, and the maintenance of social order. Explored in more detail is the shift from the anthropomorphic terminology depicting God in the Biblical canon to the less theistic lexis of the Chinese language, an accommodation that would prove to be historically contentious. Significantly, the stelae make frequent reference to the practice of ancestor veneration, with scholars subsequently debating whether this adaptation contributed to the degradation or preservation of the community's Judaic cultural core. That discussion is followed by a synopsis of Jordan Paper's *A Theology of Kaifeng Jews, 1000 - 1850* (2012), the only scholarly work to hypothesize a speculative theology based on the epigraphic remnants of the Kaifeng synagogue. Paper reiterates the critical role of ancestor veneration in the attainment of a humanistic perfection. He also postulates a more benign version of the Divine covenant embedded in a harmonious relationship with nature rather than an unwavering obedience to a paternalistic, authoritarian Deity. Finally, we conclude with an examination of the sole exemplar of textual self-representation in the correspondence to the British consul referred to above and of the derisory response by the mother-group of worldwide Jewry to the severe plight of Kaifeng Jewry.

Unlike the Torah scrolls, prayer books, Haggadoth and other synagogal relics housed in various museum libraries around the world, the 1489 and 1512 stelae still stand in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, along with a private stele of the Zhao family dated 1679.⁴⁵ However, due to China's official policy denying the existence of a Jewish

⁴⁵ These two stelae are inscribed on both sides of one stone. The 1663 stele, likewise inscribed on two sides, went missing sometime in the early 19th century. The rubbings made by the Jesuits

ethnicity in Kaifeng, these artefacts, arguably the most ancient and noteworthy in the museum, are not available to the Chinese public and are kept locked away in the museum's attic floor. Foreigners aware of their existence can pay a ¥50 "fee" to the curator to unlock the door and provide a short guided tour.⁴⁶

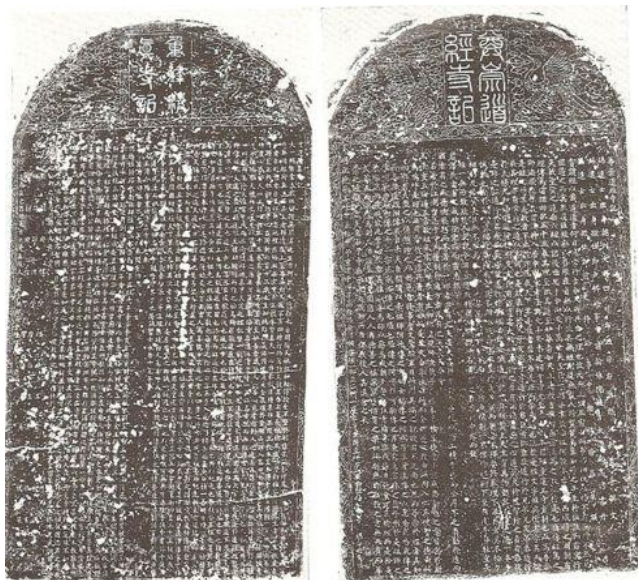


FIGURE 4. The stelae of 1489 and 1512 housed in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum (Sino-Judaic Institute n.d., photographer unknown)

Confluences of beliefs, values and practices

According to Xu (2003, 114-116), the Kaifeng Jews saw no contradiction between the social order espoused by Confucian doctrine and the Jewish emphasis on fulfilment of God's will.⁴⁷ Expounding on Donald Leslie's (1979, 161) argument that in the

still exist in the Vatican library. The stele of the Zhao clan was found embedded in the wall of a home adjacent to the former synagogue's courtyard. Its inscriptions, however, had been disfigured by neighbourhood children who used the stele as a target to flip coins against (Leslie 1972, 132-133).

⁴⁶ Likewise, foreigners, but not Chinese natives, who wish to view the exhibit on Jewish life in the Song Dynasty at the Kaifeng Riverside Scenic Park Qingming Garden (Millenium City Park) must pay an extra fee to unlock the entrance doors. In my conversation with Professor Xu, he mentioned that a US \$10,000 donation from an American Jewish philanthropist to have this exhibit upgraded, which Xu had personally transferred several years earlier to the Qingming authorities, had disappeared. No refurbishment of the exhibit has occurred.

⁴⁷ "Confucianism is a humanistic, rational and secular worldview, a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life, sometimes viewed as a philosophy. But to reiterate what was said above, it is not a religion. This is critically important for an understanding why the Kaifeng Jews never hesitated to use Confucian sayings and customs in the synagogue. Since Confucianism has nothing to do with religious faith, they saw no conflict with Judaism" (Xu 2003, 114)

inscriptions of the stelae “the ideas expressed are sometimes Jewish in Confucian garb,” Xu (2003, 119) suggests that the couching of Jewish concepts in Confucian terminology was often a linguistic convenience. Since Chinese language simply did not possess the theological equivalents of many Jewish concepts, it was necessary to adapt these concepts to the existing socio-cultural milieu. The 1489 inscription, for example, refers to the Sabbath as “four times a month”; this is because at that time there was no weekly division of the Chinese calendar, so that it was senseless to describe the Sabbath as a weekly event. Xu, however, goes further than stating that the camouflaging of Jewish theology in Confucian terms was never a contentious issue for the Yicileye. He believes that the two share many ethical commonalities: “Moreover, as has often been noted, Judaism is not so much a religion as a way of life, and this may have made it similar to Confucianism in the minds of Kaifeng’s Jews” (Xu 2003, 120). Reaffirming this suggestion is the 1663(a) inscription which reads:

The composition of the Scriptures, although written in an ancient script [Hebrew] and of a different pronunciation, is in harmony with the principles of the six classics [of Confucianism], and in no case is there anything not in harmony with them.

The following verses appearing towards the end of the 1489 inscriptions, amongst many in the stelae extolling the virtues of Confucianism, provide examples of several elements of cross-cultural value confluences:

Although the religion of Confucius and this religion are similar as a whole, and different in details, both are determined and set in ways. Nevertheless they also worship the heavenly Dao; honour the ancestors; respect the relationship between Prince and Minister; [are] filial to their fathers and mothers; peaceful to their wives and children; have order in their social ranks; interact with friends; and do not make exceptions to the Five Relationships... May the Great Ming Emperor’s virtue surpass Yu and Tang; and his highness that of Yao and Xun; his intelligence and intuitive wisdom be bright like the Sun and the Moon (Weisz 2006, 17-18).

According to Xu (2003, 121), “[T]he real implication of the 1489 inscription is that Confucianism and Judaism agree on essential points and differ only on secondary issues.” The veracity of Xu’s statement is paramount in understanding how the external “garb” of Confucianism could nonetheless potentially serve as a means of transmission of a vital, internal Jewish identity, even in the midst of broad assimilation. The similarities delineated in the inscription include the acknowledgement of a higher

moral authority, honour bestowed to the ancestors, respectful social and familial relationships, a stable social order and benevolent human interaction. Furthermore, in the closing salutation to the Emperor we find commendations of virtue, intelligence and wisdom.

As discussed above in regards to the Rites Controversy, the regular usage in all of the lapidary inscriptions of the Chinese terms *Dao* (道, the Way), or *Tian* (天, Heaven), as an appellation for God was evidence to White (1966, 1: xiii) that the Jews of Kaifeng had strayed far from their scriptural source. Xu, by contrast, indicates the compatibility of this term with the notion of a formless deity that is the essence of Judaism's monotheistic belief and its divergence from Christianity. In fact, he calls attention to a synagogue plaque describing the Divine donated by a Kaifeng Jew named Ai Shi-de which read: "Its presence is not impeded by visible form; its absence does not imply an empty void; for the Way is outside the limits of existence or non-existence." The thought expressed therein resonates with one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith formulated by the renowned Jewish codifier Maimonides: "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, is not a body, and that He is free from all the accidents of matter, and that He has not any form whatsoever" (Xu 2003, 117).

Although the Torah, in stark contrast to the abstract Chinese concepts of *Dao* or *Tian*, describes God in anthropomorphic and androcentric terminology, the Babylonian Talmud (Yevamot 71a) explains that "the Torah speaks in the language of human beings" for the sake of comprehension; all Jewish sources concur, however, that God has no intrinsic physical form or gender.

More important than the terms utilized is the overarching concept that each culture acknowledged a higher moral authority that motivates human beings to act in a proper manner for the benefit of the collective whole.⁴⁸ Although Judaism couches these moral imperatives as Divine commandments, the essential aim is the same: the creation of a just society. Commandments such as filial respect and honour; conjugal obligations;

⁴⁸ "Confucianism does not involve a religious belief system. Unconcerned with deities, the spiritual, or what happens after a person's death, it focuses on the establishment of a harmonious society, based upon a fixed idea of what each person's position and conduct demands—a society in which everyone does the right thing, especially in relation to others." (Xu 2003, 115).

the honour due to a monarch; the hierarchy of the priestly (Kohen) and Levite castes; and reverence owed to a Torah scholar were all designed to ensure the preservation of a harmonious social order.

Although both White (ibid) and Pollak (1998, 337) suggest that the introduction of Confucian ancestor worship rituals corrupted the essence of Judaism and led to assimilation, Xu (2003, 118) points out that the prayer of ancestral veneration found in the Kaifeng Memorial Book differs very little from the *Yizkor* (memorial) prayer recited in synagogues worldwide to recall deceased family members. Most prayers in the Jewish liturgy address God as “our God and God of our ancestors” (Ganzfried 1963, 18:3).⁴⁹ Perhaps more than other cross-cultural commonalities, the veneration of ancestors in each tradition enabled the Kaifeng Jews to preserve the dual identity of Han Chinese and Judaism without contradiction. More recent research seems to support Eber’s (1999, 32) definitive statement that the sinicization of Judaism, in particular the integration of ancestor veneration, “led to the maintenance of Jewish identity and to the persistence of Jewish memory.”

The primacy of scholarship

As in Confucianism, where scholarship was considered to be the highest level of social achievement, so too, the tradition of Torah scholarship was always held in high esteem. In the Jewish tradition, a Torah scholar is to be given more respect than one gives to his own father, since “...his father has given [him] life in this world, while his teacher prepares him for life in the world to come” (Ganzfried 1963, 143:1-2). Although little is known about the way in which Jewish education was perpetuated in Kaifeng, the Jesuit Gozani describes how in 1712, almost six centuries after establishing a synagogue, the Jews in Kaifeng were still teaching their children to read Hebrew, albeit with a defective accent (Pollak 1998, 108). Although this linguistic knowledge remained basic, a small group of more educated scholars and rabbis preserved core Jewish knowledge until the middle of the 19th century. Xu (2003, 89) points out that the 1663(a) inscription indicates that Zhao Yincheng and his brother Zhao Yingdou wrote scholarly works of scriptural exegesis. The Jewish inclination to erudition apparently

⁴⁹ The Hebrew translation is: *elohaynu v'elohay avoteinu* (אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו).

led many Jews to succeed in the prestigious civil service examinations, and, as Pollak (1998, 319-320) has noted, this success inevitably led to their integration and advancement in Han culture. Furthermore, those who succeeded in the examinations were required to leave their native towns and resituate to an alternate location to take up office. It is not clear, however, that assimilation with Han culture necessarily entailed the abnegation of Jewish tradition. Leslie (1984, 227-230), Pollak (1998, 320-321), and Xu (2008, 89) take Zhao Yingcheng, a high-ranking mandarin who maintained active involvement in Jewish affairs, as an example of the way in which Han acculturation was capable of co-existing with a strong Jewish identity.⁵⁰

The confluence of ethical values in both Judaism and Confucianism enabled Zhao to embrace Han culture while fully partaking of his Jewish heritage. There is evidence that many more of the *kehillah* shared this dual affiliation, which, while integrating them into the host culture permitted the conservation of their distinctive religious identity. Once all manifestation of visible culture had vanished, ancestor veneration alone became a crucial factor in conserving that identity for a sizable number of descendants, many of whom are now engaged in reconstructing a new hybrid of cultural identity in Kaifeng discussed in Part Two.

⁵⁰ Zhao was born in Kaifeng in 1619, received his *juren* (举人) degree in 1645 and the following year the ultimate *jinshi* (进士) rank. After being appointed as the department director of the Ministry of Justice, he was sent to Fukien Province, where he was successful in cultivating a strategic victory against an insurgency of armed bandits. Furthermore, he was also acclaimed in subsequent gazetteers as having "...promoted schools...cleared up judicial cases... The people were delighted to be free of calamity..." Yet, despite his achievements as a Chinese citizen, Zhao did not shirk his obligations as a Jew. After the death of one of his parents in 1653, Zhao returned to Kaifeng to begin the three-year period of mourning. During this period, he became involved in communal Jewish affairs. More competent in Hebrew than other laypeople, he assisted the *zhangjiao* (rabbi) Li Zhen with the collation and transcription of Torah parchments that had been recovered from the devastating flood of 1642. Together with his brother Yingdou and cousin Zhengji, he succeeded in locating the foundations of the inundated synagogue. From his own income, augmented by profitable investments in land speculation and brothels, he funded the total costs for three sections of the rear hall in the reconstructed house of worship. During this period, he authored the book, no longer extant, of biblical and theological commentary entitled *The Vicissitudes of the Holy Scriptures* (*shengjing jibian* 圣经记变). In 1656 he was appointed assistant surveillance commissioner in Hubei Province but died a year later, lavishly eulogized by three Chinese gazetteers (Pollak 1998, 327-328).

A speculative theology of the Chinese Jews

Due to the dearth of religious texts from Kaifeng, it is not possible to fully understand the theological foundations of Sino-Judaic belief and practice. Yet, in 1942 Bishop William C. White presented precisely that challenge in *Chinese Jews: A Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of K'ài-Feng Fu*, still arguably the seminal and most comprehensive work on the historical Jewish community of Kaifeng. In his preface White (1942, 1: xvi) wrote:

Someday it is hoped a writer will be found who will deal with the interpretation of the religious and philosophical ideas of the Chinese Jews, as such may be noted in the inscriptions of the synagogue.

Seventy years later, Jordan Paper, professor emeritus for East Asian and Religious Studies at York University and a specialist in Chinese popular religion, took up White's challenge in *The Theology of the Chinese Jews, 1000 – 1850*. Paper is careful to point out that the theology he elucidates is speculative and is based solely on the inscriptions of the stelae and synagogal placards. In *Chinese Jews* White had already proffered his own translation of these lapidary inscriptions of the stelae in the synagogue courtyard. While many scholars, Paper included, maintain that the narratives in the stelae may have been intended more for external public consumption, particularly of the literate Mandarin elite who probably collaborated to compose them, it is nonetheless presumed that they were in some ways reflective of Sino-Judaic thought.

Paper (2012, 40-43) disputes Xu's view that it was the secular and humanistic characteristics of Confucianism which enabled the Yicileye to adopt its confluent values. He instead asserts that the rituals of ancestral veneration so central to the Confucian notion of filial respect were visceral religious experiences rather than the exercises in philosophical humanism suggested by Xu. He further maintains that the Yicileye's abandonment of anthropomorphic nomenclature of the Divine in favour of more impersonal descriptors prevalent in Daoist and Confucian texts coincided with some of the mystical concepts expounded in the Jewish tradition of the kabbalah in the West. Moreover, these Chinese terminologies tended to frame the concept of reward and punishment as universal phenomena rather than the parochial decrees of a patriarchal, authoritarian God. Like Xu, Paper also argues for a Chinese

contextualization of Sino-Judaic religious culture. However, his perspective on that context emphasizes its spiritual rather than its profane aspects.

Paper begins by tracking the extent of the Jewish Diaspora, providing evidence of Jewish migration, commerce and settlement throughout the Mediterranean and as far as East Asia prior to the Roman conquest of Judea in 70 CE. He mentions the persecution suffered by Jews as subjects to Christendom in contrast to the greater freedom enjoyed by those living under Islam, although still subject to erratic “expulsions and forced conversions by local leaders who acted on their own” (Paper 2012, 31). In order to contextualise the Jewish experience in Kaifeng, Paper paints a broad, brush-stroke canvas of life in China contemporaneous with the more than eight centuries of tangible Jewish culture indicated in the title. He contends that “...no concept regarding China has caused more confusion in the Western mind than that of religion, a term that did not exist before it was poorly translated into Chinese in the late nineteenth century.” As mentioned above, Paper disputes the contention of Xu Xin that Chinese religion was of a “secular” nature and, for that reason, deemed compatible with Judaism. He suggests instead that this approach inadvertently reflects the atheistic and anti-superstition ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. Similarly, it mirrors the view of the Jesuits, who fought a prolonged theological battle during the Rites Controversy to prove the secular nature of Confucianism in order to effectively proselytise in China utilizing native terminologies and thus circumvent allegations of heresy from the opposing Dominicans and Franciscans (ibid, 38-39).

Rather than a secular character, Paper suggests a theological system of “family religion” and “sacred kingship” rooted in the foundational Chinese concept of *xiao* (孝), or filial piety. Explaining why this Chinese notion might subsume the Biblical imperative of the fifth commandment to honour one’s parents, he depicts how the primacy of clan identification, family dedication, and the veneration of ancestors through offerings constitute an intuitive form of religion independent of belief:

[H]aving grandparents or parents, whichever is the most recently departed, does not involve faith... we know absolutely that we have parents. They are more real to us than anything else. Thus, when they die, they do not disappear from our memory, nor is doubt created as to whether they actually existed (ibid, 40).

The author further characterises the practice of spirit possession as similarly empirical, as being “real to the senses”, since these spirits “could talk or be talked to, touch and be touched in turn.”

Unlike theological developments which occurred under Christendom or Islam, Paper explains how the lack of persecution in China influenced the synthesis of Sino-Judaic religious culture. According to Paper, the Hebrew names recorded for female Chinese spouses were indicative of their conversion, and the patrilineal and patrilocal facets of Han culture served to ensure the adaptation to and preservation of Jewish customs and practices. Though the placard over the ark containing their Torah scrolls gave homage to the Emperor, above it stood the tablet in gold leaf engraved with the primary proclamation of the Jewish monotheism, the *shma yisrael*. Yet, the inscriptions of the stelae suggest that the Kaifeng Jews’ comprehension of this singular God was entwined with the concept of an ancestral deity, a conception supported by prayers they, along with Jews worldwide, recited three times daily invoking “our God, and God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

In the stelae, however, the use of the Chinese names of *dao* (道) and *tian* (天) hints at the selection of classical Chinese concepts of deity that resonated with them as both Jews and Chinese. Paper proposes that the choice of this name from Daoist cosmology expresses “an understanding of God not as anthropomorphic but as all-encompassing, as the source of all life. God is the ultimate that can be named, beyond which is a further ultimate that cannot be named.” In Western kabbalistic thought, this ineffable ultimate is referred to as “Ayn Sof”, or “the Limitless”. Although in colloquial Chinese *tian* has the meaning of Sky, or, in Hebrew, *shamayim*—often utilised in idiomatic speech as a euphemism for God—its meaning in both the stelae and placards could indicate “the locus of the sacred”, “God as prime mover”, or the transcendent and immanent aspects of deity implied in the compound *tiandi* (天地), literally “heaven and earth”, depending on its usage and context (ibid, 101-102).

Although much of the chapter proposing a speculative theology consists of necessary digressions into purely Confucian, Daoist and Jewish thought to better understand its unique synthesis in Kaifeng, Paper (ibid, 112-113) convincingly depicts an alternative system of spirituality which, though markedly different from that which evolved in

Europe, is situated within the norms of great Jewish thinkers like Sa'adia Gaon and Maimonides. Rather than a onetime historical event initiated by an anthropomorphic, masculinised deity, the Kaifeng Jews viewed creation as a continual process of creation ex-nihilo forming the duality of *yin* and *yang* (i.e. *shamayim v'aretz*, Heaven and Earth) from which all forms of multiplicity are constantly emergent. Observance of the Torah commandments was perceived not as stemming from a Divine Covenant predicated on reward and punishment by an authoritarian and potentially wrathful God, but rather on the belief that "being good is being true to one's nature [the Confucian philosophy of Mengzi], which is essentially divine, while being wicked, which in the Chinese context means acting selfishly, is being perverse to human nature" (ibid, 119-120).

Similarly, as the concept of a non-anthropomorphic deity was also impersonal and void of human emotions, the concept of *tshuvah*, or "repentance", in traditional Judaism often embedded in the evasion of punishment, manifested in Sino-Judaic thought as the Confucian concept of "rectification of the heart/mind", the natural, creative yearning to realise one's full potential. Furthermore, unlike their European counterparts who viewed the recurrent persecution by gentiles as the hand of Divine punishment, the Kaifeng Jews, who suffered no such persecution, tended to interpret natural catastrophes such as drought, fire and flooding as heavenly retribution affecting everyone. Paper also suggests that traditional prayer in Kaifeng, which the Jesuits attest took place on a daily basis, "would have been understood from a functional standpoint as little different from the chanting that took place in Chinese Buddhist monasteries." He also proposes that the Chinese Jews may have engaged in private prayer when making offerings to their ancestors, reflective of the widespread custom of petitioning personal prayers at the gravesites of venerable Jewish saints (ibid, 117-118).

These are some of the speculative theological tenets that are summarized in Paper's book. Due to its hypothetical perspective, the text makes certain assumptions in delineating the details of Jewish life in Kaifeng. For example, Paper assumes that listing of Hebrew names of intermarried females is indicative of "conversion"; as there is no confirmation of formalised conversions in Kaifeng, this assumption is somewhat misleading. So too, Paper declares that the Chinese Jews did not engage with popular

religious practices in China. However, as Sharot (2007, 180) has argued, given the syncretistic nature and permeable boundaries of Chinese religious culture, such an engagement was indeed probable. Furthermore, although a colophon found in Kaifeng lists certain Talmudic tractates, as discussed above, there is no hard evidence to support Paper's supposition that the Talmud existed in Kaifeng, nor is there documentation of Talmudic study or culture. In my view, some of these assumptions might be misconstrued as apologetics, an attempt, perhaps, to attribute more orthodoxy to the Kaifeng Jews than the evidence warrants. In some ways, these peripheral assumptions detract from rather than enhance the thrust of Paper's main argument for a Chinese context to Sino-Judaic religious culture.

Finally, Paper argues that economic, geographic and demographic factors—rather than assimilation and sinicization—were the root causes of the community's cultural termination. This view has been substantiated by more recent research (Eber, Abraham, Plaks, Sharot, Urbach, Patt-Shamir and Rapaport, Laytner) that, counterintuitively, sinicization represented a preservative function that enabled this minuscule community, consisting of a mere 5000 souls at its apex in the Ming Dynasty to endure as a distinct and tangible religious culture for a remarkable eight centuries and more. Paper calls attention to the fact that this achievement surpasses that of some of Europe's most durable Jewish communities: the Old-New Synagogue of Prague, for example, has existed for only 700 years.

In the postscript to *The Theology of the Chinese Jews*, Rabbi Anson Laytner eloquently contextualises the Kaifeng Jewish experience with the problems confronting Western Jewry today (See Introduction, 25). Both the Holocaust and modern science, Laytner argues, have had a critical impact on some of the fundamental notions of God and Jewish thought in general. With more than half of Western Jewry unaffiliated and others abandoning Judaism for the spiritual traditions of the East, he believes that there is a need for "a revolution in Jewish thought." He considers that the Chinese Jews represent a model that could guide contemporary Judaism in that direction and assist in correcting its common misrepresentation as a mere racial phenomenon.

This, in effect, sums up the real significance of Paper's research, which is not simply a theological account of an exotic, remote Jewish enclave of times gone by, but, more

notably, a visualization of potentiality for contemporary Judaism and its future development.

An unanswered plea

Although we have seen that by the beginning of the 20th century, White observed the Kaifeng Jews' sheer apathy towards the invigoration of their religious culture, fifty years earlier, in the critical period following floods, the demise of the last rabbi and growing impoverishment, the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng had appealed to the Jewry of the Diaspora to help them re-establish their fading religious culture. A letter written on behalf of the *kehillah* addressed to T. H. Layton, the British consul in Amoy (Xiamen), and dated August 15, 1850, summarizes their predicament:

For the past forty or fifty years our religion has been but imperfectly transmitted, and although its canonical writings are still extant, there are none who understand so much of one word of them. It happens that there yet survives an aged female of more than seventy years, who retains in her recollection the principle tenets of the faith... Morning and night with tears in our eyes and with offerings of incense, do we implore our religion may again flourish... Daily, with tears, have we called on the Holy Name! If we could again procure ministers and put in order our temple, our religion would have a firm support for the future; and its sacred documents would have a secure repository (Pollak 1998, 144-145).

The letter was a response to one written, though left unsigned, in 1846 by James Finn of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews and author of the history *Jews in China*.⁵¹ Due to Layton's death in 1851 and the disruptions of the Taiping Rebellion, the communal letter only reached Finn's hands in 1870. Its writer on behalf of the Kaifeng Sino-Judaic congregation, Zhao Nianzu, describing in detail the illustrious past of the synagogue and its subsequent decline, specifically requested on the outer envelope that the letter be forwarded to a leader of the Jewish community. Although the letter passed through numerous hands before reaching Finn twenty years later, Zhao's appeal went unheeded (Pollak 142-143).

Zhao's letter was never conveyed to Jewish authorities, but the degenerative state of the Kaifeng *kehillah* was reported in Smith's 1851 account of the visit of the Chinese

⁵¹ In 1872 Finn published a second book on the Kaifeng Jews titled *The Orphan Colony of the Jews in China*. The designation as "orphan colony" is used as an epithet for this group even today (Xu 2003, 182).

delegates, Rev. Martin's 1869 letter to the New York *Jewish Times* and an article appearing in 1879 in the London *Jewish Chronicle* recounting the 1867 visit to Kaifeng of J.L. Liebermann, a Jewish businessman from Austrian Silesia. Liebermann was not only the first Caucasian Jew to visit Kaifeng but also the first non-Chinese visitor unaffiliated with a religious organization (Leslie 1972, 186- 189).⁵² In his letter, Martin, a missionary who fervently believed that the *kehillah* needed to be revitalised as an overture to their acceptance of Christ, issued a stern warning that without external support the Kaifeng Jews would be forever lost to Islam or the "heathen" beliefs of China.⁵³ Liebermann described the forlorn state of the site of the synagogue, now immersed in swamp water, its only memory the lone, protruding stele. He also relayed the community's fervent wish to rekindle their tradition and the need for outside religious instruction, although they were sceptical that the presence of foreign clerics would be tolerated in Kaifeng (Pollak 1998, 193-195). There were also indications of some internecine quarrels over the distribution of proceeds from the sale of manuscripts and synagogue artefacts (Xu 2003, 59).

After the release of Smith's *Narrative*, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr Nathan Marcus Adler, wrote a letter to the renowned Sassoon banking house in Shanghai requesting any information they might have on the Kaifeng Jews and questioning the feasibility of sending a rabbi to assist them. The Sassoon's reply of July 21, 1853 claimed ignorance on the subject and discouraged Adler from delegating a rabbinical emissary.⁵⁴ In 1852 Rabbi Isaac Leeser, the American editor of the Jewish journal *Occident*, published an emotional appeal to assist the community; contrary to Martin's

⁵² Although most historians have accepted Liebermann's account as factual, Pollak (1998, 189-190) highlights an almost identical account that had been published in the same Jewish newspaper by a Jewish photographer, Aaron Halevi Fink, several months after Liebermann's supposed visit. While it is plausible that one or the other of the renditions is plagiarised, Pollak believes that of the two Liebermann's is the most credible.

⁵³ From the *Jewish Times*, March 26, 1869: "Nothing can save them from a speedy extinction except the rebuilding of their synagogue, which is indispensable to give them a visible rallying point and a bond of union. For the honour of Israel and Israel's God, this ought to be done."

⁵⁴ "As to our opinion on the probable result of able ministers being sent out for the purpose of recalling and receiving into the bosom of Judaism all such scattered brethren, we beg to state that little or nothing could be done unless they such ministers are masters of the Chinese language, and have means to get into the interior of the country, where they may, by constant and habitual intercourse with the natives, meet some of them, but this, we think also impractical at the present time" (Pollak 1998, 176).



FIGURE 5. View of site of former synagogue and the remaining stele, circa 1912.
(Sino-Judaic Institute n.d., photographer unknown)

plea, he warned that failure to act would see the Kaifeng Jews succumb to the seduction of missionaries (Pollak 1998, 176-177).⁵⁵ The first community to respond to Leeser's appeal was New Orleans. Under the tutelage of their rabbi, James K Gutheim, and the support of philanthropist Judah Touro, the Hebrew Foreign Mission of New Orleans was established. Its aim was "the amelioration of the spiritual, social and political conditions of the Jews in foreign lands." Similar movements were established in the years that followed in New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta and San Francisco. These efforts, however, were abruptly interrupted with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Touro's generous donation of \$5000 to the Hebrew Foreign Mission, initially intended for the cause of Kaifeng Jewry, was allocated instead to help Jewish families in Louisiana impoverished by the war (Pollak 1998, 182-183).

The final, and ultimately abortive, efforts to save the Kaifeng *kehillah* came from the Jewish community in Shanghai. In 1900 S.J. Solomon of Shanghai received a letter inviting him to view a Torah scroll from Kaifeng that had been recently purchased by Monsignor Volonteri of the Siccawei Catholic Mission. A committee of Shanghai Jews, most of Iraqi and Egyptian origin, accompanied Solomon to view the priceless treasure

⁵⁵ Incidentally, Leeser believed that the recently-published manuscripts of the Kaifeng prayer books vindicated the textual versions of Orthodox Judaism against the arguments of the Jewish Reform movement: "... the adherents of the ancient system of worship would come off conquerors in the argument, if the form of prayer of the Chinese Jews is to be appealed to as the umpire" (*Occident*, March 1853).

now in the hands of the Church. Embarrassed and stunned at the tragic spectacle, the Shanghai Jews decided to take immediate and decisive action. A long, emotional letter was written to the Kaifeng Jews, chiding them for their forgotten heritage and the ignominy of disposing of their sacred Torah scrolls. It assured them of the Shanghai community's commitment to help them rebuild their synagogue and to provide teachers to rekindle the spark of their elapsed Jewish heritage. Furthermore, on May 14 1900, thirty-one Shanghai Jews assembled in the home of E M Ezra to found the Society for the Rescue of Chinese Jews (Xu 2003, 59-60).⁵⁶ In April 1901, in response to the initial letter from Shanghai, the Kaifeng Jew Li Jingsheng and his 12-year old son Zongmai appeared in Shanghai, remaining there for three weeks, answering the Society's many questions on conditions in Kaifeng.⁵⁷ In March 1902 Li and his son, accompanied by six other Kaifeng Jews, returned Shanghai to seek support from that community (Pollak 1998, 211-212).

When, to its great embarrassment, the Society discovered that the budget for the rebuilding of a synagogue would total £5000, far above the original calculations, they had to appeal to world Jewry for assistance.⁵⁸ The replies from London and New York were the same: the priorities of assisting the growing influx of Ashkenazi Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe and Sephardim from North Africa and the Levant left little leeway to support the needs of the Kaifeng *kehillah*. Two further surges to reinvigorate the waning Society took place in 1906 and later in 1920, but both of these attempts yielded no tangible results. According to one Iraqi Shanghai Jew, N.E.B. Ezra, accusing the Society of negligence in carrying out its intended responsibilities, he wrote the following in a 1913 letter to the local Jewish newsletter *El-Emunah*:

⁵⁶ Its stated objectives were "to study the origin, development and history of the Jewish Colonies in China; to preserve such sites and monuments [as still exist]; [to] erect monuments where advantageous; and to bring back to Judaism all Chinese Jews lineally descended from Jewish families" (Pollak 1998, 211)

⁵⁷ Li claimed that in Kaifeng there remained only 140 Jews, a figure Pollak (1998, 212) disputes as too low. Apart from the prohibition against idolatry and the eating of pork, there was no longer any trace of Jewish observance.

⁵⁸ It is difficult to fathom how a community comprised of several Jewish moguls such as Kadoorie, Sassoon, Haroon, Ezra and Abraham could not afford such a sum. These same philanthropists were able to raise substantially greater amounts to aid Jewish refugees in the wake of the Russian Revolution and during World War II.

There was every reason to hope of some help being extended to the poor and helpless Jews of Kaifeng by their affluent coreligionists in Shanghai, but, alas, the want of foresight and a little consideration on their part has played an important part of killing every chance of success in this direction.⁵⁹

After the disappointing news of the Society's inability to assist their needs, the six Jews accompanying Li returned to Kaifeng. Li died in Shanghai 1903 and is buried in the Jewish cemetery. His son Zongmai was adopted by a local family; he was circumcised and given the Hebrew name Shmuel, remaining in Shanghai until the end of World War II, when he returned to Kaifeng, where he died in 1948.

In the epigraphic inscriptions of the stelae, the Kaifeng Jews related with pride the community's history, traditions and individual achievements. Although the repeated analogies with Confucianism may very well have had the intent of appeasing the mandarin public, evidence seems to suggest that Judaism made an able and prudent adaptation to the values of its host culture in a manner that served to preserve its Jewish foundations. After its disintegration, whether or not the feeble endeavours of world Jewry to support the fallen *kehillah* were simply the misfortune of extenuating circumstances or, as Pollak (1998, 212) suggests, an antipathy for "so quixotic an enterprise as the rehabilitation of a cluster of self-styled Israelites lost somewhere in the depths of China" is certainly a question warranting further discussion. In any event, where the efforts of both Christian missionaries and Jewish relief organisations failed, ironically, more than half a century later that rehabilitation would be made possible for the Yicileye's twentieth century descendants through Deng Xiaoping's policy of "Reform and Openness".

⁵⁹ The letter continues, referring to the scriptural commandment of the proclamation to be made by a community absolving itself for an unsolved murder: "Paraphrasing a Biblical injunction, Jewry throughout the world in general, and the Shanghai community in particular, cannot say with a clear and calm conscience: 'Our hands have not destroyed this community, nor have our eyes seen who did it'" (Pollak 1998, 213).

CHAPTER THREE

Authenticity claims and authentication processes: the constructs of non-recognition

This thesis presents translation as a process dynamically synthesizing a bricolage of meanings and symbols through intercultural contact. Yet, a view of Sino-Judaic identity as a dynamic process of translation eclipses the core question of its cultural authenticity. Neither the State of Israel and the PRC have authenticated the Jewish identity of the Kaifeng descendants; this lack of recognition, coupled with the view of authentication processes as natural or ahistorical, can lead to the misconception that Sino-Judaic culture is inauthentic. This chapter aims to point out the distinction between claims of authenticity and processes of authentication and to illustrate how each of these are constructed phenomena.

The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies delineates the meaning of authenticity:

To claim that a category is authentic is to argue that it is genuine, natural, true and pure. ...In this sense, the concept of authenticity is closely related to the notion of essentialism in that authenticity implies immaculate origins. It follows then that the anti-essentialism of poststructuralism and postmodernism rejects the idea of the authentic as such, replacing it with the notion of 'authenticity claims'. That is, nothing is authentic in a metaphysical sense; rather, cultures construct certain places, activities, artefacts etc. as being authentic (Barker 2004).

In taking such an approach, I examine the Kaifeng Jews' authenticity claims not to establish the purity of these claims but to consider their reliability, when originating from empirical evidence, and their sincerity, when deriving from systems of beliefs and values.

The internal claims to authenticity of the Kaifeng Jews are based on oral histories, shared descent, collective memory and particular customs. In this chapter these are contrasted with external processes of authentication, which construct categories that over time appear as natural. Neither the authentication processes of the State of Israel or the People's Republic of China recognize the claims of Jewish identity put forward by the Kaifeng Jews. The processes of the former are embedded in Israel's secular Law of Return, which defines Jewishness in relation to Israeli citizenship, and its Chief Rabbinate, which demarcates identity according to the *halakhic* criterion of matrilineal

descent. The authentication processes of the PRC, on the other hand, relate to governmental categorization of ethnic minorities in China.

The two asymmetric yet complementary processes in Israel have generated considerable political debate domestically and within the Jewish Diaspora on the demarcations of Jewish identity, challenging both the standards of Jewish Orthodoxy and also their uneven application. Non-orthodox denominations, particularly those who have abrogated the standard of matrilineage, comprise the demographic majority of Jews worldwide. Members of these groups may be accepted as Israeli citizens under the Law of Return, while, simultaneously, the validity of their marriages, conversions and Jewish status is refuted by the Chief Rabbinate. Examining non-recognition from the Chinese perspective entails an overview of the 1954 ethnotaxonomic Classification Project of minorities, an attempt to harness both British taxonomic methodologies and Stalinist criteria to determine, categorise and control the multitude of ethnic minorities in China. Of particular significance to the Kaifeng Jews is an ambiguous policy document from 1953, endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party leadership at that time, rejecting the group's request for ethnic status while at the same time discouraging any discrimination against them. This policy statement in the context of the Classification Project has perpetuated a bureaucratic stratagem of Sino-Judaic non-recognition, one which often contradicts economic and political interests, both locally and nationally. Thus, the methodology here critically analyses processes of ethnotaxonomic recognition in both Israel and China; unlike the Chinese, however, the Israeli process includes the theological dimension of the rabbinate which has been embedded, controversially, into the political system. I argue that neither the determination that Jewish identity is regulated by matrilineal descent, or that China is a nation of fifty-six discrete ethnicities, are objective criteria but rather hegemonic constructs that have become reified over time.

Unauthenticated authenticity: The Black Hebrews

Like the narrative of the Kaifeng Jews, the story of the Black Hebrews' accommodation with the Israeli government illustrates how a group lacking official authentication can nonetheless maintain its claims of cultural authenticity.

In 1966 Ben Ammi Ben-Israel (1939-2014), né Ben Carter, founded the "African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem" in Chicago, Illinois. Influenced by the teachings of Marcus Garvey and Black Nationalist movements, the group's members, known as the "Black Hebrews", consider themselves the legitimate heirs to the heritage of ancient Israel. In 1969 Carter led a group of forty-eight African Hebrew Israelites to leave their homes in Chicago and settle in Israel. In the years that followed, many of Ben-Israel's African-American followers were inspired by their leader's prophetic revelation of such an exodus by the angel Gabriel and heeded his call to move to the Land of Israel, joining the growing community in the southern town of Dimona. Since they were unable to claim either Jewish descent or that they had undertaken Orthodox conversions, in 1973 their applications for Israeli citizenship were rejected by the Israeli government. That rejection meant that they were unable to obtain work permits. As a result, in the years that followed, several community members working illegally in Israel were deported back to the United States. To thwart these deportations, many of the group's members renounced their US citizenship. In addition, they protested the Israeli government's stance rejecting their bid for citizenship as "racist discrimination". This accusation prompted a 1981 investigation conducted by a group of American civil rights activists led by the late Bayard Rustin; the conclusion of that report was that racism was not a factor in the decision denying recognition of a Jewish status for the Black Hebrews.

In 1990 a group of Illinois state legislators helped engineer an agreement with the Israeli government to grant the Black Hebrew community working permits, subsidised housing and welfare benefits. The terms of that arrangement were further revisited in 2003, and the Black Hebrews were accorded permanent residency status. Elyakim Ben-Yehuda became the first Black Hebrew to be naturalised with full Israeli citizenship in 2009; since then, the Ministry of Interior has intimated its intent to further facilitate citizenship applications from the group on an individual basis in the coming years.

Today there over 3000 Black Hebrews living in Israel. They consider themselves descendants from the Tribe of Judah, exiled from the Commonwealth of Judea after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Similar to the Karaites, an ancient Hebrew sect adhering to the literal meaning of the Torah, they do not acknowledge the Talmud or rabbinic law; they celebrate only scripturally mandated observances such as the Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the three pilgrimage festivals.⁶⁰ Fusing Torah commandments with African-American culture, Black Hebrew males wear ritual fringes (*tzitzit*) over African print shirts and still maintain the practice of baptism. Women abide by the biblical laws commanding separation from their spouses during menstruation (*niddah*), and newborn boys are circumcised on the eighth day after birth. The Black Hebrews, relying on their own unique interpretation of scripture, observe a stringent vegan diet and avoid synthetic fabrics. Polygamy is common, and birth control is prohibited. When Ben Ammi Ben-Israel passed away on December 27 2014 he left behind four wives, 24 children, 45 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

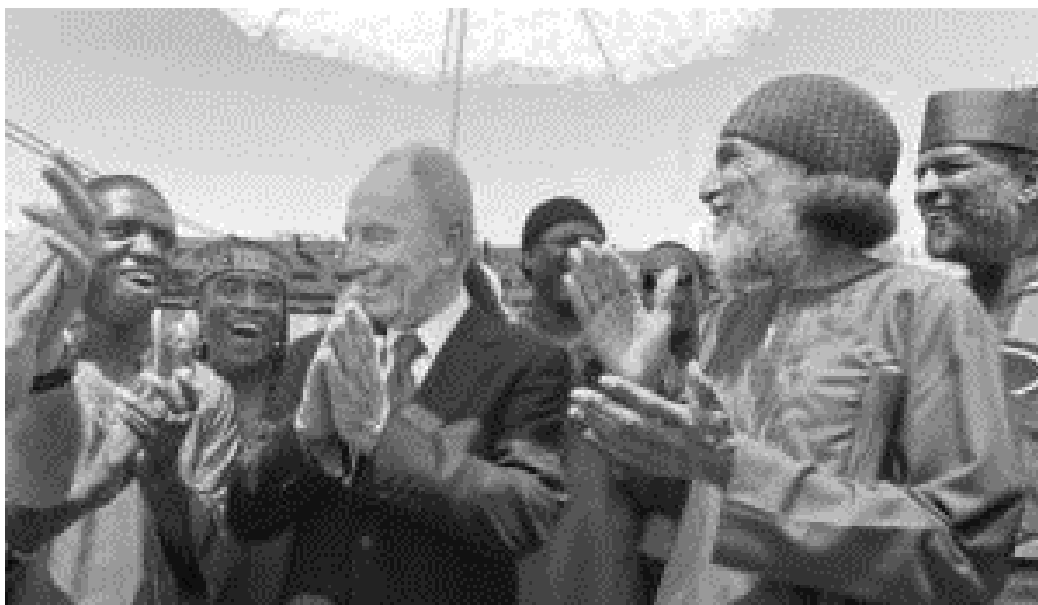


FIGURE 6. President Shimon Peres celebrates his 85th birthday together with Ben-Ammi Ben Israel and the Black Hebrew community in Dimona on August 2 2008 (Associated Press 2008).

The Black Hebrews have become a prominent fixture in modern Israeli culture. They have established businesses in handcrafts and tailoring, formed a renowned gospel choir, launched the production of a tofu ice-cream brand and founded a chain of vegan restaurants throughout the country. Two brothers from the community, Gabriel and

⁶⁰ Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) are the three festivals mentioned in the Torah during which pilgrimage to Jerusalem was mandatory.

Eddie Butler, represented Israel as part of a quartet in the 1999 Eurovision contest; the latter did so again as a soloist in 2006. The community made world headlines in 2003 when the late Whitney Houston and her husband Bobby Brown paid a special visit to Dimona. In August 2008 then-president Shimon Peres celebrated his 85th birthday with a visit to their settlement, *Kfar Ha-shalom* (the Village of Peace), where he lauded Ben-Israel and the achievements of his followers: “Your community is beloved in Israel...you give the country happiness and song and hope for a better world...Our hands are in yours; your destiny must be our destiny.”

It took the Black Hebrews of Dimona forty years from the time of their arrival in Israel until the first citizenship was awarded to Ben-Yehuda. If they had earlier on agreed to undergo formal conversions, as other marginal Jewish identities have done, that process could have been expedited in a matter of months rather than decades. Ben-Israel, however, remained steadfast in his refusal to do so. He maintained that the Black Hebrews were in fact the authentic Israelites depicted in the Bible. The latter-day Jews of Europe and the Levant were mere pretenders to that status. To submit to the demands of an Orthodox Jewish conversion would be a betrayal to their conviction of their own authenticity claims.

Authenticity claims of the Kaifeng Jews

By contrast, most of the authenticity claims of the Kaifeng Jews have more objective credibility, as they are engrained in actual ancestral and historical foundations. Yet, the historical practices of intermarriage and patrilineal descent preclude any possibility of authentication from Jewish orthodoxy, where matrilineage determines identity. Similarly, because Kaifeng’s Jewish descendants lacked any distinctively Jewish linguistic, economic or cultural characteristics, they were not recognized in China as a discrete ethnicity. Whether from the official standpoints in the State of Israel or the PRC, they have become too Chinese to be regarded as Jewish.

In interviews recorded with twenty-two members of the community, I asked them about the factors that contributed to their sense of Jewish identity. Although individual respondents provided multiple factors with considerable overlap between them, there were six major factors which can be regarded as authenticity claims: oral histories,

historical legacies, ancestral veneration, clan lineage, preservation of custom and childhood memory.

Beginning in the 1970's Wang Yisha, curator of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, began collecting oral histories and legends from descendants with Jewish clan lineage. Many of these stories were included in Wang's seminal history *The Spring and Autumn of the Chinese Jews*, first published in Chinese in 1993. (A decade later Xu Xin published an English translation of some of these histories in *Legends of the Chinese Jews*.) Wang's original source material originated from an elderly generation who had contact with ancestors who could still recall the final days of a tangible culture of a communal synagogue. Nearly every Kaifeng Jewish household has a copy of Wang's *magnum opus*, and most are cognizant of some of these oral histories.

Historical legacies include artefacts and texts that attest to the existence of a Jewish synagogue and community in Kaifeng for seven centuries. All of the manuscripts and Torah scrolls are in various repositories on three continents. Only two of the three synagogal stelae are preserved in a display in the attic of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum.⁶¹ However, none of Kaifeng's contemporary Jewish descendants have seen this exhibit, because it is only accessible to foreign tourists aware of its existence and willing to pay a special fee to view it. Because of the governmental policy denying the existence of a Jewish ethnicity in Kaifeng, the exhibit of the stelae is closed to the Chinese public. Yet, the Kaifeng Jews are aware of the existence of these tablets as they are of the Torah scrolls, prayer books and similar texts preserved outside of China. (Activists like Guo Yan are vocal in their demand that these artefacts be returned to their rightful inheritors in Kaifeng.) The SJI envoy Barnaby Yeh has translated and transliterated the Judeo-Persian *siddur* (prayer book) dating from the 15th century for use during the community's Shabbat and festival services. Through Wang's book they are acquainted with testimonials spanning three centuries of interaction between Jesuit and, later on, Protestant missionaries in Kaifeng.

Ancestral veneration is a predominant feature of Confucian thought and practice. Its practitioners perceive the deceased and living descendants as inextricably connected, with acts of respect to the spirits of the deceased as sureties for their progenies'

⁶¹ The 1663 stele has been missing since the first decades of the twentieth century.

prosperity and success. Religion of any sort was widely vilified under the Maoist regime. Since Deng's policy of opening China and the popular revival of religion, it is quite common for Chinese households to contain altars with ancestral tablets to which incense offerings are made daily. Furthermore, at intervals in the lunar cycle, the Qingming Festival and the Ghost Festival, more extensive offerings of food, beverages, and spirit money are presented. Whether because of their exotic origins or the illustrious ancestral history recorded in the stelae, Kaifeng Jewish ancestry is viewed as a unique phenomenon. For this reason, even Han Chinese males who have "married in" to Kaifeng Jewishness have formed an attachment to the venerable ancestors of their wives.

Related to, yet distinct from, the vertical relationships between the deceased and living that are maintained through ancestral veneration, clan lineage represents the horizontal association with groups of families hailing from the seven Jewish clans (Ai 艾, Gao 高, Jin 金, Li 李, Shi 石, Zhang 张, Zhao 赵).⁶² As it is known that certain clans had specific historical functions, each clan has a sense of its particularity and significance. The Li clan, for example, today the most numerous, once held a special place as the religious officiators in synagogue services; similarly, the Zhao clan, which today still retains a dilapidated building buttressing the ancient site of the synagogue, were known to be both communal philanthropists and synagogal caretakers.

Although most of the customs maintained by their ancestors were lost with the dissolution of the congregation in the mid-nineteenth century, nearly all of the respondents born into one of the clans report being instructed as children that they were forbidden to eat pork. Some of those interviewed claimed that they were also instructed not to consume shellfish.⁶³ Two of the older informants mentioned witnessing the baking of flat breads and the splashing of lamb's blood on the door lintels for Passover. However, in Dr. Wendy Abraham's pioneering 1985 interviews,

⁶² These Jewish clans are referred to in Kaifeng as "seven surnames, eight families" (*qi xing ba jia* 七姓八家), as two separate clans retained the surname of *Zhang*. Today there are no known *Gao* clan members; despite the media prominence of the purported descendant Zhang Xingwang (a.k.a. "Moshe" Zhang), it is generally held that the Zhang clan had left the fold of Judaism for Islam by the turn of the twentieth century.

⁶³ Although it is often assumed that these prohibitions are strictly adhered to, Xu Xin informed me that, in his view, their observance in Kaifeng, as in most Jewish communities, is not ubiquitous.

there was some confusion as to whether the ritual of sprinkling lamb's blood, which is rooted in the Passover narrative in Exodus but excluded from contemporary Jewish custom, actually may have taken place during Chinese New Year (Abraham 1999, 82).

Every one of the Kaifeng Jews born into one of the extant clans recalls being told as a child that they were of Jewish descent and would one day return to the land of their ancestors. This message was frequently accompanied by the prohibition against eating pork or shellfish. Most importantly, until 1996, the message of a Jewish identity would have been reinforced to these children through the official documentation of their local residency cards (*hukouben*, 户口本) where their status was listed as "Jewish" (*youtai*, 犹太).

Compared to the more ephemeral claims of Dimona's Black Hebrews based on Ben Israel's prophetic dream, the authentication claims of the Kaifeng Jews are substantiated by empirical, historical evidence. The Black Hebrews refuse formal conversion or any abrogation of their belief that they—in contrast to those who are classified as such today—are the truly "genuine" Jews. With the exception of activist Guo Yan, who refuses on principle the concept of conversion, the Kaifeng Jews are aware that their Jewishness has not been authenticated, and those able to do so still seek to redress this deficiency by undergoing formal conversion in Israel. Most also wish to see their Jewish status acknowledged by the Chinese government, either through the construction of a viable synagogue or a reinstatement of their Jewish status on their residency cards. However, there is general pessimism that either of these options would materialise.

The State of Israel's Law of Return

As mentioned of the two components to the authentication processes in Israel that affirm Jewish identity, the first is the Law of Return, in which the State of Israel determines the categorical status of a Jew in relation to attaining citizenship. According to Jewish law, or *halakha*, the apparatus guiding the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's administration of religious arrangements for its Jewish population, the criterion for a Jewish identity is simply the parentage of a Jewish mother. Originally, the Law of Return, encoded in Israel's Basic Law, passed in the Israeli Knesset on July 5 1950, allowed for Israeli citizenship to any *halakhic* Jew who requested it:

1. Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh* [immigrant].
2. (a) *Aliyah* [immigration to Israel] shall be by *oleh's* visa.
(b) An *oleh's* visa shall be granted to every Jew who has expressed his desire to settle in Israel, unless the Minister of Immigration is satisfied that the applicant
 - (1) is engaged in an activity directed against the Jewish people; or
 - (2) is likely to endanger public health or the security of the State.

However, with the emergence of the debate on Jewish identity in the late sixties, in March 1970 the Knesset added Amendment 2, clause 4a of which significantly extends that right to those who are not considered Jewish according to *halakha*:

The rights of a Jew under this Law and the rights of an *oleh* under the Nationality Law, as well as the rights of an *oleh* under any other enactment, are also vested in a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his/her religion.

This amendment guaranteed that anyone with any Jewish parentage, including that of a Jewish grandfather or father, as well as the spouses of their children or grandchildren, would be eligible for Israeli citizenship. It has been maintained that the prototype for this broader scope regulating Israeli citizenship mandated by the Law of Return is Hitler's infamous Nuremberg Laws. The conceptual justification is that anyone qualifying as Jewish under those discriminatory statutes leading to the horrific genocide of European Jewry should conversely be eligible to the protection from such discrimination afforded by a Jewish state. Ironically, those notably excluded by clause 4a, i.e. any Jew who *has voluntarily changed his/her religion* would not have been disqualified from either the Nazi death camps or their Jewish identity according to *halakha*.⁶⁴ Other speculative reasons behind the comprehensiveness of this law include the demographic strategy to counterbalance the higher reproductive rates among Israel's Arab population. Furthermore, the religious community in Israel has periodically protested that this amendment serves as a measure to preserve the country's secular majority.

The passing in 1970 of Amendment 2 to the Law of Return, broadening the criteria of those eligible for Israeli citizenship, was in response to events unfolding in Poland; yet,

⁶⁴ Conversion to another religion cannot negate the Jewish status imbued through matrilineal descent, according to Jewish law.

its implementation led to a rise in Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union. The amendment's passage coincided with anti-Semitic purges of Jewish officials instigated by Polish Minister of the Interior General Mieczysław Moczar with the authorization of First Secretary Władysław Gomułka. Moczar's campaign triggered the emigration to Israel of 13,000 Poles with Jewish ancestry, many of whom were naturalised as Israeli citizens under the delineations of clause 4a. In addition, the 1960s witnessed the authorized *aliyah* of roughly 4,000 Russian Jews. In the wake of international pressure on the Soviet Union to ease its restrictive emigration policies and the passage of Amendment 2, between 1971 and 1980 over 300,000 exit visas were granted to those with Jewish ancestry. Following Gorbachev's lifting of emigration restrictions in 1989, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union two years later, approximately 979,000 former Soviet citizens immigrated to Israel, 26% of whom were not *halakhic* Jews but admitted nonetheless under the provisions of clause 4a (Jewish Virtual Library n.d.).

Amendment 2 of the Law of Return generated anomalies in Israeli immigration policies. In 1973 then Chief Sephardic Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef declared that the Beta Israel, the Jews of Ethiopia, should be recognized under the Law of Return. Many of the non-Zionist Ashkenazi *poskim* (rabbinic arbiters) disputed Yosef's ruling, declaring the Jewish status of the Beta Israel to be one of *halakhic safek* (doubt). The 6500 Beta Israel who arrived in Israel during Operation Moses in late 1984 were required to undergo a streamlined conversion ceremony to formally ratify their Jewish status.⁶⁵ For the larger group of 14,325 Beta Israel *olim* arriving during Operation Solomon in May 1991, the process of formal conversion, whether normative or streamlined, was not obligatory. As will be discussed below in juxtaposition to the Kaifeng Jews, controversy over the Law of Return also attended the *aliyah* of Indian groups claiming Jewish descent, both the Bene Israel in the 1960s and of the Bnei Menashe in the nineties.

⁶⁵ This modified version consisted of verbal acceptance of rabbinic law, immersion in a *mikveh* (ritualarium) and, for men, a pinprick on the glans penis as a "symbolic recircumcision". Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira subsequently revoked this last requirement. The prerequisite of the streamlined conversion process, however, was not enforceable; objections to the demand were voiced by some Beta Israel leaders, who viewed it as a repudiation of their inherent Jewish identity.

The political controversy over the Law of Return is not limited to its definition of those qualified to receive Israeli citizenship but rather to its seemingly intrinsic discriminatory program. It grants a Jew born in New York or Moscow the automatic right of Israeli citizenship, which is not similarly bestowed to a Palestinian Arab born in Haifa or Acre prior to 1949 but since living abroad. In 1975 UN Resolution 3379 included Zionism as a form of “racial discrimination”; the resolution was subsequently revoked in 1991. Nonetheless, opponents of Zionism associate the Law of Return as an example of persistent racial discrimination engrained in Israeli policy. Its proponents argue that, rather than a colonialist project, Zionism has consistently been a political movement to allow the Jewish people self-determination and protection from the historical persecution Jews had been subjected to for centuries. In that context, the Law of Return is viewed as an affirmative action to ensure the continuity of a Jewish state and to safeguard its citizens.⁶⁶ Within Israel the Law of Return continues to be a subject of political debate, with those advocating its elimination, while others argue for new amendments to restrict its application only to *halakhic* Jews of matrilineal descent or those who have undergone Orthodox conversions approved by the Chief Rabbinate.

Matrilineal descent and conversion: pathways to Jewish identity

Ordinary Jews view matrilineal descent as a clear and ancient criterion of Jewish authenticity. In fact, matrilineal descent emerged as an authentication process through the gradual shift from a national to an ethno-religious identity that occurred as a result of the Roman destruction of the Commonwealth of Judea in 135 CE and the exile of its inhabitants to the Diaspora. A far more recent historical development is the status of Israel’s Chief Rabbinate as an official arbiter of Jewish law, whose authority is facing increased scrutinisation by the larger segment of non-Orthodox denominations. The next three sections examine the feature of matrilineal descent as a standard of Jewishness, the contentious politics underlying implementation of that standard by the rabbinical authority in Israel and, finally, the historicity of the matrilineal principle itself.

⁶⁶ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Article I (3) permits such a policy of affirmative action “...provided that such provisions do not discriminate against any *particular* nationality” [emphasis added].

Matrilineal descent as the defining feature of Jewish identity differs from the criteria set forth in the other monotheistic faiths. Christian identity is determined primarily by religious faith in the salvation of Jesus Christ, symbolized through the sacrament of baptism (and some secondary initiation rituals specific to the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches). In contrast to Jewish law, *sharia* delineates Muslim identity according to patrilineal lineage. However, any Muslim who subsequently rejects the tenets of Islam—its appellation signifying “submission” to the teachings of Qur’an—relinquishes the status of a Muslim to one of an apostate, or a *murtad fitri*, who, according to the majority of Islamic jurists, is culpable for the death penalty (Ali and Leeman 2008, 10). By contrast, whereas it is possible for a *murtad* to qualitatively become an ex-Muslim, a Jew born of a Jewish mother will forever be considered a Jew. Conversion to another religion, violation of Torah precepts and apostasy, though all deemed grave sins, do not change the Jewish status inherited at birth. From a *halakhic* standpoint there is no recourse to divest of a matrilineal Jewish heritage; the notion of an ex-Jew, in spite of any subjective experience of such, is theoretically an oxymoron.

The immutability of a maternally-endowed Jewish identity contrasts with that acquired through formal conversion. Unlike Christianity and Islam, proselytization is forbidden in Judaism. Accordingly, the *Beit Din*, or rabbinic court, will normally turn away prospective candidates for conversion three times before accepting their candidature.⁶⁷ The Talmud (Keritot; 8b) lists three requirements for potential converts: immersion in a *mikveh* (ritualarium)⁶⁸; ritual circumcision for males; and, when the Temple stood, the conveyance of particular sacrificial offerings.⁶⁹ In addition, the Talmudic commentaries clarify that a thorough understanding of the *mitzvot* (Torah commandments) was

⁶⁷ This is based on the narrative in the Book of Ruth in which Naomi thrice rejects her Moabite daughter-in-law’s plea to accompany her to her Judean homeland. The foundation for the prohibition against proselytization is the complexity of observing the 613 Torah commandments, coupled with the belief that these are not pre-requisites for non-Jews in their attainment of spiritual salvation. Furthermore, converts are regularly forewarned about the persecution Jews have suffered historically and questioned on their potential commitment to a Jewish identity when confronted with such challenges.

⁶⁸ A *mikveh* is a bath containing or in contact with rain water used for the purpose of ritual immersion. In the Torah, the word is employed in a broader sense to indicate a natural body of water.

⁶⁹ Male converts previously circumcised are required to undergo a procedure to extract a droplet of blood from the glans (*hatafat dam brit*).

necessary prior to circumcision and the final stage of immersion, performed in front of a *Beit Din* consisting of three rabbinical judges, or *dayanim*.⁷⁰

Maimonides, one of the earliest codifiers of Jewish law, in describing the process of conversion suggests a certain immediacy in the acceptance of sincere candidates for conversion:

What is the procedure when accepting a righteous convert? When one of the gentiles comes to convert, we inspect his background. If an ulterior motive for conversion is not found, we ask him: "Why did you choose to convert? Don't you know that in the present era, the Jews are afflicted, crushed, subjugated, strained, and suffering comes upon them?" If he answers: "I know. Would it be that I be able to be part of them," we accept him immediately. (Yad; Issurei Biah; 14:1)

However, the contemporary reality of an Orthodox Jewish conversion today, particularly when conducted through the bureaucratic channels of Israel's rabbinate, is hardly as speedy as Maimonides infers. In fact, the most sincere convert will require two to three years to complete the entire process, as has been the case with the Kaifeng Jews who have converted thus far.

Significantly, as previously discussed, although a Jew born of a Jewish mother will always remain Jewish, the same does not hold true for converts to Orthodox Judaism. Since both the study and acceptance of the commandments and laws embellishing them are preconditions to ritual immersion before the *Beit Din*, in they, an abrogation of that commitment removes that previously-acquired Jewish status from the convert. In reality, however, once an aspirant has finally completed the conversion process and received a certificate from the *Beit Din*, it is problematic to police any laxity in observance of Jewish law, particularly those infractions conducted in private.

The "Who Is a Jew?" controversy

Since the dissolution of the Great Sanhedrin in the third century CE, Judaism has had no central authority. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel is a modern, political institution that is not rooted in theological tradition. In fact, the 1947 "status quo agreement" between Israel's future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, a secular atheist, and the ultra-

⁷⁰ One rabbi and two learned members of the community could also constitute a *Beit Din*.

Orthodox *Agudat Yisrael* (Union of Israel) party consolidated pre-existing arrangements for confessional jurisdiction established as part of the “millet system” exercised by the Ottoman Empire and, later on, during the British Mandate.⁷¹ In return for their support for emergent Jewish statehood, the religious community was rewarded with concessions that were meant to provide some guarantees toward the Jewish character to be imbued in a fundamentally secular, democratic state. Among these concessions was the formation of Israel’s Chief Rabbinate, presided over by both an Ashkenazi and Sephardi Chief Rabbi, the latter given the epithet *Rishon Le’Zion* (“the first of Zion”).⁷²

The Chief Rabbinate was endowed with control over all personal status issues including marriage, divorce, burials and conversions. Additionally, it supervises the maintenance of religious sites, certification of kosher products, the funding of rabbinical academies (*yeshivot*) and the operation of local rabbinic courts, which function in an auxiliary capacity to the nation’s judiciary. Since the confessional system endows each of Israel’s religious communities—Christian, Muslim or Druse—exclusive control over marriage and divorce, two Jewish applicants who wish to marry are compelled to do so within the orthodox framework of the rabbinate. The option of civil nuptials does not exist in Israel; any Jewish marriages conducted outside of the rabbinate’s standard procedures by a non-Orthodox officiator are not only invalid but illegal under Israeli law. However, a civil or non-Orthodox Jewish marriage occurring outside of Israel—where representatives of non-Orthodox denominations function as recognized marriage celebrants—qualifies for an authorized marital status upon the couple’s entry into Israel.⁷³ Consequently, if either of the applicants is not *halakhically* Jewish, or if they simply object in principle to a religious marriage, their only recourse is to marry outside of Israel. According to Israel’s Bureau of Statistics, between 2000 and 2005, 47,000 Israelis, around 12% of all who married in that interval, were wed outside of the country, the majority in nearby Cyprus (Zumberg n.d.).

⁷¹ The word “millet” in this context derives from the Arabic word “*millah*”, or “nation”. The millet system allowed non-Muslim minorities to be governed by their own religious courts in matters of personal law.

⁷² The title *Rishon Le’Zion* was first introduced in the 17th century under Ottoman rule.

⁷³ Should the couple ultimately wish to divorce in Israel, even though they have been married outside of Israel in a civil ceremony, they must acquiesce to the formalities of Jewish law to obtain a valid *get* (bill of divorce).

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel also has power over the conversion process. In Israel, only an Orthodox conversion approved by the Chief Rabbinate can impart a certified Jewish identity to the convert. Outside of Israel, where the Rabbinate has no authority, all denominations have the right to conduct conversion ceremonies according to their respective standards. For example, Conservative Judaism, while mimicking the formalities of immersion and circumcision, generally dispenses of the personal commitment to adhere to all aspects of Jewish law.⁷⁴ Reform Judaism establishes Jewish identity through bi-linear descent—that is, either a Jewish mother or father—along with the interfaith couple’s intent to raise their offspring as “Jewish”, though not in the sense of strict adherence to Jewish law.⁷⁵ In any Reform congregation outside of Israel the offspring of any such interfaith relationship in which the mother was the non-Jewish spouse would still be considered as a Jew, despite his unequivocal *halakhic* status as a gentile. A Reform conversion mandates contact with a congregational rabbi to learn about Jewish values, ethics and customs; immersion, circumcision, and commitment to Jewish law, however, are not obligatory.⁷⁶

The Law of Return, with its more elastic parameters, qualifies non-Orthodox converts from abroad for Israeli citizenship. However, once in Israel, the Chief Rabbinate will not consider them eligible for a Jewish marriage, divorce or burial until they undertake a formally sanctioned conversion according to *halakha*. This systemic contradiction generated cracks in the political fault lines buried in the status quo agreement, beginning with the *aliyah* from Poland and the Soviet Union in the early 70s and gaining magnitude with increasingly vociferous calls from non-Orthodox denominations within and outside of Israel for religious pluralism. Furthermore, among other concessions Ben-Gurion offered to the Orthodox was the exemption of

⁷⁴ Conservative Judaism, also known as the *Masorti*, or “Traditional” Movement, an ideological conciliation between Orthodoxy and Reform, is most prominent in the United States, where one of its main founders, Solomon Schechter, established the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 2010 the first Conservative synagogue was launched in Sydney.

⁷⁵ One of the main doctrines of Reform Judaism, elucidated in the 1885 “Pittsburgh Platform”, was the purely historical context of the Torah’s commandments while preserving its moral elements conceptually relevant to modern society.

⁷⁶ A commitment to Jewish law refers to both the six hundred and thirteen precepts of the Written Torah and the details of their observance established in the Talmud and subsequent codifications of Jewish law.

rabbinical students from military service. Ultra-Orthodox, or *haredi* men who constitute 9% of Israel's population, commonly enrol in a *yeshiva*, a seminary for unmarried men, or a *kollel*, for married students. In 2011 it was estimated that 58,000 young men eligible for military service were exempted. (Among the adherents of more centrist orthodoxies comprising 17% of the population, military service is widely embraced, with many of Israel's top brass hailing from Religious Zionist households.) Thus, from the days of Ben Gurion, when only 400 potential rabbis were excluded from the draft, the number of exemptions has risen 15,000%. The secular Israeli majority, whose sons and daughters serve in the Israel Defence Forces yet whose taxes provide monetary support for exempted seminary students, have expressed their political dissatisfaction with this and other inequities and have, over the years, campaigned through various organizations and parties to modify the status quo agreement (Pressly 2012).

One of Israel's main secular protagonists in the status quo conflict was the late Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, a renowned journalist and television presenter who joined the *Shinui* ("Change") Party in the 90s. Later becoming party chairman, Lapid succeeded in garnering six Knesset seats in the 1999 election that brought Ehud Barak into power. In the 2003 elections the party ran on a staunchly secularist platform demanding implementation of civil marriage and a cessation of government funding for religious seminaries. Shinui's electoral success prompted Ariel Sharon to invite the party to join the government, with Lapid named both Deputy Prime Minister and Justice Minister. However, Lapid's attempt to amend the status quo was stymied by the presence in the coalition of Agudat Yisrael, which vehemently opposed any change. More recently, in 2013 the mantle of secular activism has been passed down to Tommy's son, the charismatic Yair Lapid, also a celebrated media personality who in 2012 founded the party *Yesh Atid* ("There is a future").

The Yesh Atid party platform, centred on socio-economic equality and elimination of draft exemptions for the *haredim*, also targeted the status quo agreement, demanding the initiation of civil and same-sex marriages; government funding for non-Orthodox denominations; allowing non-Orthodox denominations control over their congregants' personal status issues; and lifting restrictions on public transportation on Shabbat and festivals. Yesh Atid won 19 seats in the 2013 election and, as the second largest party,

was invited by Netanyahu to sit in the government with Lapid taking up the prestigious position of Finance Minister. Although the ruling coalition in the Netanyahu government excluded the ultra-Orthodox parties, it did include the national religious party of *HaBayit HaYehudi* (Jewish Home). In March 2014 Lapid succeeded in passing a law that finally ended unlimited exemptions for *haredi* rabbinical students. To be implemented in 2017, the bill limits the number of annual exemptions to 1800 “gifted scholars”. Due to the position of Jewish Home supporting the status quo on personal status issues, however, Lapid was less successful in affecting major changes on that front. However, new laws now allow registrants for marriage or conversion to apply to any rabbinic court in the location of their choice rather than that of their actual residence. Lapid’s meteoric popularity has declined in the past two years, since his tenure as Finance Minister has not alleviated the widening socio-economic gap nor the unaffordable price of housing in Israel. Although Yesh Atid still campaigns for religious pluralism and an abrogation of most aspects of the status quo agreement, Israel’s coalition politics tend to preclude any grand solutions to radically reverse the currently prevalent institutional hegemony of Orthodox Judaism (Israel ends ultra-Orthodox military service exemptions 2014).⁷⁷

The historicity of the matrilineal principle

It is commonly assumed that Jewish identity has forever been determined by matrilineal descent. The first Jewish immigrants to Kaifeng practiced patrilocal custom and patrilineal descent, excluding themselves from the onset from an assumption of Jewish identity. In *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties and Uncertainties* (1999) Shaye J.D. Cohen presents historical research documenting the transition from what was traditionally a national “Judean” identity to the ethno-theological identity familiar to contemporary Judaism.⁷⁸ Although this transition was gradually solidified

⁷⁷ The recent 2015 Israeli elections and its inherent coalition politics has since excluded Yesh Atid from a place in government but restored to power the ultra-Orthodox *Shas* and United Torah Judaism. Pundits have predicted that the gains made by Lapid’s party in the previous government are likely to be rescinded in the current one.

⁷⁸ Contemporary Jewish identity is unique in that it partakes of both an ethnic and religious component. Prior to the Roman exile, Jewishness as an ethno-theological concept did not exist; Judeans were defined by their national identity with the Temple in Jerusalem signifying a national temple, similar to the Parthenon in Athens. The implication of Cohen’s thesis is that

over time with the development of rabbinic culture, primarily in the pre-modern European Diaspora, its genesis first occurred during the Greco-Roman occupation and the advent of Hellenism—concurrent with the Mishnaic period and its deliberations on matrilineal descent.⁷⁹ He argues that the idea of matrilineage as a defining factor in identity may in fact have been appropriated from Roman civilization.

The anecdotal assumption that Jewish identity has forever been determined by matrilineal descent is substantiated by a Talmudic postulation. In *Qidushin* 68b the following scriptural verse is used as exegetical evidence of the matrilineal principle in the Torah:

You shall not marry them [the Canaanites] do not give your daughter to his son or take his daughter for your son. For *he* will turn *your son* away from me to worship other gods (Deuteronomy 7: 3-4). [emphasis added]

The exegetic proof in this verse, its fundamental sense related not to genealogy but rather to the dangers inherent in exogamous relations with the idolatrous Canaanites, is that the “*he*” of verse 4 refers to a Canaanite son-in-law who will corrupt “*your son*”, i.e. your Jewish *grandson* born to your Jewish daughter. Had he been the son of a Canaanite daughter-in-law, the verse would not have depicted him using the second-person possessive pronoun, for he would no longer be considered “*your son*”, i.e. as a Jewish child born to a Jewish mother.

Yet, this verse and the orthodox belief in Talmudic infallibility notwithstanding, careful historical analysis reveals that not only was intermarriage a fairly common phenomenon in antiquity but also that matrilineal descent as an indicator of Jewish identity is relatively recent, marking its first appearance in the Mishnaic period around 80-120 CE. (The relevant Hebrew terms in this Mishnah are explained in the paragraphs that follow.):

- A. Wherever there is potential for a valid marriage and the marriage would not be sinful, the offspring follows the male. And what is this? This is the daughter of a priest, Levite or Israelite who was married to a priest, Levite or an Israelite.

matrilineal descent fortified the ethnic component of Jewish identity, while the contemporaneous development of the Talmud and rabbinic law produced its theological aspect.⁷⁹ Likewise, it is during this period that the laws on formalized conversion were introduced in rabbinic literature.

- B. Wherever there is a valid potential for marriage but the marriage would be sinful, the child follows the parent of lower status. And what is this? This is a widow married with a high priest; a divorcee or “released woman” (*halutza* see Deuteronomy 25: 5- 10) to an ordinary priest; a *mamzeret* or a *netina* (see Ezra 2: 43- 58) with an Israelite; a female Israelite to a *mamzer* or *netina*.
- C. And any woman who does not have potential for marriage with this man but has the potential for marriage with other men, the offspring is a *mamzer*. And what is this? This is he who has intercourse with any one of the relations forbidden in the Torah.
- D. And any woman who does not have the potential for a valid marriage either with this man or with other men, the offspring is like her. And what is this? The offspring of a slave woman or a gentile woman (Mishnah Qiddushin 3:12).⁸⁰

Paragraph A of this Mishnah deals with circumstances in which a valid marriage according to *halakha*, known as *qiddushin*, can occur. *Qiddushin* refers to the groom’s acquisition of a contractual obligation to provide his bride with food, clothing and conjugal relations. In such a case the offspring of this union will follow patrilineal descent. The divisions between priest (Kohen), Levite and Israelite, formerly encompassing the twelve tribal delineations, still today determine the order for which a particular Jew is called up to recite a blessing upon the reading of the Torah. However, whether a male or female Kohen, Levite or Israelite, any progeny of the clause A union will be considered halakhically Jewish. Paragraph D depicts a different situation in which the mother, either a gentile slave or freewoman, has no possibility of contracting valid *qiddushin*. In such circumstances, the offspring inherits the status of its mother.

However, this Mishnah applies to only half of the situations of matrilineal descent in exogamous relationships, namely those where the mother is not Jewish. Circumstances in which the mother is *halakhically* Jewish, but the father is not, are treated in a different tractate on levirate marriage, *Yebamot*; the Mishnah there (7:5) indicates that the offspring of a Jewish mother and a father who is a gentile slave or freeman is considered a *mamzer*. The term *mamzer*, which is often erroneously translated into the

⁸⁰ As this Mishnah is quite complex and contains many technical terms, the discussion herein will focus only on the first and final clauses (A and D) which illustrate the principle of matrilineal descent in exogamous, and therefore *halakhically* invalid, marriages. It would fall beyond the scope of this thesis to elucidate the full content of this Mishnah. The lettering of paragraphs has been adapted from Cohen (2001) for the convenience of the reader.

English vernacular as “bastard”, denotes an entirely different category. An offspring of any adulterous or incestuous union as designated by scripture, the mamzer, though inheriting a matrilineal Jewish identity, is forbidden to marry at all. Furthermore, any descendant of a mamzer or female mamzeret is also prohibited *ad infinitum* to marry. Shaye J D Cohen, problematizes the Yebamot Mishnah in the context of that referenced above in Qiddushin 3:12:

It is unclear if this ruling is to be connected with paragraph D of Mishnah Qiddushin 3:12 (since the father lacks the capacity to contract a legal marriage, there is no paternity and the offspring follows the mother), paragraph C (since the mother is capable of contracting a valid marriage with other men but not with this man, the offspring is a *mamzer*), or with some other principle entirely. In any case, the Mishnah penalizes both a man and woman from straying from the fold. A Jewish man who marries a gentile fathers a gentile; a Jewish woman married to a gentile man fathers a *mamzer* (Cohen, 2001).

However, while the ruling in Qiddushin 3:12 that imbued gentile status to the issue of a gentile mother and Jewish father remains undisputed, a robust argument in the Talmudic tractate of Yebamot later repudiated the Mishnaic proposition in Yebamot and determines that the offspring of a Jewish mother and gentile father does not bear the stigma of a mamzer and is considered a full-fledged, *halakhic* Jew.

The notion that Sino-Judaic cultural identity has been hybridized from its original form is a pervasive perception, particularly as that culture currently lacks recognition and authentication. However, the view that European or Levantine Jewish cultures also underwent similar intercultural translations is less common, as the latter is afforded the imprimatur of the authenticator. During the Jewish-Roman Wars (66- 135 CE) the majority of Judea’s population were expatriated to Europe, North Africa and the Levant. The transition from a national to an ethnic identity effected not only an adaptation to the loss of Judean nationhood but also an increase, albeit involuntary, of intercultural contacts. According to Cohen (2001), in his discussion of the reasons for the matrilineal switch, he hypothesizes similar processes of translation as developed in Kaifeng but instead from the dominant Roman to the subordinate Jewish cultures, as triggers for that change.

In this discussion Cohen first points out the palpable evidence that the Torah itself, in its literal form, appears to tacitly endorse both exogamous relationships and patrilineal descent:

In Biblical times the offspring of intermarriage was judged patrilineally. Numerous Israelite heroes and kings married foreign women; for example, Judah married a Canaanite, Joseph an Egyptian, Moses a Midianite and an Ethiopian, David a Philistine, and Solomon women of every description. By her marriage with an Israelite man a foreign woman joined the clan, people and religion of her husband. It never occurred to anyone in pre-exilic times to argue that such marriages were null and void, that the foreign women must “convert” to Judaism or that the offspring of such marriages were not Israelite if the women did not convert (Cohen 2001, 7).⁸¹

Cohen indicates that in the opposite scenario in which an Israelite woman married a non-Israelite man, patrilocal custom would dictate that the wife would then adopt the home, clan and traditions of her foreign husband.⁸²

In addition to referencing the exegesis in Deuteronomy, rabbinic scholarship mentions Ezra as a scriptural source for the rabbinic principle of matriliney. After the termination of the Babylonian exile and return to Israel in 458 BCE, Ezra ordered the expulsion of one hundred and thirteen foreign wives of the returnees along with their offspring:

We have transgressed against our God and have taken in alien women of the peoples of the land! But now there is hope for Israel concerning this. So now let us seal a covenant with our God to send away all of the women and those born from them, according to the counsel of the Lord and those that hasten at the commandment of our God; let it be done according to the Torah. Arise, for the matter rests upon you; and we are with you; be strong and act! (Ezra 10; 2-4)

Those citing this incident as a scriptural foundation of matrilineal descent emphasize that Ezra appeals only for the expulsion of the “alien women” and their progeny as opposed to any alien men. Moreover, his exhortation to act “according to the Torah” would indicate a reference to the canonical basis for defining Jewish identity matrilineally. Cohen argues that such a proof is hardly conclusive: for Israelite women

⁸¹ As Cohen argues in “Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-Biblical Judaism”, despite some instances of anachronistic portrayals of purported conversions of Biblical figures mentioned in the Talmud, historically, conversion did not as of yet exist in Biblical times.

⁸² In exceptional situations where matrilocal custom is followed, the union of such an exogamous marriage is presumed to be Israelite (see Leviticus 24:10).

who were married to foreign men would be subject to patrilocal custom and thus not bound by Ezra's authority. Moreover, the literature of the second-temple period produced after the Book of Ezra continues to represent Jewish heritage solely in patrilineal terms.⁸³ Finally, there is no explicit suggestion from Ezra that the reason for the expulsion is simply the non-Jewish identity of these women and their children; other reasons, such as a deterrent against idolatrous influences, might be plausible.

What, then, is the reasoning that motivated the switch in the Mishnaic period to matrilineal descent? Cohen (2001) presents some of the scholarly explanations grounded in the societal upheavals of that era. These include pity on the offspring of Jewish rape victims of Roman soldiers; a disincentive to Jewish males from romantic liaisons with foreign women; the principle of certainty as to motherhood (*mater certainis; pater incertus*); as well as a view that matrilineal descent is a vestige from a theorised matriarchal structure in ancient Israel. For all of these, Cohen finds appropriate refutations. Although his evidence remains speculative, his hypothesis is not a derivative of social or familial but rather of innovations in rabbinic thinking, which in themselves were influenced by the sweeping changes transforming a nation of Judeans into a religion of Jews:

Although I have failed to discover a definitive solution to our question, I offer two suggestions more plausible than those so far considered. These two suggestions share two assumptions. First, the matrilineal principle is a legal innovation in the first or second century of our era, i.e. that the origins of the principle are to be sought roughly contemporary with its earliest attestation. Second, the principle was introduced not in response to societal need but as a consequence of the influx of new ideas into rabbinic Judaism (Cohen 2001, 10-11).

One of these "new ideas" proposed by Cohen was to be found, paradoxically, in the advanced legal system of the Roman occupiers who besieged Judea, destroyed its Holy Temple and exiled its inhabitants. Within that system, there existed the concept of *justum matrimonium*, a lawful marriage contracted between two partners entitled to a *conubium*, i.e. the authority to contract a valid marriage, a right normally bestowed to Roman citizens only. In the case of such a *justum matrimonium* descent was patrilineal,

⁸³ This literature includes the Qumran Scrolls, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Paul, Acts of the Apostles, the "pseudepigrapha" and the "apocrypha" (Cohen 2001).

and the son became legal heir to his father's inheritance. Without *justum matrimonium*, as in the case of a Roman matron marrying a slave, or a female slave marrying a Roman patron, the status inherited by the offspring is determined by that of the mother. However, a subsequent law, the *Lex Mincia*, probably enacted by Claudius, amended this rule so that cases where *justum matrimonium* could not occur, the status of the lower parent is then inherited to the offspring. Cohen remarks on the symmetry between these Roman laws and the Mishnah in Qiddushin:

The conceptual similarity between the Roman and rabbinic systems is striking. Marriages between citizens produce children whose status is determined patrilineally. Marriages between citizens and non-citizens produce children whose status, in theory at least, is determined matrilineally; but both legal systems tried to equalize the consequences of those who strayed from the fold. A Roman matron impregnated by a non-citizen or slave bears a non-citizen or slave, not a citizen; a Jewish woman impregnated by a gentile or slave bears a *mamzer*, a citizen of impaired status (Cohen 2001, 11).⁸⁴

Cohen's second suggestion represents an internal development of rabbinic Judaism applied to the novel circumstances confronting the occupied Judeans. While matriliney cannot be sourced directly to scripture, the issue of "forbidden mixtures", whether botanical or zoological, is mentioned in a few Torah commandments.⁸⁵ Within the rabbinic discourse on the cross-breeding of animals, prohibited in the Torah, the question arose as the status of the offspring of such a forbidden breeding. Would it be classified according to the species of the father, the mother or an altogether new sort? In Mishnah *Kilayim* 8:4 R. Yehuda maintains that a mule born from the union of a mare and a jackass can be bred with other mules or with pure-bred horses; conversely, a mule born of a jenny impregnated by a stallion is permitted to breed with other mules as well as with other donkeys.⁸⁶ According to the view of Rabbi Yehuda, contradicting a view of the sages that a mule has mutated into a new species entirely and is only permitted to mate with its own kind, the status of the offspring in such cases of

⁸⁴ As mentioned above, this premise from the Yebamot Mishnah was subsequently refuted in Talmudic discussion on the issue.

⁸⁵ *Kil'ayim*, meaning "mixture" or "confusion", can refer alternatively to the injunction against crossbreeding seeds, crossbreeding animals or to the mixing of wool and linen in woven garments.

⁸⁶ R. Yehuda's view in this Mishnah, though contradicted in other rabbinic texts, is accepted as the *halakha* in relation to animal husbandry.

prohibited cross-breeding goes after the mother. Reflecting on this supposition, Cohen concludes:

If this interpretation is correct, the offspring yielded by the mixed breeding both of animals and humans is judged matrilineally. The offspring of a gentile mother and a Jewish father belongs to the species of its mother, just as a mule, in R. Yehuda's view, belongs to the species of its mother. The offspring of a Jewish mother and a gentile father is a Jew but (according to the Mishnah) a *mamzer*, just as a mule, in the sages' view, cannot mate with the kind of either its father or its mother. Even if we reject this interpretation of the debate between R. Yehuda and the sages, the laws of *kilayim*, prohibited mixtures, provide an ideological concept for the matrilineal principle. Jacob Neusner has well-demonstrated the Mishnah's deep and abiding fascination with mixtures and with creatures which, like hermaphrodites, Samaritans and the land of Syria, defy simple classification. The offspring of intermarriage was a conceptual problem which required a solution (Cohen 2001, 12-13).

In summary, the matrilineal principle is a relatively recent adaptation to the advent of Hellenism in Judea and increasing intercultural exchange in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. The tendency to view the patrilineal descent of the Kaifeng Jews as an aberration to tradition, a view supported by its marginalization from authenticated Jewish communities, is rather ironic. Given the regularity of patrilocal and patrilineal practices in Central Asia, it is possible to speculate—impossible to conclusively demonstrate—that the initial Judeo-Persian settlers who arrived in Kaifeng in the period of the Northern Song Dynasty were unaware of the transition to matrilineality that commenced with the Mishnah but was widely proliferated only decades later with the first printing of the Talmud in the sixteenth century. Rather than guilty of abrogating convention through their practice of patrilineality, they may in fact have been preserving an institution that preceded the matrilineal principle by almost two millennia.

China's 1954 ethnotaxonomic Classification Project

Poignantly, nearly two millennia after the rabbis struggled to classify mixtures that “defy simple classification”, the leaders of the People's Republic of China grappled with that very same issue. However, while the Mishnaic sages were concerned with the development of an innovative form of Jewish cultural identity to withstand the demise of the Judean nation, the Chinese Communist Party confronted a reverse problematic: how to integrate a vast number of different cultural identities into the creation of a

cohesive nation. Whereas Cohen hypothesizes that the sages' innovative categorizations may have been affected, whether directly or indirectly, by foreign influences, China's Ethnic Classification Project was demonstrably shaped by Joseph Stalin's criteria for national delimitation and, more significantly, the ethnological taxonomies of an obscure British army officer, Henry Rodolph Davies, who in 1894 had organised an expedition to Yunnan Province (Mullaney 2010, 45).

In Imperial China official classifications of ethnic divisions such as those in the contemporary PRC were non-existent.⁸⁷ So long as one venerated the Emperor as the Son of Heaven and followed the rites appropriate to that veneration, one was considered a subject of the Emperor, regardless of race. As discussed in Chapter 2, the stelae of the Kaifeng Jews and the tribute to the Emperor in the synagogal banner provide evidence of how that community, despite the vast differences distinguishing it from other indigenous sects, was able to maintain both its sense of Jewish and Chinese identities. With the twentieth century supersession of nationalism and communism over the dynastic structures of the past, Chinese identity had to be redefined in a way that could incorporate the diverse ethnic populations of a huge country into a unified configuration. In order to achieve this goal, the Chinese government first experimented with the notion of ethnic self-classification in the 1953 census. The experiment proved to be an abject failure; in Yunnan alone the census wrought over two hundred different ethnicities, only twenty-five of which would subsequently be acknowledged as one of the nation's official 55 ethnic minorities (Mullaney 2010, 50-51).⁸⁸ The census, in which the question on ethnonational identity was open-ended (i.e. a blank space rather than multiple choice), had produced a plethora of ethnicities, in which, for example, adjacent villages separated only by a valley self-classified as distinct ethnicities, generating an untenable situation for the ethnic representation envisioned for the National People's Congress.⁸⁹ The census results precipitated a political crisis for the CPC which triggered the 1954 launch of the Ethnic Classification Project, or *minzu*

⁸⁷ Gazetteers from the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) mention the existence of hundreds of ethnic groups of "barbarians" dwelling in the peripheral frontier provinces of Guizhou and Yunnan (Mullaney 2010, 3)

⁸⁸ The 56th ethnic group, the Han, is said to comprise 92% of China's population.

⁸⁹ In Yunnan the census listed over twenty different self-proclaimed ethnicities with a population of one each (Mullaney 2010, 10).

shibie yundong (民族识别运动), “a collective term for a series of Communist-era expeditions wherein ethnologists and linguists set out to determine once and for all the precise ethnonational composition of the country, so that these different groups might be integrated into a centralized, territorially stable polity” (Mullaney 2010, 3).

Indicative of the urgency with which the government regarded this project, it was conducted in the mountainous terrain of Yunnan, encompassing one of the most ethnically diverse populations worldwide, in a formidable timeframe of less than six months.

Four decades earlier, in *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin had defined the concept of an ethnic nationality as “[a] historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture”. These four benchmarks of similitudes—language, territory, economy and culture—became the foundation of Soviet policy on its resident nationalities. The CPC had endorsed this Soviet prototype as did the local political directors at the Nationalities Affairs Commission, who were delegated to organise the ethnotaxonomic interviews between the researchers and representatives of the various minorities. Indeed, as will be seen in the following section, Stalin’s parameters framed the CPC policy of non-recognition of a Jewish ethnicity in China. However, it was not, as is sometimes assumed by scholars, these Soviet variables that ultimately informed the Ethnic Classification Project and the resultant fifty-six ethnicities which now comprise the “unified, multinational country” (*tongyide duo minzu guojia*, 统一的多民族国家) of the PRC (Mullaney 2010, 10).

In *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (2010) Thomas Mullaney, utilizing a wealth of primary sources made available only in recent years, deflates the myth that the Ethnic Classification Project was a feat of political engineering by the Chinese government. Rather it was the ethnologists who controlled the discourse and reverted to previous taxonomies from the earlier Republican period, guided in large by those delineated in the travelogue of Major Davies, *Yun-nan, the Link between India and the Yangtze*, first published in 1909. As explained by Mullaney (2010, 10-11),

[m]y objective is to demonstrate that the epistemological and methodological foundations of the Classification trace their genealogies, first, outside of the political circles in which scholars often ground their studies of contemporary Chinese ethnopolitics. It was not the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, nor even its team of experts at the Nationalities Affairs Commission, that first decided that Yunnan was home to roughly two dozen minzu. Instead, this decision was reached by Chinese ethnologists and linguists in the 1930s and 1940s, well before Ethnic Classification ever existed, and before anyone knew the Chinese Communists would claim victory on October 1, 1949. And when the Classification was undertaken in 1954... Chinese ethnologists and linguists were at the helm of the project, not the limited number of Communist cadres who took part.

More importantly, Mullaney shows how the methodology of these researchers was not to scientifically calculate an exact, discrete number of ethnicities in Yunnan but rather, by combining, eliminating and even creating classifications, to fashion ethnic potentialities in a system of classification which could subsequently become reified through the promotion of government policies.

Rather than fitting their taxonomy to the subjectivities of their respondents, researchers were trying to mould the consciousness of their respondents to fit the taxonomy (Mullaney 2010, 103).

Thus, it did not matter if the Classification Project produced some glaring anomalies in its production of the figure of fifty-six. For example, the Zhuang and Yi peoples are formed from numerous ethnic groups with mutually unintelligible languages. Yet, three different groups of Achang clans residing in different regions with diverse dialects and no social contacts were determined to be a unified Achang minority. Furthermore, significant minority groups, such as the Hakka and Cantonese, were subsumed under the moniker of the majority Han. The ethnicity of approximately 750,000 Chinese citizens still remains unrecognized, among them the Kaifeng Jews, or subsumed under an altogether different category.

In a similar manner in which matrilineal descent has become imprinted in the consciousness of world Jewry as an ahistorical, synchronic phenomenon, so too the notion of fifty-six discrete minorities has now become an unchallenged actuality in China. Museum exhibits; cultural performances; television programs; “nationalities doll sets”; the exotic spectacle at the opening ceremony of the Olympics; all of these serve to reinforce and reproduce the imagined ethnonational construct of a “unified, multinational country”.



FIGURE 7. A doll set containing the fifty-six nationalities sold online.
(AliExpress n.d., photographer unknown)

Official CPC policy on the status of Kaifeng Jews

In October 1952, prior to the census and Classification Project, Premier Zhou Enlai hosted forty-six delegations of pre-classification minority groups to a banquet commemorating National Day celebrations. The last of the forty-six delegations recorded on the front page of the *People's Daily* was listed as *youtai ren* (犹太人), or “Jews”; it consisted of the two Kaifeng Jewish descendants Ai Fenming and Shi Fenying.⁹⁰ According to subsequent accounts of this event, Ai and Shi had the opportunity to speak personally with Premier Zhou (alternate versions of the incident claimed the meeting was with Chairman Mao himself). When Wendy Abraham later interviewed the Shi and Ai clans in 1985, they told her that when questioned by Zhou (or Mao) as to their ethnicity, their reply that they were Jews was received with silent astonishment. Some days later, the story goes, the CPC branch in the Kaifeng municipality received a letter stating that “among China’s nationalities, there is no Jewish minority; nevertheless, they say they are Jewish, so they must be cared for”

⁹⁰ Urbach (2008, 79) questions whether there was any particular significance to the placement of the Kaifeng Jews at the very end of this list. He also points out that while all other groups were branded with the Chinese postfix *zu* (族), from the Chinese term designating a recognized ethnicity or nationality, the *ren* (人) suffix defining “people” was more nebulous.

(Urbach 2008, 79; Abraham 1999, 84). Whether or not this narrative is indicative of actual occurrences, the declaration in the purported letter encapsulates what would subsequently become official governmental policy on the Kaifeng Jews. Urbach (2008, 98) cites a 1991 report distributed to various administrators in Kaifeng that references the phrase “The Three No’s” (*san bu yuanze*, 三不原则) in relation to policy on Kaifeng’s Jewish descendants:⁹¹ (1) Judaism was not an official religion; (2) Jews were not an ethnic minority; and (3) there are no Jews in Kaifeng. Again, while there is no documented evidence that the CPC cadres used this specific catchword as a synopsis of a formalized strategy toward the Kaifeng Jews, it accurately reflects the conduct of the Chinese government in policy implementation since the time of the 1953 census on ethnic identification until the present.

In April 1953 the United Front of the Bureau of Central South relayed an inquiry to the Central United Front in Beijing to determine whether it might be apposite to consider the Kaifeng Jews as a discrete ethnicity. Although Xu (2006, 94) is uncertain whether this inquiry was a result of claims made by the Kaifeng Jewish descendants or an independent initiative from the local government, he contextualises it within the political movement toward ethnic identification taking place throughout China during that period. The response from Beijing, a handwritten letter dated June 8, 1953 and reviewed by Mao Zedong, employed Stalin’s criteria to reject any intimation that Kaifeng Jews constituted an ethnic minority:⁹²

They have completely mixed and mingled with the majority Han population, in terms of their political, economic and cultural life, neither do they possess any distinctive traits in any other aspect. All this indicates that it is not an issue to treat them as one distinctive ethnic group, as they are not a Jewish nation in themselves...It could cause other problems and put us in a passive position politically if we acknowledge the Jews of Kaifeng. We should take the initiative to be more caring for them in various activities and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them. This will gradually ease

⁹¹ The phrase was used by Liang Ping’an, vice manager of the China International Travel Service in a report on a 1991 conference in Shanghai following the recent rapprochement in Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations. Urbach speculates that the use of such a phrase with a fixed numerical value “almost always represent a widely known political principle”, suggesting that it was one familiar to Chinese officialdom.

⁹² Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping also viewed and approved this document (Xu 2006, 96).

away the differences they might psychologically or emotionally feel exists between them and the Han (Xu 2006, 99).⁹³

The ambiguity inherent in this document has had an enduring influence on China's treatment of the Jewish descendants in Kaifeng. It unequivocally rejects any notion of a separate ethnicity for the Kaifeng Jews and emphasizes the group's assimilation with the Han majority.⁹⁴ Moreover, according to Xu (2006, 95), the threat that recognition of a Jewish minority "could put us in a passive position politically" represented a critical issue in China's political discourse and a stern reprimand to local authorities to preclude any such occurrence. Finally, the approbation of Chairman Mao and the party leadership has imbued this policy document with an almost inviolable status and a tenacious resistance to change. Yet, simultaneously, this document urges the government to actively foster "various activities" undertaken by the group and to prevent any form of discrimination against them. While denying them official ethnic status, it tacitly implied a discreet recognition of both their authenticity claims and a sense of difference for which they were not to be persecuted.

Following the launch of Deng Xiaoping's 1979 "Reform and Opening" policy, the first trickle of foreigners eager to meet with the Jewish descendants began to arrive in Kaifeng. Accurately predicting that the new open-door policy would attract an increasing number of foreigners to Kaifeng and perhaps wondering if novel circumstances warranted a policy shift, in March 1980 the Unity Front of Henan Province queried its central bureau in Beijing as to whether the Kaifeng Jews were to be regarded as a minority group and as to the necessary protocols in dealing with the group in the context of foreign affairs.

The response from Beijing merely parroted the directives that had been issued twenty-seven years earlier:

[W]e believe, as it was not necessary in the past, it is not necessary now for us to recognize Kaifeng Jewry as an ethnic group. However, when we deal with

⁹³ The full text of this document appears in Appendix I.

⁹⁴ Xu maintains that were it not for assimilation, the Kaifeng Jews might indeed have gained ethnic recognition: "It would have been a totally different story had the Kaifeng Jews then lived in the way that their ancestors did before the 19th century – maintaining an observant Jewish *kehillah* [congregation], having a temple of their own, following the Jewish calendar and kashrut, and using Hebrew prayer. In other words, their situation would be different had they not assimilated" (Xu 2006, 96).

them, we should give consideration to the customs they still keep, help them to solve possible problems they may have, and more important, do not discriminate against them.

The reply from the Central Unity Front also indicated that, apart for a few of the community elders, official ethnic recognition was no longer a matter of concern for the majority of Jewish descendants. In its rejoinder to the request for protocols, the document offered the vague suggestion that "some appropriate arrangements be made for representative figures among them" (Xu 2006, 97).

The response from Beijing did little to clarify the Kaifeng municipality's need for clear directives in how to deal with foreigners who were travelling explicitly to Kaifeng to meet with members of a community that did not officially exist. To alleviate that confusion, on July 2, 1984 the Foreign Affairs Office of Henan Province issued a three-point protocol, a copy of which was forwarded to the relevant authorities in Beijing. The following is the complete text of the three-point protocol:

- 1) Stick to the principle of denying Kaifeng Jewry as an ethnic group of its own. Various periodicals and newspapers should carry objective reports both domestically and internationally. Recognize the fact of historical migration, but put emphasis on the freedom and happiness that they have today. Use the terminology "descendants of Kaifeng Jews" when we address them without implying any country or ethnic group in order to avoid any unnecessary controversy. Be lenient to foreign scholars and tourists with the request of visiting Kaifeng synagogue relics, stone tablets and meeting with Jewish descendants. The Kaifeng Foreign Affairs Office will be in charge of their visits politically.
- 2) From the standpoint of historical materialism, we may consider opening the original site of Kaifeng synagogue and stone tablets to the public. The Kaifeng municipal museum could keep historical files of Kaifeng Jewry in one of its exhibit rooms for viewing. A related introduction could also be made in books and paintings for publicity abroad and in tourist brochures.
- 3) Regarding donations made to Kaifeng by Jewish persons from other countries, acceptance could be considered if the donor has no political intentions, and is only doing it out of kindness for renovating historical sites, museums or other welfare purposes. If the donor's purpose is religiously oriented or implying "a Jewish nation," the donation should be turned down with grace (Xu 2006, 98).

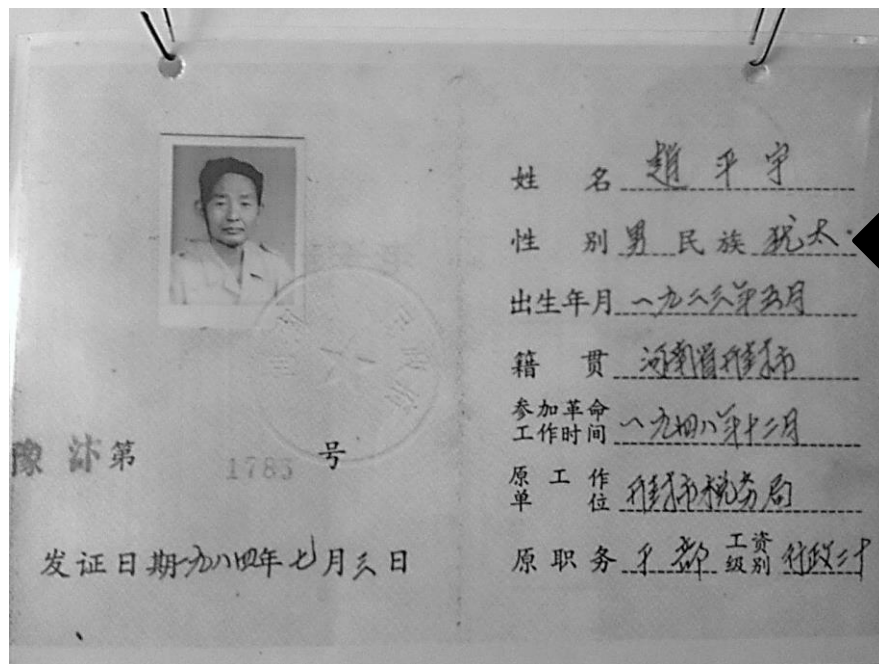


FIGURE 8. The *hukouben*, or household registration card of Zhou Pingyu. The arrow indicates the *youtai* status. (Sino-Judaic Institute n.d., photographer unknown)

As discussed earlier, since the national census on ethnic identification in 1953, the status of “*youtai*” (犹太), or “Jew”, had been listed on their household registration cards until their nullification in 1996 following a series of incidents which severely challenged the parameters of the official policy. In addition to confirming a sense of cultural identity, this ambiguous, unofficial *youtai* status nonetheless granted community members eligibility for certain privileges. Like the officially recognized Hui Muslim minority, they received subsidies for extra lamb and grain during the Ramadan period; similarly, they were also entitled to extra-credit points on any college entrance exams. According to Xu, in spite of the formal repudiation of Sino-Judaic minority status, this listing was not a mistake but an intentional opacity embodied in the policy’s concern toward preventing discrimination of or insult to the Jewish descendants.⁹⁵ In the following decade, the cultural politics focused on the construction of a Jewish history museum in Kaifeng would alter these protocols. The Chinese government’s insistence that Sino-Judaic identity be restricted solely to its historic context would pose a challenge to some of the living descendants who aspired to a deeper form of cultural identification.

⁹⁵ In my discussions with Zhang Tibin (October 1 2013), former Deputy Director of the Kaifeng Foreign Office in the early 1980s, he maintained that the *youtai* status was a vestigial administrative error from the final days of the Qing Dynasty. Xu Xin, in personal conversation (December 1, 2014) insisted that this was not a clerical oversight but deliberate ambiguity.

Claims of cultural authenticity, whether of the more idiosyncratic form espoused by the Black Hebrews or those of the Kaifeng Jews' embedded in an empirical history, are ultimately proven in their ability to construct and cohere a particular culture. As such, it is not their validity but rather the sincerity with which they are transmitted and received that determines their effectiveness in constructing meaning and value for members of a group. While processes of authentication are often perceived in synchronic and ahistorical terms, these processes themselves are likewise developmental constructs. As such, even though such processes may refute the authenticity claims of a particular culture, the refutation may have a negligible effect on the persistent transmission of cultural semiotics. As we shall see in Part Two, the rejection of Sino-Judaic identity by the Israeli and Chinese authorities did little to thwart the revitalization of Sino-Judaic cultural identity at the end of the twentieth century. It is even arguable that efforts to stifle Sino-Judaic cultural identity only served as a catalyst for that revival.

PART TWO

Globalization and Retranslation: The Modern Emergence of the Kaifeng Jews (1979 – present day)

CHAPTER FOUR

Deconstructing the Kaifeng Construction Office and the reconstruction of culture

The second part of this thesis examines the revival and transmission of Sino-Judaic cultural identity beginning with Deng Xiaoping's 1979 policy of "reform and openness". In the remaining decades of the twentieth century, the effects of this policy would catapult China into the ranks of the world's economic powers. (Nederveen Pieterse's *21C globalization*, a periodization that not only refers to increased technological, informational and cultural interconnectedness but also to the ascendancy of China as a major international player, is a reflection of these effects.) Domestically, "reform and openness" also represented a shift from the Maoist period in which traditional cultures were viewed through the prism of "class analysis" and exemplars of tangible culture deemed to be "backward" or "feudal" were destroyed. It brought about a turnaround in which "the direct attacks on material culture cease and the prohibitions against many forms of non-material culture are lifted" (Sigley 2015, 5). This new approach and its implications were reflected in a speech delivered by Deng on October 15, 1979:

The policy of religious freedom has been in practice since 1949... In China, the policy of religious freedom is related to our policy to ethnic minorities, who usually have the most problems in religious affairs. Therefore, the policy of religious freedom must be implemented if we want to carry out a right policy to our ethnic minorities.

Because it had already rejected the 1953 bid for official recognition of a Sino-Judaic ethnicity, however, the government's approach to its new policy on religious freedom to in relations to the Kaifeng Jews remains ambivalent.

The Chinese government, however, was not the only actor to affect, albeit restrictively, the emergence of a Kaifeng Jewish identity. The introduction of foreign tourism to China in the 1980s brought a host of visitors to Kaifeng along with a multiplicity of discourses on the significance and utilization of Sino-Judaic culture. These included notions from ethnologists, businessmen, rabbis, tourists, philanthropists, diplomats, evangelists and government officials, both local and national. Despite these actors'

contradictory perceptions of the Kaifeng Jews, the interest helped catalyse the revival of a heretofore dormant Sino-Judaic identity.

That revival was further stimulated by the 1992 proclamation of President and Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin of the CPC's aim to construct a "socialist market economy", including the development of a "cultural market" (*wenhua shichang*, 文化市场), with local governments urged to locate "cultural resources" to fuel economic growth (Sigley 2015, 6). Consequently, in January 1993 the Kaifeng Municipality announced the launch of the Construction Office of the Jewish History Museum "in accordance with the country's policy in foreign affairs, minorities and religion." The museum was meant to commemorate the historical community of Kaifeng's Jews and was to be modelled after their synagogue which endured for seven centuries. In keeping with official government policy, no reference was made to the living descendants of these Chinese Jews or of the emerging revival of their cultural identity, which had been eclipsed since the destruction of the synagogue in 1849.

Jiang's announcement of China's economic shift coincided with another significant event in the revitalization of Sino-Judaic identity: the establishment of diplomatic ties between the PRC and the State of Israel. For the latter, these ties were of particular significance, as they diminished Israel's international isolation resulting from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israeli policy toward the Kaifeng Jews was guided by both domestic and international concerns. Within Israel, the Chief Rabbinate denied recognition of a Jewish status for the patrilineal descendants of Kaifeng's original Jewish settlers, nor could the Kaifeng Jews qualify for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return. Internationally, so as not to disrupt the burgeoning relationship between the two countries, the Israeli government was careful not to challenge the official Chinese policy that rejected the Jewish descendants' claim to be a recognised ethnic minority.

Chapter Four offers an analysis of Nederveen Pieterse's vertical axis of political, economic and social power relations and their effects on the revitalization of Sino-Judaic culture from 1979 to 1996. In particular, it examines the cultural politics surrounding the launch and ultimate suspension of the Construction Office. Paradoxically, the multiple actors who engaged with the Kaifeng Jews during this period, often with differing interests, fermented the circumstances that initiated the

project, while simultaneously inducing its ultimate collapse. Only a few of the actual Kaifeng Jewish descendants were engaged in the political processes of the Construction Office, but their vocalization of a distinct cultural identity, rather than a mere historical one, contradicted official CPC policy previously endorsed by Chairman Mao and the party leadership. These lone voices contributed not only to the 1996 suspension of the Construction Office but also to the subsequent rescinding of the *youtai* (Jewish) status listed on the community's local registration cards, an anomaly that had persisted throughout the Maoist period despite official policy. In the years following these measures to quell a Sino-Judaic cultural revival, however, a grassroots movement among the descendants themselves would arise to further expedite it. The cultural activism embedded in this movement is discussed in Chapter Five, which focuses on the vertical axis of inherent subjectivities and meanings motivating the Kaifeng Jews to reclaim their cultural heritage.

Historical synopsis

Because the central focus of this chapter is the project to launch a museum of Jewish history in Kaifeng, I begin with a brief historical synopsis that emphasizes the role of the community's synagogue in the preservation of Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic tangible culture.

According to the narrative of the synagogal stelae (1489; 1512; 1663), the Kaifeng synagogue was first built in 1163 during the Yuan Dynasty, nearly two centuries after the first settlement of Persian-Jewish merchants in Kaifeng, then the world's largest metropolis and major hub on the Silk Road. While their brethren in Europe faced untold persecution, the Jewish settlers in Kaifeng enjoyed a seamless integration into their host culture.⁹⁶ They married Chinese women, who adopted the traditions of their Jewish husbands. While maintaining a familiarity with scriptural Hebrew for at least five centuries, the Yicileye incorporated Chinese language and its lateral values into a unique Sino-Judaic hybridisation. This integration reached its peak in the Ming Dynasty with a disproportionate number of Chinese-Jews attaining the superlative

⁹⁶ According to the 1489 stele, the Jewish traders were welcomed by the Song Emperor, who urged them to settle in Kaifeng and to "honour and preserve the customs of your ancestors, and remain and hand them down in Kaifeng" (Xu 2008, 197).

jinsshi (进士) rank in the Imperial Exams. As sea trade eclipsed mercantile traffic on the Silk Road, Kaifeng's economic fortunes gradually diminished, resulting in population migrations that affected the tiny Sino-Judaic community, never numbering more than 5000 at its apex (Xu 2003, 71).

In addition, natural catastrophes wreaked devastation on Kaifeng. Over its eight century history the synagogue was destroyed and rebuilt several times due to flooding of the Yellow River. From the beginning of the seventeenth century until the restrictions imposed on Christian missionaries in 1725, several delegations of Jesuits visited the Kaifeng Jews and reported that the community adhered to many Jewish traditions, including circumcision, dietary laws and the observance of Sabbath and festivals. Père Jean-Paul Gozani, who arrived in Kaifeng in 1698 and lived there intermittently for over 20 years, is credited with producing rubbings of the synagogal stelae. Père Jean Domenge, came to Kaifeng in 1721 and lived there for eight months. Fluent in Hebrew, he was able to catalogue the synagogal library, transcribing a colophon later identified as Judeo-Persian in origin. Domenge also employed his artistic talent to render detailed sketches of the synagogue's interior and exterior design (See Figure 1). The existence of these sketches would factor into the Construction Office project to build a museum of Sino-Judaic history modelled after the ancient synagogue.

By the time of the flood of 1849, continued economic degradation and population erosion left those remaining descendants incapable of supporting further reconstruction of the infrastructure that had served as the matrix of communal identity. With the destruction of their synagogue and the death of the last *zhangjiao* (communal leader), an impoverished congregation sold the bricks and planks of its demolished sanctuary to their Muslim neighbours; its Torah scrolls and holy books were likewise sold, under more dubious circumstances, to a delegation of Anglican missionaries from Hong Kong. Subsequent pleas for assistance from their brethren in the Jewish Diaspora, including the wealthy Jews of Shanghai, elicited only limited relief that could not avert the disintegration of Sino-Judaic culture in Kaifeng (Pollak 1998). Efforts to cohere the shattered community by Anglican Bishop William C White

during his twenty-five-year episcopacy in Kaifeng yielded insignificant results.⁹⁷ Early Western research predicted that with the destruction of their tangible heritage, coupled with intensified assimilation, the extinction of the Chinese-Jews was inevitable (Pollak, 192). It is in this historical context that the 1993 inauguration of the Construction Office and its impetus to a Sino-Judaic cultural resurgence, assumes particular import.

After a hiatus of 150 years during which Sino-Judaic culture was limited to clan lineage and a few vestigial customs, in the late 1980s Christian missionaries arriving in Kaifeng introduced small communal gatherings of the remaining Sino-Judaic clans, teaching them their forgotten Scriptures. Shortly thereafter, Chinese and foreign academics appeared, displaying interest in their histories, legends and traditions. Various American-Jewish entrepreneurs and philanthropists forged an affiliation with worldwide Jewry and a cognizance of its economic prospects. The CITS, which managed local tourism under the auspices of the Kaifeng Foreign Affairs Office, viewed these developments as a harbinger of the financial windfall of Jewish tourism, similar to that already underway in Shanghai and Harbin, where a historical presence of European-Jewish immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively was more familiar to worldwide Jewry. The establishment of the Kaifeng Society for the Research of the History and Culture of Chinese-Jews in Kaifeng (hereafter the Research Society) in 1992 and the Construction Office a year later were designed as means to that lucrative end. While Chinese Communist Party (CPC) officials in Beijing, in particular those from the Foreign Ministry, supported that goal, due to domestic and international concerns, they endorsed the view that Chinese-Jewish culture was part of Kaifeng's history, one in which no hint of a separate ethnic status or a living Sino-Judaic culture was permitted. The State of Israel and its rabbinate, which had granted Israeli citizenship to indistinct Jewish cultures with less historical claims than the Kaifeng Jews, maintained a political interest in denying that status to the miniscule group of a few hundred descendants lest it disrupt its nascent diplomatic relations with China. The contestations in power relations between these conflicting uses of

⁹⁷ "No spark of interest in their history and in the divine heritage of Israel could be aroused in them," White wrote, following his return to Canada in 1925. "They were Jews no longer, either in a religious sense or as a community."

culture served to define the emergent boundaries of Sino-Judaic identity, the resultant politics of the Construction Office and the debacle of its suspension in 1996.

Evangelists, ethnologists, and entrepreneurs

From Father Matteo Ricci's "discovery" of the existence of Jews in China in 1605, until the community's dissolution in the mid-nineteenth century, Christian "evangelists" have been entangled in the developing narrative of Chinese-Jewish identity. Some of that engagement has been motivated by interests to substantiate Christian theological discourse. The Jesuits early attempt to emulate the Chinese-Jews' assimilation of Confucianism's deific terminology and ancestor veneration resulted in the 300 year Rites Controversy; ultimately, the Vatican's rejection of the Jesuits' manoeuvre contributed to the Church's failure to proselytise successfully in China. Furthermore, both Catholics and Protestants were convinced that the Torah scrolls in Kaifeng would yield a divergent representation from their European counterparts substantiating the divinity of Christ. When in 1851 several scrolls were purchased by the Anglican-Chinese delegates, however, they were found to be in exact accord with those found among Jews worldwide (Pollak 1998, 159-163).

The missionaries' vain attempts to revitalise Jewish heritage were inevitably viewed as a first step in bringing the Chinese-Jews into the covenant of the "New Israel" and the messianic faith in Christ. Remarkably, during the three centuries of missionary activity among the Chinese-Jews, there is no documentation of a successful conversion (Pollak 1998, 219- 222). In the late 1980s Chinese Christian missionaries appeared once again in Kaifeng and began organising Sabbath-day (i.e. Saturday) Bible-readings in the homes of some of the Jewish descendants. A decade later an alliance between Christian Zionists and Jewish nationalists in Israel would facilitate the first immigrations of Kaifeng Jews to Israel and their orthodox conversions to Judaism. For the evangelical Christians this immigration was viewed as both a vindication of Biblical prophecy and a prelude to the Second Coming.

The authorities in Kaifeng were—and still are—wary of any missionary activity, particularly when manifested in public displays. In October 1995 the Jewish-American Messianic (i.e. "Jews for Jesus") televangelist Sid Roth petitioned the Kaifeng

municipality to allow his dance troupe to perform at the annual October Chrysanthemum Festival. Since Roth's company offered to perform free of charge, the municipality accepted on the condition that no public displays of evangelising would be permitted. After the performance, however, the troupe was authorized to meet with the Jewish descendants at its hotel, where there were casual musical performances and informal discussions. However, the local TV broadcast of the performance spawned rumours of cash incentives for Jewish descendants willing to convert and triggered a swarm of neighbouring villagers posing as Chinese-Jews overwhelming the hotel. Municipal officials gave orders to the CITS prohibiting the evangelistic dancers' participation in future festivals (Urbach 2008, 115).

Prior to "reform and openness" policy, most academics focused on the Chinese-Jewish descendants did not classify them as "Jews". One of the early pioneers in the "discovery" of a persistent subjective identity and the reasons for its perpetuity was Wendy Abraham, an American-Jewish Sinologist from Stanford University. In August 1985 she travelled to Kaifeng, organised a meeting with the descendants of the seven extant Jewish clans in a local hotel, and conducted audio-taped interviews.⁹⁸ Her research "[a]ttempted to demonstrate that a Jewish identity did in fact exist in Kaifeng and that some degree of Jewish life and customs prevailed" (Urbach 2008, 84). Ensuing research (Eber 1999; Ehrlich and Liang 2008; Plaks 1999; Sharot 2007; Urbach 2008; Xu 2008) endorsed Abraham's findings, suggesting that assimilation with Confucianism and its practice of ancestor veneration served as a paradoxical preservative, rather than a corrosive, to the protracted sense of Sino-Judaic identity. Although those interviewed expressed little interest in religious Judaism, there was a general sentiment that with "reform and openness" they would eventually be recognised as a legitimate ethnic minority (Urbach 2008, 88). The initial spotlight Abraham cast upon the living Jewish descendants did not go unnoticed by the authorities in Kaifeng; Abraham was subsequently detained and interrogated by state security agents (Ehrlich and Liang 2008, 287; Urbach 2008, 84).

⁹⁸ Ai 艾, Gao 高, Jin 金, Li 李, Shi 石, Zhang 张, Zhao 赵 are the names of the seven clans. Originally, there were said to be seventeen specific Sino-Judaic clans, but only descendants of these seven live in Kaifeng today.

In the early 1980s the Jewish-American Congress began incorporating Kaifeng into their tours of China. The CITS, in conjunction with the local Foreign Affairs Office, coordinated scripted meetings with Wang Yisha (王一沙), curator of the Kaifeng Museum and an expert on Sino-Judaic history, along with a few selected Chinese-Jewish elders. In 1985 Rabbi Arnold Belzer of the prestigious Mickve Israel Congregation in Savannah, Georgia, a bastion of the American Reform Movement, led a prayer service together with some of the Kaifeng Jewish descendants. Belzer subsequently arranged a Bar-Mitzvah ceremony on the top floor of the Kaifeng Museum for the son of mixed Chinese and Jewish-American parents. This type of arrangement became popular with other mixed couples who “found in Kaifeng a historic symbol of a fusion of the two cultures” (Urbach 2008, 84). Notably, the Reform Movement’s acceptance of bi-lineal descent differs from Orthodox Judaism’s matrilineal criterion of identity. As such, apart from the discourse of the “exotic” establishing Kaifeng as a nascent Jewish tourist destination, the Chinese-Jews buttressed Reform Judaism’s platform embracing patrilineage, while offering historical evidence as to its potential for cultural longevity.

These processes were allowed to occur on the condition that they were kept hidden from the public eye. In 1989 the Jewish-American magnate Marvin Josephson, married to a Chinese woman asked Belzer to arrange a similar Bat-Mitzvah ceremony for their daughter in the Kaifeng Museum. En route the celebratory party was greeted in Beijing by US Ambassador James Lilly (Urbach 2008, 93). Apparently, due to the prominence of the delegation, word reached certain Beijing officials who had been unaware of these ceremonies. Firm orders were delivered to the Kaifeng CITS to cancel these religious observances. Due to the mediation of certain Kaifeng officials, a last-minute compromise was reached: the service was allowed to proceed in the Josephson hotel with no Chinese-Jews in attendance and with cardboard cut-outs of the stelae provided courtesy of the CITS. Josephson, a potential investor in Kaifeng’s development, left the city disillusioned and frustrated (Ehrlich and Liang 2008, 290).

Belzer was not only active in promoting Kaifeng tourism but also instrumental in the 1985 establishment of the California-based Sino-Judaic Institute (SJI), of which he is currently president. The SJI is an advocacy group of Sinologists, Judaists, rabbis and

Jewish activists with the primary goal of aiding a revival of Kaifeng Jewish culture. However, given the attitude of the Chinese government to high-profile foreign intervention in the Kaifeng Jewish issue, the group would devote many years agonising over the appropriate strategies to achieve this goal. At an SJI meeting in November 1988 Belzer put forth the suggestion that “a physical structure of some sort in Kaifeng would go a long way in encouraging a renaissance among the Jewish descendants.” Due to the sensitivity of the matter, however, the general approach has been “[t]o abstain from any activity of missionary nature and merely to offer assistance to any native initiatives” (Urbach 2008, 85-86).

In summary, in the decade following “reform and openness” foreign actors articulated novel dimensions to develop the contemporary Sino-Judaic discursive narrative. First, the work of Christian evangelists brought the Kaifeng Jews together in small groupings to relearn the Old Testament, shifting the focus of identity from an isolated clan to a more communal perspective. Second, the collective memories, legends, customs and family histories were validated as authentic aspects of a subjective Sino-Judaic identity. Finally, the attraction they held to many prominent foreign Jews reflected on their own sense of communal esteem as well as on the material prospects these relationships implied. Yet, as already witnessed, the interactions between the Kaifeng municipality and the Beijing central government regarding the aforementioned developments were fraught with contradictory interests that would be exacerbated with the participation of a third actor in this paroxysmal bureaucratic tango: the State of Israel.

An irreconcilable threesome

As discussed in Chapter Three, according to the Talmud, matrilineal descent has always been the normative measure of Jewish identity. Therefore, Jewish law (*halakha*) circumscribes the status of Jewishness either by Jewish matrilineage or ritual conversion. A different standard, however, is applied to the Israel’s Law of Return, under which a person is entitled to automatic Israeli citizenship. Here the definition expands to include patrilineal descent. The rationale behind this is based on the Nazis’ criterion of Jewish identity: as any trace of Jewish blood qualified for Hitler’s death camps, any such individual should in theory be awarded the ostensible protection from persecution afforded by a Jewish state. Since the establishment of the State of

Israel, various groups who cannot be defined as *halakhic* Jews have nonetheless been granted entry under the Law of Return: 120,000 of the Beta Israel from Ethiopia, 350,000 of Russian immigrants and, more recently, around 2,000 of India's Bnei Menashe. Nevertheless, in spite of the documented evidence of their past Jewish heritage, Kaifeng's Jewish descendants have not been authorised for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.

When China established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, the newly-appointed Israeli ambassador, Dr. Zev Suffot, visited Kaifeng to ascertain the status of its Sino-Judaic community. Although a commission from the Jewish Agency had planned a visit to Kaifeng to investigate the Chinese-Jews' eligibility under the Law of Return, in a subsequent memo Suffot strongly discouraged pursuing any further inquiries: "To claim they are Jews is absurd; there is nothing between these people and Judaism. It is obvious that this is the utter misuse of a term that has an objective meaning, not only *halakhic* but also as an objective definition" (Urbach 2008, 99-100). Suffot's objectivist standard has had an enduring effect on Israeli policy ever since, though domestic and international politics have undoubtedly fortified this position.

Compared to the inflexibility in Israeli policy, the policies of the Chinese government toward the Kaifeng Jews have been ambivalent. In the wake of the first visits to Kaifeng by delegations from the Jewish-American Congress, an article appearing in *Time* magazine in February 1985 and entitled "New Hope for the Jews of China" concluded that "[t]he prospect that they may be soon be able to rebuild their synagogue has given the Jews of Kaifeng new hope that their long years of decline are finally over" (Urbach 2008, 85). In an apparent response on July 16 1985, the Religious Affairs Bureau of the State Council of China (*Guowuyuan Zongjiao Shiwu Ju* 国务院宗教事务局) issued a decree proclaiming that:

In China there used to be a Jewish nationality, but they have long been assimilated into the Han nationality (*tong Han minzu ronghe* 同汉民族融合). Our country does not have Jewish *minzu* [ethnicity] and does not have Jewish religion: therefore, the question of building a synagogue does not exist (Urbach 2008, 94-95).

A few months thereafter the Kaifeng municipality, fearful of endangering its position with the central government, issued an embarrassing denial of the foreign journal's fabrication and of any complicity in the supposed project (Urbach 2008, 85).

Despite the 1953 request to recognise a discrete Sino-Judaic ethnicity, the Central United Front of the CPC, following a government investigation and with the approval of China's top leadership, ruled that "Kaifeng Jewry should be treated as a part of the Han nationality" (Xu 2008, 199-201).⁹⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, this verdict had been qualified by the caveat that "[w]e should take the initiative to be more caring for them in various activities and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them." (Xu 2008, 205). Over the years the central government's policy on the Kaifeng Jews has wavered within this polarity of absolute negation and conditional acceptance. With the onset of "'reform and openness'" Deng Xiaoping equated China's new policy of "religious freedom" with an appropriate strategy toward its ethnic minorities.¹⁰⁰ Yet, in part because of its exclusion as both a recognised religion and ethnicity, the approval of "various activities" of the Sino-Judaic community has been provisional on these not crossing a perceived cultural threshold; whenever it did so, it tended to provoke a critical reaction.

Apart from the Chinese government's political motives in maintaining control of its system of ethnic classification, there are other implicit policy elements which preclude acknowledgment of a contemporary Sino-Judaic identity. One of these, applicable prior to diplomatic relations with Israel, was apprehension of disrupting China's alliance with the Arab states, who at that time supplied the major part of China's energy needs (Urbach 2008, 97).¹⁰¹ Related to this was anxiety about Kaifeng's Hui Muslim population, who comprise more than 90% of Kaifeng's minority population. Finally,

⁹⁹ This group included Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping.

¹⁰⁰ China's Policy of Religious Freedom, issued on October 15, 1979, states: "The policy of religious freedom has been in practice since 1949... In China, the policy of religious freedom is related to our policy to ethnic minorities, who usually have the most problems in religious affairs. Therefore, the policy of religious freedom must be implemented if we want to carry out a right policy to our ethnic minorities."

¹⁰¹ This fear was first articulated in a 1998 file from the Foreign Ministry and the China International Friendship Association to the Kaifeng CITS: "Any attempt to reconstruct a Kaifeng Synagogue, even as a museum, will no doubt raise the suspicions and concerns of some Arab countries about our diplomacy" (Ehrlich and Liang 2008, 289).

and perhaps most crucial, is the perception that Sino-Judaic links to a global network of Jews with political and financial clout could erode governmental control (Urbach 2008, 132- 134). In contrast to its hesitancy toward Kaifeng's Jews, the Chinese government has actively promoted its unique role in Jewish history in Harbin and Shanghai to attract an increasing number of Jewish tourists.¹⁰² As the only nation which absorbed Jewish refugees after the onset World War II in these two cities, it might be assumed that China would be inclined to stress its exceptional treatment of its own Kaifeng Jews, who have resided securely in China for more than a millennium.¹⁰³ It appears, however, that whatever the public relations coup achieved by such a tactic is outweighed by the purported strategic risks.

More than the Kaifeng Jews themselves, it is the city of Kaifeng that has borne the brunt of the central government's ambivalence. In 2004 the per capita GDP for Kaifeng was ¥7,250 with a comparable figure of about ¥41,000 in Beijing. Any visitor to Kaifeng immediately observes that the phenomenal urban development that characterises most Chinese cities has bypassed this historic capital of the Northern Song. As mentioned above, the arrival of Jewish visitors and potential investors in the 1980s did not fail to catch the attention of Kaifeng's municipal leaders, in particular its branch of the CITS. Although today there are some Jewish tours of Kaifeng, these pale in comparison to the number of organised tours of Jewish Shanghai or Harbin. Although there are a few fragments of Kaifeng Sino-Judaic heritage preserved in different locations, as well as some "exhibitions" managed privately by some of the descendants, the general reaction of a Jewish tourist to Kaifeng is that there is very little to see.¹⁰⁴ This sentiment was first expressed in an official seven-page document dated November 4, 1990 entitled "A New Attempt—Developing 'Kaifeng Jews' Tourist Resources",

¹⁰² The Harbin Main Synagogue, which for several decades functioned as police headquarters, has recently been renovated and opened to tourists. Similarly, in 2010 the Ohel Rachel Synagogue of Shanghai, closed for sixty years, was refurbished with an additional building housing a historical exhibition.

¹⁰³ Leslie (1972), Pollak (1998) and Xu (2003) all refer to China's unprecedented absence of anti-Semitism. It is probable, however, that this trend was attributable to the indistinctness of this tiny, insignificant group among China's large populace.

¹⁰⁴ The stela are kept locked away on the attic floor of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum for viewing by foreigners only with an additional fee of ¥50. The Qing-Ming Millennium Park has a special historical exhibition of Kaifeng Jewry, but this too is closed to the general public and only opened for foreigners with the payment of a special fee. The Shanxi Shaanxi Guild Hall similarly houses a small exhibit on the historic Chinese-Jewish community.

Procrastination and No Solution Yet” (hereafter “A New Attempt”) and written by the vice-manager of the CITS, Liang Ping’an.¹⁰⁵ In addition to detailing the inadequacy of Kaifeng-Jewish tourist resources to stimulate the city’s moribund economy, in this first appeal to lobby for a “Jewish assembly hall site museum” Liang circumspectly addresses all of the concerns underlying pertinent national policy. These include: non-recognition of Kaifeng Jews as an ethnic minority; no attempt to restore or introduce Judaism as a religion; the absence of Arab unease over developing Sino-Israeli relations; and the guarantee that the proposed museum would service tourist or academic ends only (Urbach 2008, 95- 96).¹⁰⁶

In May 1992, three months after the establishment of official ties between China and Israel, the Municipal Government of Kaifeng established the Research Society, in what would be the precursor to the Kaifeng Construction Office.¹⁰⁷ The local government paper *Kaifeng Daily* (*kaifeng ribao*) offered a guarded account of this development. It portrays the venture as “a non-governmental, academic society”, makes no mention of any living descendants and proclaims its aim as a means of promoting Kaifeng’s “external culture and economic relations.” When referring to the historic Chinese-Jewish community, it employs the archaic and linguistically obscure attributive adjective Yicileye (一赐乐业, i.e. Israelite) rather than the contemporary *yiselie* (以色列, i.e. Israel) in what Urbach (2008, 101-102) suggests is “[a] rather sophisticated attempt to unlink the historic Kaifeng Jews and the modern State of Israel.”

The Research Society was instituted as an independent body with minimal CITS representation. Professor Zhao Xiangru 赵相如, a Kaifeng descendant who “came out” with his Sino-Judaic identity only three years’ earlier, was appointed chairman of the Research Society. His deputy was Wang Yisha, who had been relieved of his curatorship of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum several years earlier.¹⁰⁸ The eccentricities

¹⁰⁵ *Xinde changshi—kaifa “Kaifeng youtairen lüyou ziyuan”—chichi de bu dao jiejie* 新的尝试—开发“开封犹太人旅游资源”—迟迟不到的解决.

¹⁰⁶ In his “A New Attempt” appeal Liang utilises the analogy of the Great Wall and Forbidden City, which, though both considered prime tourist attractions, are not indicative of any official endorsement of China’s feudal society. Similarly, the construction of a Sino-Judaic history museum would not represent any approval of Judaism or Chinese-Jewish ethnicity.

¹⁰⁷ *Kaifeng youtai lishi wenhua yanjiuhui* 开封犹太历史文化研究会.

¹⁰⁸ It may be presumed that, from the authorities’ viewpoint, Wang’s position as museum curator clashed with his personal interest in Kaifeng’s Jews. Wang’s protégé, Liang Ping’an,

and personal rivalries of these two men would prove pivotal in the erratic developments of the Sino-Judaic narrative.

The divergent articulations of Kaifeng-Jewish culture by China's central government, the State of Israel and the Kaifeng Municipality have produced a fluctuating ambiguity that persists to this day. In its support of the Research Society, the Chinese government fortified its longstanding policy that Sino-Judaic culture should remain restricted to its historical and touristic aspects. Yet, as Urbach (2008, 102) puts forward, the Research Society's historiographic purview "[l]egitimated—to a certain degree—the contemporary existence of this group as a unique entity." The government of Israel, constricted by the rulings on Jewish identity by the Chief Rabbinate and its nascent, fragile relationship with China, would not be inclined to offer any form of recognition to this marginal backwater of purported Jewish culture. Finally, while economic incentives certainly motivated the Kaifeng Municipality, "A New Attempt" also articulates an appreciation for the distinctive place of Sino-Judaic culture in Kaifeng's history, while positioning this sentiment with its potential to attract Jewish tourist dollars. As becomes apparent, the PRC, State of Israel and the Kaifeng Municipality held irreconcilable views on the meaning and uses of Sino-Judaic cultural identity. Moreover, the flux in power relations between these three generated tensions that have had considerable impact on the revival of Kaifeng Jewish heritage. It is, however, in the establishment of the Construction Office that a tangible form of that heritage came precariously close to fruition. Ironically, the reckless performances of those chosen as its leaders would play a notable part in its ignominious downfall.

Fatal antagonisms

Although Wang was neither a Jewish descendant nor a certified academic, he was the Han pioneer of Sino-Judaic scholarship, beginning his extensive research as early as the 1960s. His magnum opus, the three-volume *Spring and Autumn of China Judaism* (*Zhongguo youtai chunqiu* 中国犹太春秋) published in 1993 based on numerous interviews that demarcate the oral histories of Kaifeng's Jewish descendants, is conceivably the modern Chinese equivalent of Bishop White's influential work (Liang

concurr that Wang's forced retirement was due to his persistent study on the Kaifeng Jews (Urbach 2008, 81; fn.56).

n.d.)¹⁰⁹. On the other hand, Zhao, a Kaifeng Jewish descendant himself, was a senior scholar at the Institute of Nationality Studies (*minzu yanjiusuo*, 民族研究所) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (*Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan*, 中国社会科学院) in Beijing specialising in the language and culture of the Muslim Uyghurs. Wang, ever reticent and conservative, despite three decades of contacts and friendships with the Jewish descendants, strictly adhered to the governmental ideology emphasizing their historical rather than cultural status. Zhao, a belated champion of his Jewish heritage, was nonetheless vociferous in advocating a distinctive Sino-Judaic identity and a revival of its culture (Urbach 2008, 91- 92).

Already in 1989 Professor Zhao announced a bold plan to establish a National Jewish Institute incorporated into the central government. To achieve this, Zhao initiated contact with the SJI in the hope to link it with his projected institution. He also speciously predicted that the advance of diplomatic ties with Israel would trigger Beijing's support for a revitalisation of Sino-Judaic culture. The fact that Zhao, a prominent Chinese academic, was able to make these public proclamations without governmental rebuke, may have prompted Liang Ping'an in 1990 to advocate for a Kaifeng Jewish history museum (Urbach 2008, 92). Following the inauguration of the Research Society, Zhao reported to the SJI its ostensible aim to "rescue, restore and protect the cultural relics of the ancient Jews of Kaifeng"; this assertion was in contradistinction to more modest parameters ascribed to it in the *Kaifeng Daily* and was at remarkable odds with the official stance. Zhao also recounted a May 1992 meeting with Kaifeng officials where agreement was reached to launch a project to rebuild a model of the ancient synagogue to serve as Sino-Judaic history museum along with a guesthouse to accommodate tourists. Zhao concludes: "I hope that on behalf of the SJI, we can establish a foundation abroad to raise the building fund by soliciting contributions (Urbach 2008, 104).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Chinese Jews: A Compilation of Matters Relating to the Jews of K'aifeng Fu* (1942, 1966)

¹¹⁰ Urbach (2008, 92) suggests that Zhao probably overestimated the "size and importance" of the SJI. Today the SJI hosts 250 members, most of whom are academics. Its policies have generally been inclined to scholarship over activism, although offering qualified assistance only to autonomous, non-controversial efforts of the Kaifeng Jews.

In time the Research Society—which in fact produced only token and insignificant research—became itself an attraction for Jewish tourism in Kaifeng, with some tour companies offering the opportunity “to meet with local Judaic scholars”. With the publication of Wang’s *Spring and Autumn of Chinese-Jews*, tensions between Wang and Zhao began to simmer. Zhao was critical of Wang’s contentions that the Kaifeng Jews had completely assimilated into Han culture as well as its declaration that the group’s inbreeding had produced a higher rate of mental retardation (Urbach 2008, 105). In August 1992 both men had been invited to speak at a conference at Harvard University, though Wang, due to deterioration of his health, did not attend. During his talk Zhao claimed that the Kaifeng Jews found themselves in a precarious situation with the Chinese government restricting their practice of Judaism. In order to validate the religiosity of Chinese-Jews, he made the false claim that, when hosting gentiles who ate pork, the Kaifeng Jews had the custom of smashing the dishes used by the guest.¹¹¹ His imprudent remarks reached the ears of Chinese officials; when the Research Society convened later on that year, Wang, who had been appointed the new chairman, announced Zhao’s dismissal as both chairman and board member.

To this day, Wang Yisha has become the standard-bearer for Sino-Judaic scholarship in China with many notable academics like Nanjing’s Xu Xin (徐新), Shanghai’s Pan Guang (潘光) and Kaifeng’s Zhang Qianhong (张倩红) paying tribute to his efforts. Zhao Xiangru, on the other hand, was a cultural activist who seemed to display a regrettable knack for impropriety. Yet, his dismissal from the Research Society did not hamper him from pursuing his extravagant crusade on behalf of a Jewish revival in Kaifeng as an unofficial, but active force in the Kaifeng Construction Office.

The internecine politics of the Construction Office

When the Construction Office was finally established as a subsidiary of the Research Society in January 1993, Wang Yisha was again awarded the position of managing director; Guo Aisheng (郭爱胜), head of the Municipality Personnel Regulation Office and first secretary of the Research Society was appointed as a vice-director but effectively its chief administrator; the academics Xu Xin and Pan Guan were selected as

¹¹¹ This custom is actually prevalent among some of the Hui, the subject of Zhao’s primary research.

advisers; more significantly, two representatives from Kaifeng's Jewish descendants, Zhang Xingwang (张兴旺), a.k.a. Moshe Zhang, and Jin Guangyuan (金广元), a.k.a. Shlomo Jin, were appointed as functionaries to the Construction Office. The official order emphasized that the creation of a Kaifeng Jewish History Museum was to be "in accordance with the country's policy in foreign affairs, minorities and religion." The third paragraph states:

Following this office's establishment, through the friendship between the Chinese people and the world Jews, Kaifeng's name is to be famed. The office must advance the city's openness, contribute to its economy, promote technological and cultural ties, attract investments and technologies, and promote the economic advancement of Kaifeng.

Though Professor Zhao had been excluded from any official capacity, Guo understood that his standing with Jews overseas would be vital to the success of the venture; and so, early on he established and maintained contact with him. Parallel to the rivalry of the scholars Wang and Zhao in the Research Society, the Construction Office's two Chinese-Jewish representatives, Zhang and Jin, engaged in a contentious altercation for communal leadership. Zhang, a protégé of Wang, leaned toward the orthodox government policies limiting Sino-Judaic culture to its historical dimension while Jin tended toward Zhao's cultural activism; in this regard, their divergence reflected the dichotomous articulations of discourse—one for internal consumption in China, and another for the benefit of world Jewry—that emerged with the inauguration of the Construction Office.

In addition to his position as a functionary in the Construction Office, Zhang was eventually appointed as the Jewish descendants' representative to the local Political Consultative Committee, from which he was able to coordinate with the CITS contacts with any institutionalised tour groups visiting Kaifeng. The Jewish descendants allege that Zhang used this position not only for personal profit but also to inform to the authorities of any activities deemed politically inappropriate (Urbach 2008, 106; Ehrlich and Liang 2008; 307). Moreover, it has been claimed that Zhang is in fact a Hui Muslim and that his Sino-Judaic identity had been engineered by Wang in compensation for the former finding him a young bride after the death of his first wife. Nonetheless, Moshe Zhang retained his position on the Political Consultative Committee until 2005.

Despite his ostracism from the Kaifeng Jewish community, he is still occasionally spotlighted in the media as a representative of Chinese-Jews.

Unlike Zhang's dubious identity, the Jin family owns the sole, extant Jewish burial grounds in Kaifeng, ornamented with memorial plaques extolling the clan's ancestors. During the Cultural Revolution Shlomo Jin's father was a victim of frequent public denunciations, routinely castigated as a "Zionist" spy. After Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the elder Jin participated in the first scripted dialogues organised by the CITS between Kaifeng's Jewish descendants and foreign visitors. After his father's death in 1981, Jin received permission to bury him according to Jewish ritual, overriding the Chinese law mandating cremation. The Jin family cemetery is one of the few sites of Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic heritage tourism (Urbach 2008, 121-122). Thus, while Zhang and his protégés entertained the official tour groups organised through CITS, Jin and his clan members surreptitiously continued their unauthorized contacts with both Chinese-Christian missionaries and individual Jewish tourists. With Wang Yisha becoming ill with cancer and Zhao Xiangru still operating in a clandestine capacity, Jin's group gradually aligned itself with Guo Yisheng, who was perceived as the official most capable of achieving results in the Construction Office (Urbach 2008, 118).

Despite being consigned to a background role, Zhao managed to remain in the forefront with his strident views. Shortly after the founding of the Construction Office, he attended a conference in Kaifeng at Henan University, accompanied by the American-Jewish Sinologist and SJI board member Andrew Plaks. Also in unauthorized attendance were fifty Kaifeng Jewish descendants, the largest such public gathering of Chinese-Jews since the 1919 conference arranged by Bishop White. During this event, Zhao called on the descendants to actively revitalise Sino-Judaic culture, restore Judaism (*huifu youtaijiao* 恢复犹太教) and, in what appears to be a contradictory imperative, consider the necessary procedures to immigrate to Israel. Word of Zhao's indiscretions reached the United Front in Beijing; he was summoned to the "[U]nited Front for intensive interrogation and forced to sign a confession of guilt and 'self-criticism' papers." He was also placed under house arrest, fired from his prestigious university post, defined as a "dangerous element" and prohibited from returning to Kaifeng (Urbach 2008, 110 -111)

In January 1995 an English language broadcast of the *Zhongguo Xinwenshe* (中国新闻社) news service, brought national attention to the developments in Kaifeng:

They [the Jewish descendants] demand the government to recognise them as a minority. The government of Kaifeng said that it would support their activities commemorating Jewish history and agreed to collect and keep the relics of Jewish ancestors. But the State Nationalities Affairs Commission said that there was no adequate evidence to prove Jewish as one of the minority nationalities in China (Urbach 2008, 113).

Three months later, frustrated by Zhang's increasing control of foreign contacts and his scrutinization of Jin's ongoing associations, Jin visited the Israeli Embassy in Beijing to inquire about the status of Kaifeng Jews under the Right of Return. To his chagrin, he was not allowed to meet with any embassy officials; after obstinately sitting for two days in the embassy's waiting room, he was forcibly removed from the premises by security guards. Jin was traumatised by the event; he claims to have been ill for a week before he could deliver the verdict to his fellow Jewish descendants that "Israel has forgotten us". Nine months later in January 1996 the mayor of Kaifeng issued an order closing the Construction Office and suspending all of its pending projects. Although no particular reason was put forth, the decision was clearly a reversal of the previous policy predisposed to the development of tourist resources for the Chinese-Jews of Kaifeng. The mayor's edict was followed by intensive police surveillance of all Chinese-Jewish activities, including the gatherings with Christians in the Jin homestead (Urbach 2008, 122-124).

After the suspension of the Construction Office, Jin and two companions again tried to obtain Jewish status for *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) by having a notarised affirmation of the "youtai" (犹太), or "Jewish", classification on their local household registry certificates¹¹², or *hukouben* (户口本), which they subsequently had authorised by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Beijing. While they were again denied entry into the Israeli Embassy, the three Kaifeng Jews were nonetheless buoyed by the Chinese government's authorization of their notarised Jewish status. A month later, however, the United Front together with the Kaifeng police announced that all Kaifeng residents

¹¹² The system of *hukou*, which dates from ancient China but was institutionalised with the founding of the PRC, differs from the more recent Resident Identity Cards (*jumin shenfen zheng* 居民身份证) first issued in 1985, in which ethnic classification is limited to one of the fifty-six recognized minorities.

registered as “Jewish” would be compelled according to law to change to Han or Hui. The police also searched Jin’s home in a vain attempt to locate the erroneous certificates. This official erasure of Kaifeng Jewish identity caused great embarrassment for Jin and his companions (Urbach 2008, 123-124). Following the United Front order, police shadowing of Sino-Judaic gatherings only increased. In 1999 with the help of a group of Finnish Christian Zionists, Jin left with his wife and daughter for Helsinki, and from there, with the assistance of the Israeli NGO Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), was able to enter Israel.¹¹³ Jin wrangled with the authorities for several years before he accepted the need for conversion; finally, he and his wife converted and celebrated their marriage according to Jewish law in 2005 (Ehrlich 2008, 293-294).

The onset of China’s policy of “reform and opening” brought to Kaifeng numerous actors and groups with conflicting discourses on the uses of Sino-Judaic culture. Christian missionaries from Hong Kong gathered the diverse clans together as a community and reintroduced them to Biblical texts. Foreign and Chinese researchers, such as Wang, Xu and Abraham, imbued in the descendants a reawakening to their historical and cultural significance. The visits to Kaifeng by foreign Jews, including wealthy entrepreneurs, ended their prolonged isolation and linked them to a global network of perceived kinship with potential economic opportunities. Although their status as Jews went unrecognized by both the Chinese and Israeli governments, the CITS capitalized on the prospect of foreign investment in Kaifeng’s stagnant tourist industry and the consequent launch of the Construction Office offered the descendants a glimmer of hope that this might change. However, both the vocal activism of Zhao Xiangru and the attempts by Jin Guangyuan to formally procure Jewish status clashed with Beijing’s policy restricting that identity solely to its historical dimensions. The suspension of the Construction Office and the revocation of their *hukouben* status ultimately dispelled any further expectations of official recognition. Yet, the cultural politics of this episode had already supplied the momentum to a cohesive sense of community and its potential for cultural revival. The seeds planted through the divergent encounters engendered through “reform and opening” would be nurtured and cultivated in the ensuing decade, with the descendants themselves actively

¹¹³ *Shavei Yisrael* is an organisation dedicated to assisting marginal Jewish communities worldwide.

engaged in the development of their cultural heritage and the gradual reconstruction of their Sino-Judaic identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

The promises and constraints of Sino-Judaic cultural activism

The previous chapter outlined the effects of globalization in revitalising the latent cultural identity of the Kaifeng Jews. These effects included the convergence of actors, institutions and processes which aligned to generate the political events surrounding the launch and subsequent suspension of the Construction Office. The advent of academics, clergy and businessmen in Kaifeng served to cohere the disparate clans into a more communal structure and reacquainted them with basic Jewish traditions and scriptural narratives. These foreign individuals—and, in some instances, their respective organizations—were the primary drivers of the cultural politics of the nineties that resulted in the establishment of both the Research Society and the Construction Office. Only a select few of the Kaifeng Jewish community were involved in these political processes; few were aware of the events that triggered the suspension of the Construction Office in 1996. On the other hand, the revocation in that same year of the *youtai* (Jewish) status on their local registration cards discussed in the preceding chapters—an abiding ambiguity that had not only affirmed their ancestral identity but also entitled them to certain economic and social benefits—was an event that had a profound impact on the entire group.

Chapter Five chronicles the cultural activism which developed following the events of 1996 and resulted in increasing communal engagement with Sino-Judaic cultural heritage from the onset of the twenty-first century until the present. Despite the chronology suggesting a causative factor, it is not entirely clear that the cultural revival which commenced at the start of the twenty-first century was triggered by the revocation of their Jewish status in the nineties.¹¹⁴ In fact, the stimuli for an invigorated revitalization of Sino-Judaic identity had already begun in the previous decade; some

¹¹⁴ Urbach (2008, 125) suggests that the increasing foreign contacts of the eighties stimulated a connection with and positive perception of the “mother-group” of world Jewry, influencing the reconstruction of identity and communal self-representation. He further proposes that the “... local authorities’ wish to develop an ethnically and religiously ‘sterile’ project ended up encouraging an emergence of an identity thought by all to be dead”. While there may be some veracity in the second notion, it seems uncertain to what extent the drive to self-representation had already achieved a momentum of its own and how extraneous circumstances have impacted on that development.

of the individuals and NGOs who were part of that initial impetus continued to be instrumental in subsequent forms of communal activism. In the framework of this thesis, this chronological coincidence overlaps the conceptual shift from Nederveen Pieterse's horizontal axis of external exchanges—social, political and economic—to the vertical axis of shared meanings and subjectivities motivating individual actors to partake in the group's revival of its latent cultural heritage. Some of the endeavours in this quest have included the launch of community centres, restoration of Hebrew language skills, promotion of Jewish education, celebration of the Sabbath and festivals, sharing in ritual prayer, exchanges with foreign tourists and clergy, participation in special domestic and overseas programs, and *aliyah* (immigration to Israel).

The central focus of this chapter is on the communal associations and individuals which have actively engaged in the renewal of a Kaifeng Jewish cultural identity. To provide background to this engagement, it first examines the anomalies of Sino-Judaic activism in the broader context of cultural heritage politics in China. It then introduces three of the foreign NGOs who have provided the main support for Sino-Judaic cultural activism: The Association of Kaifeng Jews, a Christian Zionist evangelical group formed solely to assist Kaifeng Jewry; The Sino-Judaic Institute, an academic institute for the study and support of Jewish history, education and tourism in China; and Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), an organization dedicated to bringing peripheral Jewish identities worldwide back to the fold of Judaism and the Land of Israel.

Over the past fifteen years there have been three main communal centres for Sino-Judaic cultural activities with connections to the aforementioned NGOs. These are the Yicileye School, the Beit Hatikvah (House of Hope), and, finally, the centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng.¹¹⁵ The Yicileye School was established in 2003 and lasted nearly a decade. It was supported by a curious alliance of Christian Zionists from the Association of Kaifeng Jews and Jewish nationalists of Shavei Israel. In 2010 clan squabbles together with accusations of missionary activities prompted a

¹¹⁵ Yicileye School (*yicileye xuexiao*, 一赐乐业学校); Beit Hatikvah (*jia zhi xiwang*, 家之希望); and Centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng (*kaifeng youtai shequ*, 开封犹太社区).

breakaway from the Yicileye School and the formation of the new centre, the Beit Hatikvah. Maintained initially by the Sino-Judaic Institute with intermittent educational envoys later furnished by Shavei Israel, Beit Hatikvah introduced more religious studies and traditional practices into its curriculum. Finally, in August 2013 Shavei rented a larger building—complete with kitchen, courtyard and guest bedrooms—to function as a facility to amalgamate the two rival groups into a centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng. The attempt at uniting the community proved to be transient, however, as in June 2014 the police ordered its shutdown on the pretext of noise disturbance.

The three individuals represented in this chapter express diverse forms of cultural activism. Jin Guangyuan, mentioned in Chapter Four as one of the two Kaifeng Jews on the board of the abortive Construction Office, has consistently advocated for Sino-Judaic cultural renewal, though he maintains that only through *aliyah* can that be actualised. By contrast, Shi Lei, a licensed tour guide for the company Jewish Heritage Tours of China, highlights the descendants' link to past history rather than contemporary culture. Shi was the first Kaifeng Jew to receive a scholarship to an Israeli university. Because of his knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism, along with his command of English, he has lectured and appeared in the local media in the US and Canada. Shi is a favoured contact for Chinese academics, as his activism for historical culture conforms with official policies. Finally, Guo Yan, who is the granddaughter of Zhao Pingyu, one of the first generation of activists in the post-Maoist era. She calls for recognition of the Kaifeng Jews as an authentic cultural expression of a unique blend of Judaism. Guo, who has a teaching degree in Chinese language and excellent English skills, has hosted numerous foreign tourists in her ancestral home alongside the site of the old synagogue and has published her own blog. Like her grandfather, she sees the reconstruction of the historic Memorial Hall as the means to ensure an efficacious revival of Sino-Judaic cultural identity.

Though the development of Sino-Judaic communal structures has been disrupted by both intracultural frictions and scrutiny by local security, it has nonetheless progressed from a primarily social function, to a more religious orientation and, finally, for a short period, as a unified community in a structure suitable for its logistical needs.

Moreover, this development was supported by shifting alliances among the three NGOs with competing ideologies. While those shifts can be seen as representative of their own interests, they also reflect shifts in the development of cultural identity among the Kaifeng Jews. Before exploring that narrative, however, we first review the anomaly of the Kaifeng Jews in the wider framework of cultural heritage activism in China.

Anomalies of Sino-Judaic cultural heritage activism

As discussed earlier, the “reform and openness” policy initiated possibilities for cultural heritage activism that had been precluded in Maoist China. According to Lai (2003, 42) there are three categories of religious practice experiencing revivals in contemporary China:

1. **The five big, officially recognized religions**, namely, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. These religions enjoy relatively well-demarcated places of worship and open and publicized nationwide associations.
2. **Unofficial religions**, comprising underground churches, sects related to the big five yet not recognized by the state, and Tibetan Buddhists and Xinjiang Muslims who challenge Beijing's control.
3. **Indigenous religions, or folk religions**. Folk religions come in varied and diffused forms, including utilitarian ancestor or lineage worship (worshipping one's ancestors so that the ancestor's soul can intervene on behalf of its living descendants), local god worship, divination, geomancy (most notably *fengshui*), witchcraft (sorcery, exorcism and planchette writing), physiognomy, and certain taboos. Many of the folk religions tend to vary across regions, and their followers generally believe in several at any one time.

China's officially recognized religions are carefully monitored by state security. Elements that do not conform to the state's regulatory measures, such as China's underground churches, “[r]isk suppression and the destruction of unauthorized religious buildings” (Oakes and Sutton 2010, 15); the outlawed Falun Gong falls into this second category with the challenge they pose to state control. The third category of popular Chinese religion, in the Maoist era viewed as primitive superstition, is one that is nearly impossible for the state to manage. As such, the beliefs and practices in this category are generally subsumed under the broader classification of “culture” rather than “religion” (Oakes and Sutton 2010, 16).

For all intents and purposes, the practice of Kaifeng Judaism should be outlawed. According to the “Three No’s” policy discussed in Chapter Three, (1) Judaism is not an official religion in China, (2) nor are Jews considered one of its fifty-five ethnic minorities, (3) nor—consistent with this doctrine—are there any Jews in Kaifeng. Consequently, the Kaifeng Jews should be treated no differently than the unofficial underground churches or the illicit Falun Gong. This is even more the case when the 1953 CPC policy document identified any semblance of a Kaifeng Jewish ethnic identity as a factor that “[c]ould cause other problems and put us [China] in a passive position politically” (Xu 2006, 99). According to Xu, this caveat from half a century ago has been an ongoing and serious concern for the Chinese government (private conversation, December 2014).

Yet, the same policy from 1953, reiterated in 1980, calls upon local officials to take care not to discriminate against the Kaifeng Jews. Cryptically, it demands that the authorities nurture their pursuit of “certain activities” and allow them to maintain their “cultural practices” (Xu 2006, 97-99). Thus, Sino-Judaic practice, as opposed to an ethnic identity, falls more under the third category of popular religion. To the Chinese security apparatchiks, chanting hymns on the Sabbath eve, eating matzos on Passover or lighting candles on Hanukkah all appear as cultural practices that are not only tolerated, but even encouraged, under the CPC’s policy. However, any vocal assertions of Jewish identity, whether ethnic or religious, particularly of the kind that attract international publicity, have at times elicited repercussions by the local authorities. These have included increased surveillance, questioning by state security officials, deportation of foreign organizers and closure of the group’s facilities.

Yet, there is a second reason why Kaifeng Jewish cultural practice is tolerated, one perhaps even more significant than obedience to any official party policy. That reason correlates with the 1992 directive of Jiang Zemin to develop a “cultural market” to stimulate the Chinese economy (Sigley 2015, 6). The 1990 document produced by Liang Ping’an, the local CITS vice manager, *A New Attempt—Developing ‘Kaifeng Jews’ Tourist Resources”, Procrastination and No Solution Yet*, is as relevant today, twenty-five years later, as it was at that time. Before the suspension of the Construction Office, it had produced architectural plans for the proposed museum of Kaifeng Jewish history,

detailed a budget of over three million dollars and enlisted the support of enthusiastic donors. Even today speculation about this lavish scheme to develop Kaifeng Jewish tourism—which was suspended rather than voided—still persists and makes its way into the international media, often provoking the sort of official reactions described above. Yet, despite the lamentable state of Sino-Judaic tourist infrastructure—the concealment of the stelae, the closure of the Qingming exhibit and the meagre pictorial illustrations in the Shaanxi Hall—a few intrepid Jewish tourists still make their way to Kaifeng. Some of these may visit with descendants in the home of Shi Lei or purchase hand-crafted trinkets from Guo Yan’s home display; a few may even celebrate a Kabbalat Shabbat service with the group on Friday night. Their numbers, however, cannot compare to the many Jewish tourists who visit Shanghai or Harbin, where the state has invested heavily into the tourist infrastructure commemorating these historic communities of Jewish expatriates in China. Nonetheless, the authorities are acutely aware that the Kaifeng Jews have established links with foreign tourists; that awareness, and the tacit encouragement of those links, may be another cause for the official ambiguity toward the expression of Sino-Judaic cultural heritage.

The supporting NGOs

The NGOs that support Sino-Judaic cultural activism do not have a visible presence in Kaifeng. Yet, without their financial, moral and psychological support from afar, it is unlikely the cultural identity of the Kaifeng Jews could have manifested as it has. While this chapter focuses primarily on the local institutions and actors engaged in Sino-Judaic activism, a cursory examination of those supporting, foreign organizations provides a context to the various views and activities of the former.

The Association of Kaifeng Jews (AKJ) was an organization dedicated to the advancement of the Kaifeng Jewish descendants with an exclusive focus on assistance to the Yicileye School. Founded in 2004 by a group of Hong Kong Christian evangelists, the group is listed in the U.S. as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization based in Hampton, Virginia at the address of John Lerner, the father of the Yicileye School’s founder, Timothy Lerner. On its now-defunct website, it stated its organizational aims:

The AKJ is a non-denominational group dedicated to helping the Kaifeng Jews better understand their Jewish heritage and faith... The AKJ seeks to help those Kaifeng Jews who wish to return to the Land of Israel (Aliyah), and their Jewish faith... The AKJ also supports different religious and social activities in Kaifeng in order to help foster a communal spirit amongst the Kaifeng Jews.

With the closure of the Yicileye School in 2013, the website of the AKJ was subsequently removed, although the group is still officially listed as a charitable organization in the US. While accusations that the intent of this organization is in fact the proselytization of the Kaifeng Jews, the evidence supporting such allegations has been questionable. What is not in question is the eschatological foundation of Evangelical Christianity, namely, that the Second Coming, as prophesized in Isaiah 11:12, is predicated on the return of the Jewish exiles from the four corners of the earth to the Land of Israel (Knighton 2007). Thus, the Kaifeng Jews are in some respects viewed as instrumental in that process.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the Sino-Judaic Institute (SJI) was founded in 1985 in response to the opening of Kaifeng to foreign tourism and an interest in assisting the Kaifeng Jews. The scope of SJI's activities, however, comprise all aspects of Jewish-Chinese relationship. Included in the "fields of work" on its website's homepage are research on the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng; cooperation with Chinese authorities to promote Kaifeng tourism; study of Jewish life in Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin, Hong Kong and elsewhere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; enquiries on Sino-Israeli relations; support of Jewish Studies initiatives in China; grants to scholars, authors, filmmakers and others to pursue research or creative endeavours in the field of Sino-Judaica; and international cooperation with scholars and students in Sino-Judaic studies (Sino-Judaic Institute 2009).

Unlike the AKJ or Shavei Israel, the Sino-Judaic Institute does not promote or assist in emigration from Kaifeng. On the contrary, SJI openly expresses its commitment to support the "Kaifeng Jewish descendants"; it commits to doing so, however, "*as appropriate*". Already in 1988 the SJI decided to abstain from any "missionary activities" and to support only "native initiatives". That initial restraint has continued until today; in general, the authorities in Kaifeng have adopted a tolerant approach commensurate to SJI's measured engagement in Kaifeng.

Shavei Israel is the most recent of the NGOs described herein. In comparison to the AKJ and SJI, the scope of its activities is broader, and, to facilitate its extensive global activities, it has a larger annual budget. Because some of its activities in Israel and abroad, including Kaifeng, have provoked controversy, it warrants a more detailed examination.

Shavei Israel CEO Michael Freund, a syndicated columnist for the Jerusalem Post, previously served as Deputy Director for Communications & Policy Planning of the Prime Minister's Office during Benjamin Netanyahu's first term. After resigning in 1999, he partnered with Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, who back in 1975 had established the non-profit group Amishav (My People Return). Amishav is dedicated "[t]o research and activity on behalf of the dispersed of Israel, in particular, research regarding the fate of the Ten Tribes" (Amishav n.d.). Rabbi Avichail has travelled throughout India, Burma, China, Thailand and Japan to Europe and South America in pursuit of the dispersed tribes of Israel after the Assyrian exile of 722 BCE. Of particular interest to him were a group of indigenous tribes in India's North-Eastern border states of Manipur and Mizoram. The Mizu, Kuki and Chin had been converted to Christianity from their native animism by British missionaries in the nineteenth century. Three decades before Avichail's arrival, in 1951 their tribal leader Challianthange, who was familiar with the Old Testament, had a dream that the original religion of his people was in fact Judaism. Despite historical and genealogical evidence to the contrary, based on some generic similarities, such as the occurrence of three seasonal festivals, and the veneration of an illustrious ancestral spirit known as Manmási, Avichail named this group the "*bnei menashe*", the "children of Manasseh". His organization Amishav has facilitated the *aliyah* of around 1,000 of the Bnei Menashe.

However, within two years after their partnership, Freund quarrelled with Avichail and set up his own foundation, Shavei Israel. With an annual budget of a million dollars, much of which Freund privately finances, Shavei has surpassed the Amishav effort in locating the Lost Ten Tribes by including "[c]rypto-Jews, hidden Jews, and self-proclaimants". Shavei Israel has conducted activities with Russia's Subbotniks, the Inca Jews and the Jews of San Nicandro, none of whom claim descent from the Ten Tribes or a genealogical Jewish heritage.

As posted on its website, Shavei Israel defines its mission as extending “[a] helping hand to all members of our extended Jewish family and to all who seek to rediscover or renew their link with the people of Israel to offer assistance.” The need for this mission is outlined in the next section on the webpage:

The Jewish people are currently facing a demographic and spiritual crisis of unprecedented proportions. Our numbers are shrinking, Jewish commitment is waning, and more and more young people are leaving the fold. And yet, simultaneously, an extraordinary awakening is taking place. From northeastern India to southern Spain, from the coast of Portugal to the shores of Brazil, countless numbers of people are trying to make sense of their Jewish ancestry, wrestling with profound questions of history, identity and self. Many are literally knocking on our collective door, looking for a way to enter.

This presents the Jewish people with a tremendous opportunity to reinforce its ranks and reinvigorate its spirit by extending a courteous hand to all those who wish to return. Shavei Israel is the only Jewish organization today that is actively reaching out to “lost Jews” in an effort to facilitate their return. We are not merely a research team. We approach each case on a human level, lending guidance and understanding in tracing Jewish roots, exploring Jewish history and evaluating options for returning to the Jewish people (Shavei Israel n.d.).

In a *Jerusalem Post* column of September 2001 entitled “Finding ‘Lost Jews’” and addressing the demographic issue in Israel, Freund is more explicit in defining the link to “the people of Israel” than Shavei’s online mission statement infers:

The fact is that there are plenty of people out there in the big wide world who would like *to move to Israel* [emphasis added]. The problem is that most of them are not Jewish. While many are no doubt motivated by economic reasons, there are countless others who are sincere in their desire to be Jews and it is incumbent upon Israel to at least explore the possibilities that such populations present.

As an ardent religious Zionist who offers outspoken support for the notion of Greater Israel, Freund would view the link with the people of Israel and its ancestral homeland as synonymous. The “demographic crisis” of “unprecedented proportions” facing “the Jewish people”, is, more precisely, the political crisis of Israeli and Palestinian demographics. Shavei Israel’s main focus, therefore, is assisting the various communities in conversion and *aliyah*.

Shavei Israel’s greatest quantitative success has been with the Indian tribes in Manipur and Mizoram. After appropriating that mission from Amishav, Shavei Israel has so far facilitated the *aliyah* of more than 2,500 Bnei Menashe immigrants. Granted entry to

Israel in 2005 under the Law of Return by Israel's chief rabbi, there was subsequent controversy with the revelation in 2006 that these new immigrants were being accommodated in settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Immigration was then halted but, with the change of government, resumed again in 2013. Apart from Freund's assistance to the Jin family back in 1996, since the new century Shavei has facilitated student visas for the eleven Kaifeng immigrants, who underwent three years of religious instruction prior to formal conversion and the acquisition of Israeli citizenship. One of those young men, Yakov Wang, has been studying for rabbinic ordination in Jerusalem. When finally ordained, he intends to return to Kaifeng and serve as the first communal rabbi in more than 200 years (Freund 2014). There are currently five young female Kaifeng Jews who have been accepted into the program and are awaiting formalization of the necessary processes.

Shavei Israel has been the subject of critique in Israel's left-wing media. In a column in *Ha'aretz* from February 2015 ("How a Former Netanyahu Aide Is Boosting Israel's Jewish Majority, One 'Lost Tribe' at a Time"), Judy Maltz accuses Shavei Israel of exploiting the Bnei Menashe to expedite a demographic shift in the West Bank. She also shows how the ruling of Rabbi Amar which granted them visas to enter Israel under the Law of return was misrepresented as a confirmation of the group's Jewish descent. Furthermore, since the Bnei Menashe immigrants are brought into Israel privately by Shavei rather than by the Immigration Ministry, they are not entitled to receive government support. Many of them who were sent to live in the West Bank were never informed of the area's disputed status and believed they were living in the Jewish state. Maltz claim that many of them are living in poverty, with two or three families in one home, yet are afraid to voice complaints lest it deter the chances for their relatives in India to join them in Israel.

Through his lawyers, Freund has denied the suggestion that the Bnei Menashe are unhappy in their current situation. Like the situation many new immigrants face, the difficulties they encounter need to be measured against their sense of satisfaction in joining together with the Jewish nation. Freund's supporters, who would similarly view Judea and Samaria as an integral part of the Jewish state, regard Freund as a

latter-day Moses, leading his exiled people—the “lost Jews” of the planet—back to their homeland.



FIGURE 9. Members of the Yicileye School celebrate Rosh Hashanah.
(Association of Kaifeng Jews n.d., photographer unknown)

The Yicileye School: A Judeo-Christian impetus

Since his arrival in Kaifeng in 2002 Tim Lerner’s activities with the Kaifeng Jewish group provoked some controversy.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, the Yicileye School (一赐乐业学校) he established through his informal contacts with the Sino-Judaic community has played an important role in the reconstruction of its identity. According to Ehrlich and Liang (2008, 301), Lerner had received a visit at his parents’ home in the US from the same Beijing Christian missionary who had facilitated Jin Guangyuan’s immigration to Israel via Finland. This missionary apparently accompanied Lerner to Kaifeng and introduced him to the Jewish descendants. Lerner then began regular meetings in his apartment with a group of descendants, teaching them Hebrew and Biblical history. As the numbers increased, the group was provided funds by its Christian supporters to rent out a small storefront on the second floor of a run-down commercial complex.

In 2004, together with a group of Hong Kong evangelists, Lerner established The Association of Kaifeng Jews (Ehrlich and Liang 2008, 301). As mentioned above, this

¹¹⁶ Lerner is also known by his Hebrew name Naphtali (נפתלי).

group adhered to the theological view of Christian Zionists that a precondition of the Second Coming was the return of worldwide Jewry to Zion. Utilising the talents of other exchange students in Kaifeng, Lerner organised classes in Hebrew for different age groups. As most of these students were secular Israelis, the classes were focused on Hebrew language skills and modern Jewish history rather than religious subjects. The classes were generally held on Friday afternoon prior to the onset of the Sabbath and on a Sunday or weekday. At the time of my first visit in 2009, the school conducted its advanced classes for its younger members in a loft above a pub nearby Henan University. In addition to the social gathering on Friday evening for a Shabbat Kiddush and communal meal, the *kehillah* (congregation) gathered together regularly to celebrate the Jewish holidays. (In 2011 Lerner proudly informed me that over 100 descendants had attended the Passover Seder that year.) In 2004 Michael Freund, CEO of Shavei Israel, visited Kaifeng together with rabbis Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat, and Eliyahu Birnbaum of the Israeli Ministry of Religion. During that visit the rabbis did not detect any signs of missionizing activity. Subsequently, the Yicileye School, in coordination with Shavei Israel, facilitated the *aliyah* of four young women in 2006 and seven young men three years later.

Despite intermittent surveillance by local security during the decade of the Yicileye School's existence, its operations generally proceeded without disruption. However, in 2007 Ehrlich (2007, 303) had observed that Lerner seemed "a touch paranoid", an observation confirmed four years later by the latter's refusal to allow me to photograph or video any of the community's activities. He was also careful to keep the front window of the storefront draped shut with a wide curtain during their Friday evening Kiddush.

Lerner's caution, however, can be attributed more to the authorities' responses to his personal indiscretions than to his direction of Sino-Judaic cultural activism. Lerner has had his visa revoked on two previous occasions following allegations of missionizing local Christian congregations (Ehrlich 2007, 306). Following these deportations, he



FIGURE 10. Yakov Wang (far left) and six other Kaifeng Jews pose in front of the Jerusalem's Great Synagogue. (Shavei Israel 2010, photographer unknown)

managed to return to Kaifeng and was employed as an English teacher at Henan University until 2012. In an article in the online Wall Street Journal of August 16 2011 Lerner publicly asserts his affiliation with Messianic Judaism but also his contention that his objective has never been to proselytize but rather to reacquaint the Kaifeng Jews with their forgotten heritage.¹¹⁷ In spite of the controversies, Lerner is highly regarded by most in the community as an effective leader who coalesced the different families into a viable communal structure and, more significantly, unlocked the doorway to the promise of finding a better and more Jewish life in their ancestral homeland of Israel.

Beit Hatikvah: the transition to religious culture

In 2010 American exchange student Eric Rothberg, while working as a volunteer teacher in the Yicileye School, discovered what he claimed was missionary literature. Rothberg, who is an observant Jew, no doubt had more qualms than previous secular Israelis may have had regarding Lerner's theological eccentricities. Lerner claims that prior to Rothberg's accusation, there had been wrangling among the clan factions over control of funds. Whatever the reason, in early 2011 a breakaway school called Beit

¹¹⁷ Davis, Bob. 2011. "Chinese Jews Face Existential Questions". *Wall Street Journal Online*. August 16. <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424053111904007304576496022880806338>

Hatikvah (House of Hope, 希望之家) was established in a residential apartment block opposite the Kaifeng Children's Hospital. At first Rothberg organised private funding to cover the rent, but the Sino-Judaic Institute stepped in at an early stage to cover the expenses. Shavei Israel, which had similarly dissociated from the Yicileye School following Rothberg's allegations of Christian missionizing, contributed by sending an envoy from Israel for a period of several weeks to serve as a volunteer teacher while residing on the premises. Unlike the secrecy of the Yicileye School, the Beit Hatikvah featured a sign in Chinese next to the entrance door openly announcing its charge as a centre of Jewish education and culture.¹¹⁸ In fact, the Beit Hatikvah established by Rothberg would allow the group to transcend the social activities of the former school and integrate new aspects of Jewish religious life, most significantly, the shared ritual of the Kabbalat Shabbat prayer service on Friday evenings.

Whether or not this development was a reaction to Lerner's alleged missionary activities or simply a natural progression in the evolution of self-representation is unclear. What is certain, however, is that following Eric's departure from Kaifeng in late 2010, the Beit Hatikvah had to employ its own resources to continue its educational and cultural activities.¹¹⁹ In this respect, they were pleased to display the small media library adjacent to the main meeting room used for the prayer services. With a computer and large-screen monitor hooked up to the Internet, the Beit Hatikvah library also contained a wide selection of DVD's and CD's to acquire better understandings of Hebrew language and Jewish culture. Moreover, the SJI and an affiliate group known as Kulanu (All of Us) helped organise weekly interactive lessons with Rothberg and a few other supporters.¹²⁰ More impressive, however, was the group's mastery of the traditional Hebrew liturgy of the Kabbalat Shabbat service.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Hatikvah* (hope) is also the name of Israel's national anthem, which the Beit Hatikvah members have mastered in both Hebrew and Chinese. As its doorways were often kept open, neighbours in the apartment block are free to enter Beit Hatikvah during services. During the Kabbalat Shabbat I attended, a neighbouring Han family stood in the back, curiously observing the liturgy of unfamiliar Hebrew chants.

¹¹⁹ For example, it utilises the skills of Wang Jiabin 王嘉辛, a young Kaifeng student who attended Yemin Orde High School in Israel for one year and has served as Beit Hatikvah's Hebrew teacher.

¹²⁰ For several months in 2012, I taught a small group of advanced students classical Hebrew from the Mishnah on Skype.

¹²¹ These are the special prayers for welcoming the Sabbath recited on Friday evening.

Led by Gao Chao, who had accessed YouTube to learn the traditional cantorial melodies, the Friday night service I witnessed was equivalent to that held in many traditional Jewish diasporic communities, apart from a few prayers translated and recited in Mandarin. Though some of the congregation used transliterated texts, others were able to follow the service using the conventional siddur, or prayer-book. Contrasted with the group at the *Yicileye* School, Beit Hatikvah's congregation displayed greater enthusiasm towards the traditional religious aspects of Sino-Judaic identity. At the time of my 2011 visit, there were still several young adults of university age at Beit Hatikvah, although they expressed the desire to continue their studies outside of China, whether in Israel or elsewhere. Because of its religious inclination, the Beit Hatikvah had been shunned by wary Chinese academics and by certain rabbis who took umbrage at *halakhic* non-Jews conducting the parochial Jewish liturgy. At that time Rothberg was resentful that Shi Lei, rarely present in Kaifeng, had come to be regarded by both local scholars and foreign tourists as the community's *de facto* leader, while the Beit Hatikvah School he helped establish had yet to receive a visitor of academic or religious standing.



FIGURE 11. Congregants at the Beit Hatikvah School established in May 2010.
(The Kaifeng Kehillah Facebook Group 2011, photographer unknown)

In July 2013 Shavei Israel organised the rental of an entire house and convinced both the *Yicileye* and Beit Hatikvah Schools to merge into a single community. By that time Timothy Lerner had returned to Israel, and the groups were happy to benefit from

both a logistical upgrade in their communal space and the promise of a more cohesive group structure. The Jewish Community of Kaifeng, sponsored now exclusively by Shavei Israel, officially opened its doors in August 2013.

The Jewish Community of Kaifeng: an ephemeral figment of unity

The centre which Shavei Israel established for the entire community was meant to be a watershed in the community's contemporary revival of its cultural heritage. Chapter Six, devoted wholly to fieldwork conducted at the centre in October 2013, offers a personalized description of the communal events during the Festival of Sukkot in that period. On that occasion I left Kaifeng with the impression that the community had reached its apex. The spacious house with a courtyard and proper kitchen provided the group with an infrastructure conducive to large gatherings. As in the Beit Hatikvah, advanced students were able to further their studies in Chumash (scripture), Hebrew language, Pirkei Avot (ethics) and other subjects using internet telephony services. During the ten short months of its duration, Shavei Israel sent three different educational envoys to interact with the community for varying time periods. One such envoy was Aaron Chau, a Han Chinese who had undergone a strict, orthodox conversion and was now living in Safed in the Northern Galilee. During this period the Sino-Judaic Institute also sent a permanent envoy to Kaifeng. Barnaby Yeh, a Taiwanese-American convert to Judaism, lived at first in the centre but later moved to an apartment of his own. His efforts on behalf of restoring a pristine version of Kaifeng Jewish cultural heritage will be discussed in the next chapter.

In March 2014 Michael Freund returned to Kaifeng with three rabbis and a couple of representatives from Israeli government ministries. There was a large event held in the four-star Grand New Century Hotel for the entire community to meet this delegation. The rabbis' speeches, exhortations to embrace Jewish traditions, were translated into Chinese by the then Shavei representative to Kaifeng, Eran Barzilai. A month later, after the delegation had departed, Shavei Israel sponsored a lavish Passover Seder for over one hundred participants, held again at the New Century Hotel, a notable upgrading of standards from previous venues of Kaifeng seders. Moreover, the ceremony was conducted by one of the seven male *olim* who had settled in Israel. Coincidental to the visit of Freund's delegation, a few boys from that group had

returned home on tourist visas to their families in Kaifeng. On April 9 2014, just a few days prior to the start of Passover, articles appeared in the Israeli press publicizing the occasion as “a first-of-its-kind traditional Passover Seder”, even though Lerner had conducted the same ritual with the group for nearly ten years. There were similar stories in the print and online media from the US, UK and Canada, lauding this purportedly inaugural event and lavishing praise on Shavei Israel and its philanthropic founder, Michael Freund. Just a few weeks after these articles began to circulate, the police arrived at the centre to inform the descendants they were to be evicted due to noise disturbance to the neighbours. However, informed sources contend that the publicity treating the Kaifeng Jews as a viable ethnic group with religious traditions, contradicting official CPC policy, was the real reason for the shutdown.

The three institutions described above marked three different phases of development in Sino-Judaic cultural heritage activism. The first phase of the Yicileye School ushered in the primary social, cultural and educational activities that brought a sense of group identity to the individual families and clans. It also offered the prospect, for a few of them at least, of leaving Kaifeng to dwell in the Land of Israel. The Beit Hatikvah embarked on a more religious pursuit of a Jewish cultural identity. The recitation of the Shabbat liturgy employed by Jews all over the world forged a dramatic connection from Kaifeng to the mother-group. Finally, Shavei Israel’s centre for a unified community represented an effort to unify a small, divided community. Its failure to do so may be linked to the international publicity flaunting the achievements of Shavei Israel to the detriment of the Kaifeng Jews. We now turn to the contributions of three individuals to the cause of Kaifeng cultural activism.

Jin Guangyuan: the case for *aliyah*

Jin Guangyuan (Shlomo Jin) recalls how as a child during the Cultural Revolution his father was a victim of daily public denunciations because of his Sino-Judaic identity: he was accused of being a spy for Israel and a “running dog of American imperialism.”¹²² Later, after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, his father also participated in the early dialogues between Kaifeng’s Jewish descendants and foreign scholars, tourists and

¹²² The elder Jin even had the ethnicity status in his national identity card changed to *tewu* (特务), or “spy”. This was rectified two years later.

philanthropists that were organised and carefully scripted by the official CITS (Chinese International Travel Services).¹²³ While his father had become reticent and obedient to authority, Jin Guangyuan, on the contrary, developed into a vociferous advocate of Sino-Judaic cultural activism.

After his father's death in 1981, Jin received permission to bury his father according to Jewish ritual, overriding the Chinese law mandating cremation. The Jin family burial plot contains memorial plaques extolling the Jewish ancestors of the Jin clan and is one of the only extant Jewish burial grounds in Kaifeng.¹²⁴ Following the initial restricted contacts with foreigners in the early nineties, Jin began to host unsupervised group meetings with visiting Chinese Christians in his home on the Jewish Sabbath, where they would study the Bible. The municipal government, having witnessed the immense interest of foreign Jews in the Kaifeng descendants and the financial potential for Kaifeng tourism, first established in May 1992 the Research Society and, later, in 1993, the Construction Office, assigned the task of building a Kaifeng Jewish History Museum on the site of the former synagogue. Jin Guangyuan and the controversial Zhang Xiangwang (Moshe Zhang) were appointed as the Jewish representatives to the Office.¹²⁵ While the central government had set strict guidelines that the project was to involve a historical museum for foreign tourists only, it became apparent through public statements of chairman Zhao Xiangru and the increase of independent contacts forged with foreign Jews by Jin and others, that the Sino-Judaic community viewed the project as a means to revitalise their cultural identity. In January 1996, without offering a reason, the work in the Construction Office was suspended.

¹²³ As mentioned in Chapter Four, the CITS is a subdivision of the local Foreign Affairs Office. The meetings were chaired by Wang Yisha, local curator of the Kaifeng Museum and one of China's prominent researchers on the Kaifeng *kehillah*.

¹²⁴ In 2000 Jin sent funds to his family to refurbish the family cemetery and its memorial tablets. It is one of the historical sites still visited today by tourists exploring Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic history.

¹²⁵ As reported in Chapter Four, the general view among the Kaifeng Jews is that Zhang is a Hui Muslim posing as a Jew, who was an informer for the state security apparatus in the 1990s.



FIGURE 12. Shlomo and Dina Jin at their celebration of their Jewish wedding ceremony in Jerusalem. (Wagner 2005, photo by Michael Freund)

The previous chapter recounts Jin's attempts to have the Jewish status on his household registry card officially authorised by the Foreign Ministry in Beijing in the vain hope that it would be accepted by the Israeli Embassy for the purpose of *aliyah*. The Israeli Embassy refused his request and, when he refused to leave, ordered his forcible removal from the embassy premises.¹²⁶ A month later, however, the United Front together with the Kaifeng police announced that all Kaifeng residents registered as ethnically Jewish would be compelled according to law to change to Han or Hui. The police also searched Jin's home in to locate the erroneous certificates but were unable to find them.¹²⁷

The official erasure of Kaifeng Jewish identity caused great embarrassment for Jin and his companions. Following the United Front order, police surveillance of Sino-Judaic gatherings increased. In 1999 with the help of a group of Finnish Christian Zionists, Jin

¹²⁶ The rabbis officially approved to minister the contingent of foreign Jews in Beijing, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and elsewhere are similarly forbidden to allow entry on their premises to any Chinese nationals—including the Kaifeng Jewish descendants – lest they be suspected of proselytising.

¹²⁷ From the private video footage of Urbach, it seems that in 1999 Jin was in possession of and tried unsuccessfully to utilise this certificate to gain entry to Israel as a full citizen. It has been suggested that following the incident in the Israeli Embassy, Jin may have posted the document to the Finnish Christians who later helped facilitated his immigration to Israel.

left with his wife and daughter for Helsinki, and from there, with the assistance of Shavei Israel, was able to enter Israel. Jin's daughter Shalva (*Wenjing*, 文静) became the first Kaifeng Jew to formally convert in 2002.¹²⁸ Jin wrangled with the Israeli authorities for several years before he accepted the need for conversion; finally, he and his wife converted and celebrated their marriage according to Jewish law in 2005. Shlomo and Dina Jin currently live in Jerusalem; Shalva graduated Hebrew University in 2008. She worked for some time as a teacher of Chinese language, in 2012 tutoring the future Israeli ambassador to China, Matan Vilnai. Shlomo, who works as a security guard, is an outspoken advocate of *aliyah* as a solution to the negotiation of Sino-Judaic identity. Jin was able to return to Kaifeng in 2006, where he managed to regain his Chinese passport. He has actively urged his compatriots to emigrate from Kaifeng to Israel as the only means to preserve the intrinsic culture of their Jewish ancestors.¹²⁹

Shi Lei: promoting history and tourism

Shi Lei (石磊) is arguably the most articulate of the Kaifeng Sino-Judaic community; as a result, he is often regarded as the spokesperson of Chinese Jews to the mother group of global Jewry.¹³⁰ In the year 2000 Shi Lei, studying to be a tourist guide, was introduced to Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, a former chaplain in Japan who, after returning to Long Island, continued to lead Jewish-American tours of China. Impressed with Shi Lei's intelligence, Rabbi Tokayer arranged a scholarship for him to study at Bar Ilan University in Israel. In 2001 Shi embarked on the one-year program which included studies in Hebrew language as well as Jewish history and religion. During his stay, he was interviewed by Jerusalem Post reporter Michael Freund, later the founder of Shavei Israel, who assisted Shi Lei to further his studies for two years at the *Machon*

¹²⁸ Shavei Israel, chaired by Michael Freund, is an organization dedicated to assisting communities worldwide that claim distant Jewish ancestry to return to Israel and their Jewish traditions.

¹²⁹ It is normally forbidden to retain a Chinese passport after accepting foreign citizenship. How Jin managed to do this remains unclear, although his story seems to indicate a particular resourcefulness in his dealings with authorities.

¹³⁰ Although the other members of the community respect his status, there appears to be some resentment of his monopoly on foreign Jewish tourists and its economic benefits. Also, because Shi is frequently on tours away from Kaifeng, he is perceived as distant to the grassroots movement towards self-representational religious culture. Yet, he remains the favourite of American rabbis and academics, particularly Chinese, as he carefully conforms to the expectations of governmental policy viewing Kaifeng Jewry solely as a historical phenomenon.

Meir Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Despite his fluency in Hebrew and knowledge of Judaism, Shi Lei turned down an offer for conversion and opted to return to Kaifeng permanently in 2005 in order to teach Judaism properly to his fellow Kaifeng Jews.¹³¹ He established regular classes and a small exhibit of memorabilia in his home, to which tourist groups were brought. Today his increasing involvement with Jewish Heritage Tours of China, focusing mainly on Shanghai, Harbin and Hong Kong, entail frequent and prolonged absences from Kaifeng, thereby diminishing the constancy of these classes.¹³² Shi often appears in overseas print media and broadcasts. For Chinese academia, representing as he does a historic as opposed to a religious cultural identity, he is also considered the acceptable persona with whom contacts may be forged. In our conversation in 2011, Shi was adamant in confirming the surfacing accusations of Tim Lerner's missionary activities and was dismayed at the consequential fragmentation of the community.¹³³ Like Jin, he also believed that only in Israel could Kaifeng Jews realize the possibility of a genuinely religious Jewish culture; however, he asserted that there would always remain a secondary manifestation of Kaifeng Sino-Judaic heritage based on the community's collective history.

¹³¹ According to Ehrlich's account, it was the Israeli government that was hesitant to grant Shi status as a test case on the Law of Return, fearing both the diplomatic repercussions and potential problems with Chinese workers in Israel. In my conversation with Shi Lei, he suggested that he could have stayed but deliberately chose to return to Kaifeng to "teach the Kaifeng Jews about real Judaism". Lerner is critical of Shi's refusal, since, had he accepted the offer of the Israeli immigration officials, he would have opened the door for other Kaifeng Jews to immigrate. On the other hand, Shi is extremely critical of Lerner's "missionary activities", although he likewise criticises Eric Rothberg for establishing the breakaway group, further fragmenting a small community, only to abandon it a few months' later, when, completing his semester at Henan University, he returned to the US.

¹³² According to what I was told, Shi no longer teaches groups but rather introduces Jewish groups to others of his clan and friends. The decentralization of the Jewish stelae, exhibits and memorabilia in several different locations (Kaifeng Municipal Museum, Qingming Millenium Park, Shani Shaanxi Hall, along with the unofficial displays of Shi Lei and Guo Yan) create the impression that there is little to see of Jewish tourist interest in Kaifeng, particular as the stelae and Qingming cultural exhibit are not open to the general public. This explains the enthusiasm of the local CITO in 1993, and its subsequent advocates, to consolidate a central exhibit housed in what would be a replica of the old synagogue on its original location. This would also link Kaifeng with the tourist boom already current at the nearby Shaolin Monastery and the ancient capital of Luoyang.

¹³³ In our telephone interview he suggested that Lerner and the Hong Kong missionaries associated with him had already managed to proselytize four or five Jewish descendants.



FIGURE 13. Shi Lei teaching a group of Kaifeng Jewish descendants with visiting tourists in his home. (Jewish Heritage Tours of China n.d., photographer unknown)

Guo Yan: the challenge to authentication

Prior to his death at the end of the twentieth century, Zhao Pingyu, of the illustrious Zhao clan referred to in the stele of 1679, was known as Kaifeng's most prominent Sino-Judaic activist. In particular, Zhao advocated the rebuilding the ancient Memorial Hall, the main structure of the synagogue, on its original site where the Number 4 Hospital now stands. Having fathered five daughters, Zhao let it be known before his death that he wanted his female progeny to perpetuate their Sino-Judaic identity. His granddaughter, Guo Yan (郭研), has not only fulfilled his wish but taken up his choice cause with great eloquence and passion.

Guo Yan, also known by her Hebrew name Esther, graduated from Henan University majoring in Chinese literature. In 2008, together with her newly-wedded Han Chinese husband, Yang Wenjiang, she bought back the old stone house adjacent to the Number 4 Hospital and that once served as the Zhao family's ancestral memorial shrine. Until her passing in 2013, Guo's grandmother, Zhao Pingyu's widow, lived in one section of the house, while the young couple lived in an adjoining sector. Together with her mother and aunts, Guo Yan has stocked the main display room with Chinese beadwork, paper cuts and knitted items reflecting Sino-Judaic themes. Although she does not have the same prestige as Shi Lei, a licensed guide, in attracting large tourist

groups, she nonetheless has a regular stream of private tour groups who come to see the old Zhao premises and the ancient well that once supplied the synagogue's needs. To all who do, Guo gives an expressive testimony of Kaifeng Sino-Judaic history and



FIGURE 14. Guo Yan in her grandfather's homestead with background model of the synagogue. (Photo by Batsheva Bernstein 2011)

her version of its potential future, featuring a model display of the ancient Memorial Hall fashioned by her late grandfather. It is her belief that only a reconstructed synagogue can function as a cohesive structure—both physically and spiritually—in the current revival Sino-Judaic cultural identity. In addition, in a spacious house her husband Yang purchased with his savings on the outskirts of Kaifeng, Guo has also established her own exhibition of Kaifeng Sino-Judaic memorabilia; tourists who have the time and inclination are taken to this venue by taxi.¹³⁴

Like many patriotic Kaifeng Jews, Guo is somewhat apologetic of China's non-recognition of Sino-Judaic ethnicity but less forgiving of the view of Orthodox Judaism that defines Jewish identity solely through the matrilineal line.¹³⁵ Unlike other Kaifeng

¹³⁴ The house, quite large by Kaifeng standards, is curiously empty, except for the room that functions as the museum. Since their marriage, both Guo and her husband opted to forfeit the space and comfort of this suburban home for the cramped, run-down quarters they occupied together with Guo's late grandmother in the old Zhao homestead. She has also set up The Kaifeng Jewish History Memorial Center (KJHMC) which she chairs.

¹³⁵ She points out that the *Tanach* (Bible) makes no reference to this and that it is rather a later imposition of the rabbis. "Only God is perfect. The laws made by the rabbis are not perfect" (Guo Yan interview, July 2011).

Jews, however, including her cousin Nina Wang who immigrated to Israel in 2006 and later converted, Guo has no intention of returning to her ancestral homeland so long as she is not allowed to do so as a full-fledged Jew and Israeli citizen.¹³⁶ She is also unique in that she believes her grandfather's mission to rebuild the synagogue should be funded by the Chinese government rather than foreign Jewish organisations or philanthropies, where she expressed concern that conditions were likely to be imposed.¹³⁷ After receiving a \$250 contribution in support of Kaifeng Jews from an American pastor several years ago, it has since become her purpose not only to attain the reconstruction of the ancient synagogue but also the colossal task to revitalise an adaptive, contemporary synthesis of Chinese and Jewish cultures. On her blog she requests the repatriation of Kaifeng's historic relics from their location in museums in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada back to Kaifeng for their incorporation in the future synagogue (Guo 2009). In 2011 she pushed the boundaries of the local authorities by erecting a large sign in front of her home announcing it as the site of the old synagogue and current Kaifeng Jewish History Memorial Centre; by 2013 the sign had been removed.¹³⁸ She has been questioned about her activities by security agents on a few occasions but, both astute and confident, she is not easily intimidated. Despite the magnitude of the challenges she faces, she speaks of her vision of a Sino-Judaic renaissance with such passion that it seems almost tangible. To my knowledge, Guo Yan is the only Kaifeng activist candidly championing a local representation of Sino-Judaic cultural identity expressed in the restoration of its historic synagogue.

Setting the contributions of the aforementioned institutions and individuals into a chronology, I would suggest that Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic cultural activism begins in fact with Jin Guanyuan's first successful *aliyah* to Israel in 1996, an event which impacted

¹³⁶ As discussed in Chapter Three in Israel there is growing controversy over the institutionalisation of the orthodox Chief Rabbinate, coupled with demands for its removal, the legalisation of civil marriage and legislation mandating the separation of religion and state. The American Jewish Reform movement, whose conversions are not recognized in Israel and who allow bi-lineal descent, is particularly active in lobbying for change in the current "Who Is a Jew?" issue.

¹³⁷ She recognizes that Jewish financial support is frequently conditional to the interests of the individual or organization providing that funding.

¹³⁸ As Guo Yan was visiting Hong Kong during my visit in 2013, I asked her husband Yang Wenjiang whether local security agents had demanded the removal of the sign. Yang was evasive in his answer, and my impression was that my assumption had been correct.

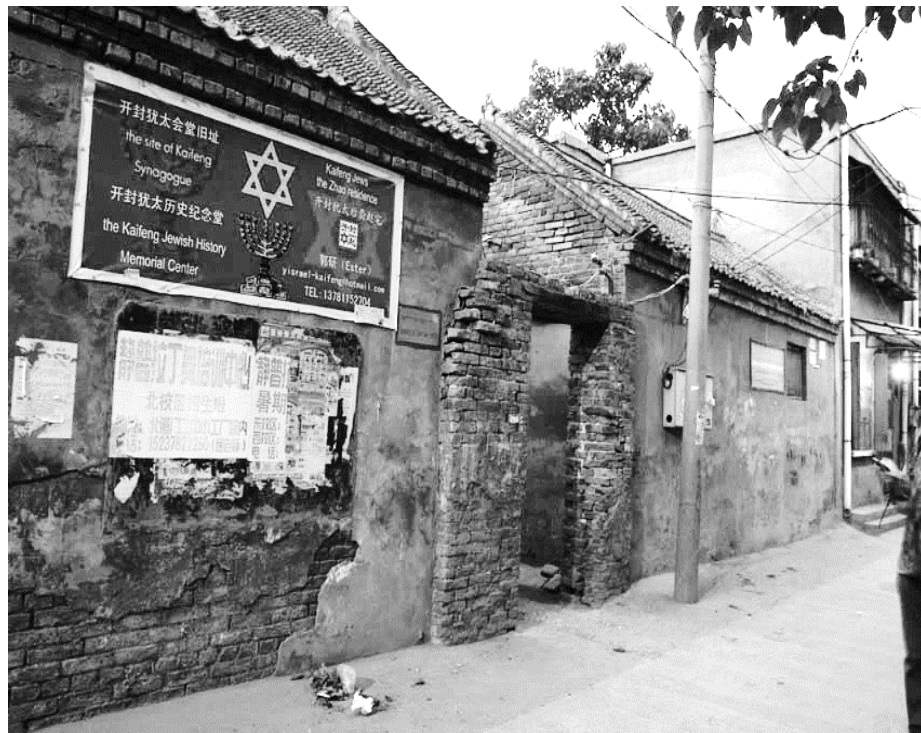


FIGURE 15. Home of Guo Yan and her grandmother on *jingjiao hutong* 教经胡同, Teaching the Torah Lane. (Photo by Batsheva Bernstein 2011)

communal perceptions of possibilities beyond Kaifeng. It proceeded with Shi Lei's return from Bar-Ilan in 2002; for the first time in centuries, the Kaifeng Jews had one of their own who was fluent in Hebrew and knowledgeable of Judaism. Shi's home gatherings together with foreign tourists served both educational and promotional purposes. Lerner then effectively took the Jewish community out of their familial environs and created a more formalised communal structure. The contacts he forged with Israeli students who volunteered as teachers brought the group in closer contact with foreigners, both Jewish and Christian. His success in expediting the *aliyah* of several of the younger members brought the reality of Israel closer into the lives of the whole group. The Beit Hatikvah advanced the concept of education to embrace religious liturgy and tradition. Finally, the community centre, a well-intended effort to provide the Kaifeng Jews with an adequate cultural facility for a unified *kehillah*, once again highlighted in its closure the restraint inherent in any potential opportunities for Sino-Judaic cultural expression in Kaifeng. Finally, Guo Yan actively seeks to innovate an adaptation of Kaifeng's past traditions into unique Sino-Judaic templates rather than import models ascribed to Jews from distant lands.

Through their linkage to transnational networks, the Kaifeng Jews have contested the geographical borders of China and its policy restrictions on their ethnic status. External

transmissions through the international media have further enhanced a viable sense of their Jewish legacy. Finally, the Kaifeng Jews' engagement with transnational NGOs has blurred these organizations' conflicting ideological boundaries and translated into a unique amalgam of revived cultural identity. In spite of sporadic constraints enforced by China's governmental agencies and state security, the Kaifeng Jews have successfully negotiated the ambiguities inherent in these limitations and continue to uncover novel opportunities to reaffirm and reconstruct their remarkable heritage. The following chapter, an ethnographic study of their celebration of the Sukkot and Mid-Autumn Festivals, examines more closely the revival of their cultural heritage through the prism of my fieldwork in Kaifeng. The epilogue of that chapter supplies an overview of the communal configurations in Kaifeng following the closure of the community centre in 2014.

CHAPTER SIX

Sukkot and Mid-Autumn Festivals in Kaifeng: Conundrums at the Crossroads of Sino-Judaic Cultural Identity

In September 2013 I joined the Kaifeng Sino-Judaic community for its celebration of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot (Festival of Booths) coinciding with the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. This coincidence was not arbitrary but rather due to inherent similarities in the Jewish and Chinese calendars. Two foreign NGOs, the Sino-Judaic Institute (SJI) and Shavei Israel (Returners of Israel), were also represented at these festivities. The US-based SJI is committed to the study of the historical community of Kaifeng Jews. It also advocates “appropriate” support for a revival of the Jewish descendants’ cultural heritage and the promotion of Jewish tourism in Kaifeng. According to the website of Israeli NGO Shavei Israel, it similarly “strives to extend a helping hand to all members of our extended Jewish family and to all who seek to rediscover or renew their link with the people of Israel.” However, unlike SJI, Shavei Israel has been active worldwide in facilitating the *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) and formal conversion of peripheral communities espousing Jewish identity. Along with the Jin family who immigrated in 1996, in the past decade eleven other Kaifeng Jews have undergone this process with Shavei’s support and are now Israeli citizens, an apparently small number that is nonetheless a sizable proportion of the fifty families engaged in communal activities (Eichner 2009).

Apart from my participant-observation during the holiday and *Shabbat* (Sabbath) celebrations, during my three-week stay I conducted unstructured interviews to explore the foundations of the community’s sense of cultural identity and perceptions of its future development.¹³⁹ I found that the diversity of discourse globally on the

¹³⁹ Interviews with the Kaifeng Jewish descendants were last conducted by Dr Wendy Abraham on Stanford University. Her observations from those interviews, recorded in *Memories of Kaifeng Jewish descendants today: historical significance in light of observations by Westerners since 1605* led her to conclude that the pervasive Chinese feature of ancestral veneration had preserved among the descendants a sense of cultural identity despite the lack of any tangible heritage. In 2000 Dr Noam Urbach conducted interviews regarding the cultural politics surrounding the 1993 inauguration and ultimate dissolution three years later of the Kaifeng Construction Office of the Kaifeng Jewish History Museum. My fieldwork research explores the influence of globalization on the dynamic processes of cultural identity, and, in particular, how various global conceptualizations of Jewishness are translated and transmitted in the context of Chinese culture.

constitution of Jewish identity has impacted on these perceptions. Furthermore, these new articulations often conflict with the vestiges of collective memory of the community's historical identity, itself an amalgam of Confucian, Daoist and Jewish elements. These divergent views on the issue of Jewish identity have produced inherent tensions with concrete manifestations: What standards, if any, should be adopted to determine the status of Jewish identity within the Kaifeng Sino-Judaic community? Should that identity be viewed primarily as a historical narrative or a restoration of Jewish practice? Finally, is that identity best fulfilled in Kaifeng or in the Jewish State of Israel?

This account does not purport to solve these questions but rather to explore, through events observed and discussions with individual community members, how these dilemmas have been translated and internalized into an emergent Kaifeng Jewish culture. It argues that divisions within the community as well as external, global rifts on the constitution of Jewish identity have triggered both confusion and communal fragmentation together with a sense of expansion and potentiality. Consequently, the emergent reconstruction of Sino-Judaic culture reflects and incorporates these contradictory elements, echoing similar paradoxes in the blended identity of the historical community which endured until the final demise of its synagogue in 1849.

Arrival in Kaifeng

On September 17 2013 after an hour's drive from Zhengzhou Airport along the newly-constructed S82 Zhengmin Expressway, I approached Kaifeng's ancient city wall dating from the later Zhou Dynasty. Its austere façade, at this time of day tinted with the crimson rays of the setting sun, obfuscated its history as having once encompassed the thriving, cosmopolitan capital of the Northern Song, then a major hub on the Silk Road and the largest metropolis in the world. As I drove north through the city centre, vendors from the night market were busy setting up displays of their assorted wares or preparing a variety of dishes at the numerous food-stalls. The sizzling scents of local Hui specialties, dominated by the pungent aroma of lamb kebab and fresh *náng* bread, drifted through the open windows of the taxi. Little had changed in downtown Kaifeng since my previous visit two years earlier in 2011: the dynamic economic

growth that has marked so many of China's urban landscapes continued to elude this humble backwater of Henan Province.

The taxi finally turned into the entranceway of the New Century Grand Hotel (*kaiyuan mingdu*) in the city's New Economic Zone, quite far from the Old City, where the Jewish community centre set up by Shavei two months before was located. Given the dearth of vegetarian restaurants in Kaifeng, the New Century's buffet service included an array of vegetable and tofu dishes that satisfied my kosher dietary requirements. This amenity outweighed the three-kilometre distance to and from the community centre, a route I travelled almost daily during my three-week stay.

Sukkot and Mid-Autumn Festivals

Sukkot is one of three major Jewish festivals that commences on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month of Tishrei; along with Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (Pentecost), when the Temple was standing, these three occasions mandated pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The commandment to build a *sukkah*, or booth, in which to reside during the period of the festival, is found in Leviticus 23:42: "You shall dwell in booths for a seven-day period; every native in Israel shall dwell in booths." The verse that follows expounds that the underlying reason for this specific commandment is for future generation to recall that God "[c]aused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I [God] took them from the land of Egypt." There is a dispute in the Talmud whether this verse refers literally to the huts that offered natural protection to the Israelites in their forty-year sojourn through the Sinai Desert or, metaphorically, to the supernatural Clouds of Glory that surrounded the Israelite encampment on all sides.

Although the verse indicates a celebration of seven days, due to a rabbinical injunction adding an extra day to the observance of the festivals in the Diaspora, outside of modern-day Israel, the holiday is celebrated for eight days.¹⁴⁰ Among Orthodox Jews,

¹⁴⁰ The reason for this discrepancy dates back prior to the establishment of the Hebrew calendar. When the Holy Temple existed, witnesses would come forth on either the 29th or 30th day of the month to testify before the Sanhedrin on the sighting of the new moon, which, when confirmed, would establish the date for any festival taking place in that month. Once the sighting was confirmed, messengers would be sent out to the outlying regions surrounding the Land of Israel to inform the Jewish communities of Diaspora. As there were many distant communities which these messengers were unable to reach prior to the start of a festival, the Sanhedrin decreed that all Diaspora communities would celebrate the festivals for two days, to account for the



FIGURE 16. At the centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng the group constructs a *sukkah* in the evening preceding the festival. (Photo Moshe Y Bernstein 2013)

this scriptural decree is universally observed; every household erects a structure with a minimum of three walls covered on top with branches or palm fronds. Although like all time-bound commandments in the Torah women are exempted, it is customary for most religious families to eat all of their main meals during the festival inside the sukkah. Similarly, in order to fulfil the injunction to “dwell” in the sukkah, many observant Jews sleep in it, although inclement weather or adverse conditions nullify this imperative. Conservative Judaism, which adopts a more lenient view in the execution of Torah law, is less stringent on the requirement of every household to build a sukkah. Most temples, however, will construct a communal sukkah, where its congregants will gather after the holiday prayers for a *kiddush*, a blessing recited over wine or grape juice followed by a snack or meal. Although Reform Jews do not recognize Torah commandments as sacrosanct, some Reform congregations will

eventualities of both a 29th and 30th day new moon. Later, following the destruction of the Temple, this custom was preserved. The exceptions to this rule are the fast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, celebrated universally for one day, and Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, which even in Israel is celebrated for two days.

emulate the tradition of their Conservative colleagues in erecting a sukkah as a social function.

Of equal importance on Sukkot is the scriptural imperative of waving the Four Species, colloquially referred to as *lulav* (palm frond) and *etrog* (citron).¹⁴¹ Nearly every Orthodox Jewish male will adhere to this imperative by purchasing, prior to the festival, a set of a citron, palm frond, three myrtle twigs and two willow branches. The latter three are bound together; at different points in the festival liturgy the bound lulav is held in the right hand, the etrog in the left, and they are waved together in six directions as a portent for abundant rainfall in the year ahead.¹⁴² As with the sukkah, most Orthodox households will acquire at least one set of the four species. However, because of the high cost, those unable to afford a lulav and etrog can borrow from a friend or congregant.¹⁴³

At some time during the Shang Dynasty (16th-10th century BCE), broadly concurrent with the period Moses is said to have received the Torah on Mount Sinai, the Chinese initiated the celebration of the harvest season at the autumnal full moon. The festival is associated with the ancient custom of offerings made to the lunar deity *Chang-e*. The festival is celebrated widely throughout China with a variety of regional customs. However, it is most common for friends and families to gather together for a meal and to eat mooncakes (*yuebing*), a symbol of harmony, under the evening sky while gazing at the beauty of the full moon. The holiday also is associated with bright lanterns and to the ritual Dragon or Lion Dances. Next to Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival is the most significant occasion on the Chinese calendar, and it is celebrated ubiquitously. The government of the People's Republic of China has classified this festival as "intangible heritage"; it is also one of China's official public holidays.

The chronological convergence of Sukkot and mid-Autumn Festival during my visit was a result of parallels between the Hebrew and Chinese calendars. Both are lunar but, unlike the Islamic version, both insert seven intercalary months over the course of

¹⁴¹ The verse in Leviticus 23:40 instructs the Israelites to "... take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before the Lord, your God, for a seven-day period".

¹⁴² The four directions of the compass as well as upwards and downwards. The order of the waving varies according to the Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions.

¹⁴³ The average cost of a full set in Australia is about AUD \$120.

nineteen years. The Jewish calendar periodically inserts an extra winter month of Adar to ensure that Pesach, also referred to in the Torah as the Festival of Spring, always occurs after the vernal equinox. The Chinese include an extra month to ensure that the Northern Hemisphere's winter solstice always transpires during their eleventh month and that the Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival, will then inevitably fall after that celestial event at the conclusion of the ensuing twelfth. The upshot of the intercalations of these two congruent, lunisolar systems is that for most years the first night of Sukkot will also concur with Mid-Autumn Festival.

Revival, return or retreat

Less than a kilometre south of the *Bianjing* Hotel—eponymous with the name of Kaifeng when it served as the capital of the Northern Song—is the narrow *hutong*, or alleyway, of Caoshi Jie. Unlike the Economic and Technological Development Zone in the northern part of the city where my hotel was situated, the infrastructure in this dilapidated quarter seemed barely adequate: an odour from the sewers, a peculiar amalgam of ammonia and onions, capped the discordant mix of tobacco smoke, fresh mutton, and roasted *shaobing* (flatbreads) permeated the lane.

Just prior to the turnoff where the new Kaifeng Jewish community centre was located, the steeple of a church further down the road came into view. Simultaneously, on the corner on my right, a sign with Arabic script proclaimed the location of one of the neighbourhood's two mosques. That the contemporary Kaifeng Jews should find themselves in such close proximity to the representatives of the two fraternal monotheistic faiths reflected a certain historical irony. The affinity of Judaism and Islam sufficed, at least from the standpoint of the host Han culture, to subsume any conception of distinctiveness the Kaifeng Yicileye (or "Israelites")—the eponymous epithet cited in the synagogal stelae.¹⁴⁴ Instead, they were deemed a sub-sect of the Hui, earning them the sobriquet of "Blue Hat Hui-Hui" (*lanmao huihui*). By contrast, whereas the Hui Muslims served as a camouflage to Sino-Judaic identity, it was the

¹⁴⁴ As discussed in previous chapters, the Kaifeng stelae of 1489 and 1512 are currently on display in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum for private viewing by foreign tourists. The stele dated 1663 was lost. Père Jean-Paul Gozani, who arrived in Kaifeng in 1698 and lived there intermittently for over 20 years, is credited with producing rubbings of the synagogal stelae, now preserved in the Vatican library.

Church which proved instrumental in revealing it to the Western world. Through a chance encounter in 1605 in Beijing, Father Matteo Ricci “discovered” the first Kaifeng Jew, Ai Tian (Xu 2003, 1-3; Pollak 1998, 3-5; Leslie 1972, 32-34). Subsequent missions of Jesuits over the century that followed conveyed detailed information of the religious practice, synagogal structure, and unique customs of the Yicileye. Later, at its cultural nadir with the destruction of the synagogue by flooding in 1849, it was largely Protestant missionaries who informed the West of the effective dissolution of Chinese-Jewish culture in Kaifeng. The latter also managed to purchase the waning community’s Torah scrolls and Hebrew manuscripts, now displayed in various museums in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Pollak 1998, 163).

The new centre is located at the end of a narrow, unpaved passageway off of the main *hutong*. I entered through an open, metallic door into a small courtyard paved with cement tiles, adorned with a fig tree on the northern wall and a pomegranate tree at its southern flank. In the middle of the courtyard verged by the two trees, a large sukkah had been set up. It had been constructed in an imaginative engineering feat, binding a complex arrangement of long bamboo poles with steel wire fastened to a rooftop peg for support. A stretch of tarpaulin had been wrapped around this structure for the walls, and branches cut from the courtyard trees had been placed atop a few crossbeams for the roofing. I was later informed that it had taken two men from the community all of twenty minutes to set up the entire edifice. Inside the sukkah there were three long tables and a dozen or so stools, with stacks more lined up against the courtyard wall. While I admired the handiwork and reflected on the novelty of a sukkah in remote Kaifeng, Barnaby Yeh stepped out of the foyer of the main building to greet me.

Barnaby, a 25-year old Taiwanese-American and a convert to Judaism, is a more recent import to the anomalous culture of the Chinese-Jews. Although the Sino-Judaic Institute had paid for his airfare and provides a modest stipend, Barnaby’s assignment to Kaifeng was largely a personal initiative. Listing his religious affiliation on Facebook as “Blue Hat Hui-Hui”, an indication of his ardent identification with the Kaifeng Sino-Judaic community, Barnaby was unswervingly dedicated to revive the historical Yicileye culture into the lives of its latter-day progenies. For the prayer service of the

festival later that evening, he had designed and printed out a liturgy based on extant Hebrew manuscripts from the Kaifeng synagogue dating to the Ming period, which he had arduously translated into Mandarin Chinese. Affiliated with an Orthodox Sephardic congregation in Washington D.C., where he had undergone his conversion, he advocated the restoration of the original Judeo-Persian traditions introduced to Kaifeng by its earliest Jewish inhabitants a millennium prior. Because of his Taiwanese passport, he had an easier time than other nationals in procuring a long-term Chinese visa and, ultimately, prospective residency. His determination was such that he viewed his mission in Kaifeng as an open-ended endeavour; he even envisioned the possibility of marriage and family within the context of the Kaifeng Jewish community. In spite of his dedication and idealism, he was quick to admit that the task of instilling Jewish knowledge and values in Kaifeng was an arduous one. With the lack of any local Jewish infrastructure, persistent community squabbles and uncertainty of their future, he had his mission cut out for him, but he felt well-positioned to fulfil that charge.

Barnaby gave me a brief tour of the new premises of the two-story community centre rented by Shavei Israel just a month before. The centre brought together two factions, the Yicileye School founded by in 2002 and the more recent breakaway Beit Hatikvah (House of Hope), established in 2011. The grounds for that split were allegations of the missionary tendencies of the Yicileye School's originator, the American-Israeli student and self-confessed Messianic Jew Tim Lerner.¹⁴⁵ However, Lerner has suggested ancillary issues of clan allegiances and financial management also contributed to the schism. The new property consisted of a kitchen and large storage area on the western flank of the courtyard. On the ground floor eastern verge was an entry into the foyer—normally used on Friday evenings for communal meals and prayers—which led into a small den with a computer, where Skype classes with several overseas teachers were held on Sunday evenings. Barnaby was temporarily lodging on a cot in that room until he found his own place. Along the wall of an ascending stairwell was hung an array of black-and-white photos depicting various scenes of Jewish life in early twentieth-century Kaifeng. The stairs led up to a large hall with a lectern and plaque meant to serve as a larger synagogue for communal services, though it had yet to be utilized in

¹⁴⁵ Unlike normative Jewish theology which denies both the divine or messianic status of Jesus, Messianic Jews (or “Jews for Jesus”) accept these as integral to a Messianic Jewish belief.

that capacity. Outside its doorway, Barnaby had posted a sign requesting the removal of shoes prior to entering, an archaic Sephardic tradition no longer in vogue. A hotplate had been plugged into an outlet, and there was already a small pot of food prepared for the evening meal resting on its surface. Two windows looked down onto the courtyard, the one on the left partially obstructed by the network of bamboo poles attached to the rooftop. Adjacent to the hall was a guest bedroom with two beds where the envoy from Shavei, Eran Barzilai, and his travelling companion and fellow rabbinical student, Shmuel Avraham, were lodging.

Later that morning, I had the opportunity to speak with Eran, who, when I first arrived, had been out with his friend on a shopping expedition for the holiday. Eran's connection to the Kaifeng Jewish community predates his association with Shavei Israel. In September 2009 he had enrolled as a Chinese-language student in Henan University. Eschewing the top Chinese universities normally attended by foreigners, he felt that he would learn Chinese more rapidly in a place where foreign presence was minimal. More significant in his decision, however, was his fascination with Kaifeng's Jewish descendants. Shortly after his arrival, he took on the role as Hebrew teacher at the Yicileye School and developed a close rapport with individual families and the community as a whole during the two-year period of his studies. In the aftermath of the devastating Mount Carmel forest fire in Israel in late 2010, the group presented Eran with a sum in *renminbi* equivalent to US \$300 to aid those affected by the catastrophe. Knowing that most of its members were employed as low-paid factory workers or labourers, he was deeply moved at their generous gesture. Upon his return to Israel, he began his religious exploration of Judaism in a rabbinical seminary, where he subsequently met Avraham. While in Jerusalem, he arranged a meeting to deliver the group's donation to Michael Freund, the chairman of Shavei Israel. Thus began his association with that organization and his ongoing engagement with the Kaifeng Jews.

Freund's generosity in funding the new location had paved the way for the successful merger of the previously divided community. Apart from Eran, Shavei also had sent three other envoys to Kaifeng for short teaching stints at Beit Hatikvah. However, as mentioned above and suggested by its name, the group's focal modus operandi was facilitating the immigration of young Kaifeng Jews to the Land of Israel. It was only

there, according to Eran, that, after an adequate period of study and subsequent orthodox conversion, they could experience “a full Jewish life.” In 1999, Shavei Israel, in conjunction with a group of Helsinki Christian Zionists, had first facilitated that experience for the family of Jin Guangyuan, whose Hebrew name forename is Shlomo, following Jin’s failed attempt that same year to have the certified Jewish status of his household registry card recognized by the Israeli Embassy (Urbach 2008, 123-124). The daughter of Shlomo and Dina Jin, Shalva, became the first Kaifeng Jew to officially convert in 2002 (Ehrlich and Liang 2008, 294). In 2006 four girls in their early twenties arrived in Israel to study Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the Bat Ayin settlement in Gush Etzion; they formally converted the following year. Three years later, Shavei further facilitated the visas for a group of seven young men, who studied at Yeshivat Hamiftar in Efrat for three years, undergoing conversion by the rabbinate in early 2013. Two of the women, Shalva Jin and Rebecca Li, have married, the former to an Israeli and the latter to a Jewish-American; each has given birth to a child. The young men were enrolled in an *ulpan* (institute) for advanced Hebrew language study. One of them, Yakov Wang, intended to pursue rabbinical studies and, following ordination, to return to Kaifeng to become its first rabbi in nearly two hundred years. In our conversation that morning I asked Eran whether Shavei would consider expediting the immigration of the older members of the community. He did not believe that was a viable option, as the processes of language shift and cultural acclimatization would prove too onerous.

One of the questions I had prepared for the subsequent interviews was whether the *aliyah* of Kaifeng’s younger populace posed a demographic threat to the community’s continuity. In my mind, this certainly seemed to be the case. I was therefore surprised when not a single one of the twenty-two respondents shared my concern in this regard. Whether they suffered from a collective naïveté or whether I simply failed to grasp an aspect of Chinese mentality, the unanimous view was that the departure of a substantial portion of their young demographic was positive. Some proffered the opinion that, once they understood the intricacies of Judaism, they would return to Kaifeng to impart their knowledge to the locals; others suggested that regular visits to and from Israel would maintain their relationship with the community. A few spoke of the still younger generation of Kaifeng Jewish schoolchildren, who would be more

knowledgeable of their heritage due to the integration of their older cohorts into Jewish life in Israel. Although claims have sometimes been made among a certain segment of academia, both Western and Chinese, that the cultural revival in Kaifeng is rooted in economic opportunism, none of those I interviewed expressed material gain as the main benefit of *aliyah*; rather, it was, as Eran had suggested, the ability to live a fully Jewish life.

When asked about the prospects for the future of its cultural revival in Kaifeng, however, the interviewees were less sanguine. While a few expressed the hope that a continued influx of foreign teachers would enable the perpetuation of some Jewish tradition in Kaifeng, there was a general consensus that the establishment of a veritable *jiaotang*, a place of worship, was necessary. There was general discontent over the revocation of their Jewish status in the household registry cards fourteen years earlier. Even though it was acknowledged that this status was in fact a quirk contradicted by the Han ethnicity listed on their national identity cards, they nonetheless felt its annulment denied them the religious privileges of their Christian and Muslim neighbours. Surprisingly, only a few of those interviewed were aware of an attempt by the Kaifeng municipality in 1996 to rebuild the ancient Kaifeng synagogue, albeit as a museum of Kaifeng Jewish history. The suspension of that project came amidst local and international rumours that it would lead to a reinvigorated Kaifeng Jewish culture. All of my respondents agreed, however, that the current government would not be amenable to any similar project in the foreseeable future.

In a discussion I had in 2011 with Nanjing University's Xu Xin, one of China's foremost experts on the Chinese Jews, I confronted him with my concerns over the shifting demographics with the departure of the Kaifeng community's younger members to Israel. Like the descendants themselves, he did not believe that continued emigration implied a threat to the autochthonous culture. Rather, he had opined that there would be two representative and interactive poles: a practicing, integrated Sino-Judaic culture in Israel and a traditional cultural mix maintained in Kaifeng.

Convergences, incongruities and the question of authenticity

When I returned to the centre just after five o'clock, about an hour before the festival service would commence, to my surprise, the sukkah and courtyard were still in a state of disarray: the tables, covered with a thin layer of grime, were littered with dirty dishes and food scraps, and the concrete floor of the courtyard was strewn with cigarette butts. I was deliberating picking up the broom perched against a corner beside the fig tree, when I heard the sound of a bicycle from the alleyway. It was Barnaby, carrying a bag with a stack of photocopies of the redacted Kaifeng Sukkot liturgy. With obvious exasperation, he complained that Eran had informed him at this late hour that there were not enough copies of his handouts for the expected gathering. Rather than make do with the centre's numerous, donated Ashkenazi *siddurim* (prayer books) commonly used by the group, Barnaby had opted to make a last-minute run to photocopy extra handouts. (Paying out of pocket, he grumbled about the steep price of photocopying in Kaifeng.) He expressed further agitation that the Israeli guests had declined to use the kitchen utensils he had properly rendered kosher subsequent to his arrival several weeks' prior, interpreting their religious stringency as an offensive form of Ashkenazi chauvinism.

A few minutes after Barnaby had gone inside to shower and change for the holiday, Peng Wenxia, who prefers to be called by her Hebrew name Neta, arrived by motorbike carrying a large basket full of food for dinner that evening. Neta, a board member of the former Beit Hatikvah, was arguably one of the most active participants in the community. A 48-year-old employed full-time as a toll-collector, Neta has embraced her Sino-Judaic identity with unparalleled zeal. Apart from three of the young adults who have spent their high-school years in Israel, Neta is the most proficient in Hebrew literacy skills. In the Mishnah classes I had taught via Skype to a few of the most advanced Hebrew students, she was the most diligent, memorizing and reciting complex passages of classical Hebrew with relative ease. Ironically, Neta's link to Sino-Judaic identity derives solely from her marriage to You Yong (or *Yoel*)

whose maternal grandfather was a Li, one of the seven clan names that mark the identity of Kaifeng's Jewish descendants.¹⁴⁶

Neta was pleased to see me and from her basket of tasty goodies handed me a spinach dumpling, or *jiaozi*, as a sampling from the impending feast. Although the celebratory holiday feasts usually included some dishes of beef or chicken, purchased from the local *halal* butchers (the most akin to kosher), aware of my requirements from my first visit, the women took extra care to provide me with portions of vegetarian cuisine. Neta took her basket and hurriedly retired to the kitchen, just as Gao Chao and his wife Bai Xiaojuan arrived in the courtyard, each on separate motorbikes similarly laden with cartons of food. Gao Chao is the only male member of the adult community who can read and speak some Hebrew. As such, he functioned as the *chazzan*, or cantor, leading the congregation in prayer. Many of the traditional melodies he employed, invariably of East European origin, were garnered from YouTube clips. Because of his prominent role in the community's affairs, I had erroneously assumed his lineage as an illustrious male descendant from the Gao clan. However, earlier that morning Barnaby had informed me that Gao also had "married in." It was through his wife, Bai Xiaojuan, or Levana, whose paternal great-grandfather was a Zhao, that Gao Chao enjoyed his current status within the community. No doubt that status had been further cemented with his decision to undergo a circumcision procedure at the local hospital.

Neta and Gao Chao were not the only ones whose association with Jewishness derived through matrimony. Contrary to the idiom, prevalent in the Western Jewish Diaspora, of "marrying out" — where a Jew is perceived to have eroded her/his identity through intermarriage — exactly half of the contemporary, wedded Kaifeng Jews, both male and female, have "married in" to that identity. (Today there are no married couples both of whom are of Kaifeng Jewish descent.) Although research into the historical Yicileye noted their practice of patrilineal descent as the marker of Jewish identity, a custom that ultimately precluded their recognition by mainstream orthodoxy, that practice is

¹⁴⁶ Of the seven clan names Ai, Gao, Jin, Li, Shi, Zhang and Zhao, the Li are today the most numerous. Apart from Zhang Xingwang (a.k.a. Moshe Zhang), who is regarded by most of the community as a Hui imposter, there are no other known present-day members of the Zhang clan and none with a lineage traceable to the Gao.

no longer the marker of contemporary Sino-Judaic identity (Leslie 1972, 103). Interestingly, Chinese academics still give some credence to this historical marker, one that is confluent with the familial hierarchy in Confucianism, in authenticating the status of the present-day Kaifeng Jews.¹⁴⁷ For example, Chinese scholars tend to view Shi Lei, a licensed tour guide for Jewish Heritage Tours of China, and, more importantly, a male descendant from the Shi clan, as one of the few “genuine” Kaifeng Jews. Whether because of his adherence to the state’s guidelines on the purely historical context of Sino-Judaic culture, or because of his busy touring schedule (or both), Shi is one of those Jewish descendants who have remained disengaged from the local revival of Sino-Judaic cultural identity.¹⁴⁸ He has, however, lectured abroad on the Kaifeng community’s long history. In successfully packaging Sino-Judaic identity in the historical and touristic framework acquiescent to government policy, he has become the main reference point for Chinese scholars as well as for most foreign tourists. Of course, in terms of the Israeli Rabbinate’s orthodox criteria of Jewish identity, there is no difference between a Shi Lei and an ethnic Han who has “married in” to the community: neither is recognized as Jewish.¹⁴⁹

Bai Xiaojuan, together with her younger sister, Bai Ying, had begun to clean up the tables and floor of the sukkah. Despite their protestations that I remain seated, I grabbed an extra broom and assisted sweeping the butt-strewn tiles. By six-thirty, about twenty-five people had arrived and began filing into the sukkah, seating themselves on the stools set up along both sides of the U-shaped table arrangement. Barnaby distributed the copies of the traditional Kaifeng liturgy he had so diligently reproduced. On this occasion, due to variations in the holiday liturgy, Barnaby filled in for Gao Chao as chazzan with most of the group joining in a chorus of the melodic

¹⁴⁷ Xu Xin, for example, in a discussion about the cultural activism of Guo Yan, who sources her Jewish identity through her maternal grandfather, pointed out that she was “not really Jewish” (Personal conversation, October 8 2013).

¹⁴⁸ Shi Lei could not be reached to arrange an interview during my most recent fieldwork. In 2011, while researching my Honours thesis, I conducted a telephone interview with him. Guo Yan, another independent activist who interacts with local tourism from the Zhao family homestead adjacent to the site of the ancient synagogue, was in Hong Kong studying restaurantering during this period of fieldwork. She had previously granted me an extensive video interview in 2011.

¹⁴⁹ This fact has not prevented Shi Lei on his website from declaring himself “...China’s only Jewish Chinese tour guide” (Jewish Heritage Tours of China n.d.).

hymns that were also recited in their usual Friday night services; they also recited in unison the Chinese translation of a few of the main blessings. Compared to the service I had participated in at the Beit Hatikvah two years earlier, this one was more subdued, perhaps due to their unfamiliarity with some parts of the festival service or with the text in the handouts.

After the services were over, there was a flurry of activity, mainly undertaken by the women, to set the tables for the meal. All sorts of dishes were brought out from the kitchen—some served on the centre's crockery, others on plastic throwaways—and placed on the tables in the sukkah. There was steamed bass with cabbage; marinated tofu and chillies; bok choy with garlic, honey and soy; stir-fried spinach with chillies and Sichuan pepper; and several other recipes with unidentifiable ingredients. There were also a few dishes of braised, halal chicken feet distributed here and there across the lavish spread. Neta had set several vegetable and tofu platters close together, gesturing to me where I should take my seat, though the others were still busying themselves with preparations. Eran approached me and, speaking in Hebrew, offered to share their kosher meal with me. Apparently, Eran and Shmuel had brought kosher meat and new utensils from Shanghai. They had prepared enough food and welcomed me to join them at the head of the table. I voiced concern that, as I had always eaten the vegetarian food provided me in the past, I might cause offense if I rejected that now. He assured me that that would not be the case; despite his lack of observance during his student days in Kaifeng, the community displayed great respect to his present adherence to stricter dietary standards. I thanked him but politely refused his offer.

Once everyone had seated themselves at the tables, Shmuel, wearing a dark suit and black fedora, filled his kiddush cup with the kosher wine brought from Shanghai; the rest of the community, myself included, received a small plastic cup filled from a spouted vat with homemade wine that Gao Chao had made with the help of a few others. Raising his cup, Shmuel proceeded to recite the festival kiddush, inflected with the Ashkenazi phonation, from his place at the head of the table. The kiddush and the special blessing for observing the commandment of dwelling in the sukkah were followed by the ritual hand-washing before a meal. There was some commotion in the search for water faucets for the ritual hand washing preceding the breaking of bread;

some went to the kitchen, others to the laundry and bathroom, while several used a large basin and cup brought out to the courtyard and situated just outside the sukkah. Finally, when everyone was again seated silently at the table, Shmuel made the blessing over two loaves of *challot* (also imported from Shanghai), then tore off two large pieces for Eran's and his consumption; he broke off several other morsels which were distributed to the others. The *challah* had not fared well on its journey from Shanghai, particularly in the hot weather; it was stale and tasteless. Fortunately, Levana and her mother appeared in the sukkah with freshly-baked *mantou* buns, served to all of the company, with the exception of the Israelis.

The meal was a gustatory smorgasbord of exquisite variety. Gao Chao and Li Bo, the most culturally active scion of the Li clan, soon appeared at the table carrying small ceramic jugs; each began tipping the limpid liquid contents into the men's plastic cups. Gao came to my place and with a knowing smile said, "*Ni xihuan he baiju ba?*" (*You like to drink rice wine, right?*) I nodded, as he filled up my cup to the brim. I had learned from previous visits how *baijiu* was an essential feature—at least for those of male gender—in these social gatherings. Gao Chao, seated at the head table with Eran and Shmuel, raised his glass and gave the Hebrew toast: *L'chaim!* I raised mine in return and, in honour of Mid-Autumn Festival, offered the Chinese tribute "*Gan bei!*" downing the contents in a few gulps. The fiery fluid burned a path down my throat and oesophagus, its inebriating fumes quickly dissipating upwards to my brain. Feeling quite content, I helped myself to more tofu and chillies, listening to the background chatter of the women, punctuated with loud, raucous bursts of laughter from the men, joking around in the local dialect I could hardly fathom.¹⁵⁰ As soon as I had finished my drink, Li Bo was quick to refill my glass.

The apparition of a beaming Neta suddenly appeared before me holding a platter of delectable *yuebing*, or moon cakes. She pointed up toward the branches that formed the sukkah roof. She reminded me that it was customary to gaze at the full moon, now visibly rising above the rooftop, on the Mid-Autumn Festival. I nodded and looked up

¹⁵⁰ The tones in Kaifeng dialect are completely different than those in standard Mandarin, or *Putonghua*. The rule of thumb is that Mandarin first tone becomes second tone in Kaifeng dialect; second becomes fourth; third becomes first; and fourth becomes third. Considering that tonal recognition and vocalization are among the more difficult aspects of Mandarin Chinese, the Kaifeng dialect poses problems for most foreign students.

at both the stars, which, according to *Halakha* (Jewish law), were meant to be visible through the sukkah's covering, and the ascending moon, which tonight seemed very large with a golden hue. Feeling a bit giddy from the liquor, I suddenly became aware of the bizarre situation of observing the Torah commandment of dwelling in the sukkah in far-flung Kaifeng while simultaneously celebrating the ancient Mid-Autumn Festival. During the course of the evening there were a lot of comings and goings in the centre's courtyard. At one point, I counted forty heads; there were also a few curious neighbours who, upon hearing the din of the festivities, had entered the courtyard to get a closer glimpse of the celebrations. I wondered what they thought of Chinese men wearing yarmulkes or of the crowd huddled together under the peculiar shelter of the sukkah.

While Eran circulated among the crowd chatting with old acquaintances, Shmuel Avraham sat alone at the head table, stroking his full beard and grinning broadly (he had also drunk his share of *baijiu*). He had earlier informed me that his visit to Kaifeng was for him a transit point to Southeast Asia, where he was to spend a few weeks supervising the *kashrut* (kosher certification) of food production in several factories.¹⁵¹ Eran had introduced him to the group as "*labi*", or "*rabbi*", an appellation which boosted their self-identification as Jews and concurrently provided them with an exemplar of that coveted identity. Other rabbis representing different denominations and divergent views had made previous pilgrimages to Kaifeng. Shmuel was possibly the first *haredi*, or ultra-orthodox rabbi, to make that journey. In Israel the *haredim*, who had adopted a rigorous view of matrilineal descent, had vociferously protested the bestowal of Jewish status under the Law of Return to the Ethiopian Jews as well as to Russian immigrants of paternal descent. I wondered what Shmuel thought of this throng of Chinese people emulating Jewish customs, and, conversely, how the group would view this bearded man in black coat and hat, a model of a Judaism quite unlike what they were accustomed to. Furthermore, looking around the sukkah and courtyard, I considered how the marker of authenticity of Sino-Judaic cultural identity, once embedded in paternal clan lineage, had dramatically shifted. More than half of those present for the festival celebrations staked their claim of Jewishness in either

¹⁵¹ For more comprehensive study of *kashrut* supervision in China refer to M.A. Ehrlich, *Jews and Judaism in Modern China* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

maternal or paternal clan lineage, that link sometimes regressing three or four generations; every one of this group had been informed as a child as to their Jewish heritage and the prohibition of consuming pork. The other half were the male or female spouses to one of those bloodline descendants.

Historical memory and contemporary practice

One of the goals of my fieldwork was to interview the members of the community to hear their views on the revival of Sino-Judaic identity and its significance in their lives. I had assumed that finding volunteers would be facilitated by the attendance of a large segment of the community in Sukkot celebrations.

The last recorded interviews of Kaifeng's Jewish descendants took place in August 1985. Dr Wendy Abraham of Stanford University conducted these interviews, which are currently stored in Stanford's Hoover Institute Archives (Abraham 1999, 81). According to the SJI website, Abraham "travelled to Kaifeng to gather oral histories from six of the heads of Kaifeng Jewish clans ... before being arrested and expelled" (Sino-Judaic Institute 2009.). Although the political situation in Kaifeng regarding the Jewish descendants had evolved somewhat since 1985, I still had to exercise a measure of caution and discretion in any dealings with the Sino-Judaic community. Apart from any residual political constraints regulating contacts with the Kaifeng Jews, in China there appeared to be a generic cultural reluctance, particularly among those old enough to remember the tumult of the Cultural Revolution, to go on record verbally with personal opinions on politically sensitive issues. The more recent proliferation of online blogging and social media in China was gradually mitigating this perspective, but provincial Kaifeng lagged far behind metropolitan Beijing or Shanghai in this emergent cultural awareness. For these reasons, I had set myself the modest goal of obtaining twelve to fifteen interviews as a sampling of the active members of a group whose numbers probably did not exceed one hundred.¹⁵² Prior to my arrival, I had emailed Gao Chao requesting that he speak to other members of the community to

¹⁵² According to Tim Lerner, the engine behind the former Yicileye School, this was the number of Kaifeng Jews who participated in the Passover Seder of 2010, which was held in a Kaifeng restaurant. The actual number of those who might claim Jewish descent is undoubtedly more, with estimates ranging from five hundred to two thousand. Some of the descendants claim that because of political sensitivities, some who would otherwise claim Jewish descent might not record this fact in the national census forms.

begin organizing interviews, but he maintained he had not had the opportunity to do so.

I arrived back at the centre the next morning and performed the ritual waving of the lulav and etrog, using the set Eran and Shmuel had brought from Israel. Afterwards, I joined the two Israelis for a coffee in the sukkah and asked Shmuel for his impressions of the previous evening. He replied that he had enjoyed himself immensely and found it to be an uplifting experience. The exotic trail of history which had brought Jews to China and preserved their conviction in their Jewish identity fascinated him. This soon led into a discussion of matrilineal descent; I shared with them my hypothesis that the original Jewish settlers to Kaifeng may not have been aware of the historical shift from patrilineal to matrilineal descent, which only proliferated with the redaction of the Mishnah in the second century CE and publication of the Talmud later on in the fourteenth. Shmuel replied that, according to the Talmud, matrilineal descent had been the practice since the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. I argued that this was but one of many Talmudic anachronisms. Furthermore, scripture was replete with genealogies of The early Kaifeng Jewish settlers had for centuries invested heavily into maintaining a synagogue and sustaining their traditions. Would they have done so, I wondered aloud, knowing that their practice of “marrying out” was excluding them from that very identity they struggled so assiduously to keep? We had moved into an uncomfortable zone in our discussion; Shmuel mechanically rejected any argument that exposed the fallibility of the Talmudic sages. We managed to shift the subject to less controversial territory, and, after finishing my drink, I returned to the New Century.

The following evening was the next gathering at the community centre for the Friday night *Kabbalat Shabbat* services, again conducted outdoors in the sukkah. About twenty-five Kaifeng Jews were in attendance; prior to the service, the women lit Shabbat candles inside the foyer. Gao Chao performed as chazzan, generating greater group participation than on the first night of the festival. After the prayers ended, a few of the elders offered the customary Sabbath blessing to their offspring in attendance, the

former placing their hands on the latter's heads and reciting the traditional scriptural passages. Li Xiurong (or Aviv) offered the blessing to her Han daughter-in-law, Neta.¹⁵³

The fare that evening was not quite equal in either variety or quantity to the first night, but I was yet again presented with several tasty vegetarian dishes. Unexpectedly, and without my asking him to do so, Gao Chao stood up in the middle of the meal and announced that I had come to Kaifeng for fieldwork on my thesis on the revival of Kaifeng Jewish cultural identity, urging those present to contact me to arrange for an interview. As he spoke, I tried to gauge the crowd reaction to his exhortation. If there was indeed any enthusiasm at his suggestion, it was all but imperceptible. Milling about during the meal, I had managed to secure a date on Sunday morning to separately interview Gao Chao and his wife Levana at the community centre. As Neta's work schedule precluded any availability for the coming week, she invited me to join her at her in-laws' home for interviews followed by dinner the following Monday. Shortly afterwards, a newcomer whom I had not previously met approached me for an interview. His name was Li Feng, a nephew to Li Xiurong. As he was leaving early Sunday morning for Shanghai, where he would be stationed on business for the next month, we organized an interview at my hotel for Saturday evening. As I was saying my good-byes, a middle-aged woman also from the Li clan, another one of Li Feng's aunts, approached me to do an interview at the centre on Sunday afternoon.¹⁵⁴ Following those first three interviews on Sunday, the ice was broken: rather than having to solicit volunteers, I began receiving requests for participation. In the end, I was able to conduct interviews with twenty-two members of the community.

In general, as mentioned above regarding the perpetuation of Sino-Judaic culture in both Israel and Kaifeng, on most questions there was a uniformity of opinions. However, there was some divergence of opinion on the question of whether Confucianism was compatible with Judaism. A few of the respondents suggested that monotheistic belief and the notion of inviolable precepts in Judaism were irreconcilable with the pragmatic, earthly concerns of Confucian thought. Most of them, however,

¹⁵³ Li's biological daughter, You Qing (Sarah), one of the original advanced students from my Mishnah class, had moved to New York several months prior. A divorcée, she was working in the beautification industry to support her son's college tuition.

¹⁵⁴ The Li clan form the overwhelming majority of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Ten out of the twenty-two interviewees had the surname Li.

while acknowledging those differences, believed that in practice both systems shared many confluent values. These elements of cultural syncretism included respect for elders; honouring of parents; the centrality of scholarship; participation in ritual; and conducting relationships with humaneness and benevolence.

The widest discrepancies, however, came in response to the question as to what factors were optimal for the personal development of their Jewish identity. On the one hand, most of the participants, particularly the more active members, tended to emphasize factors related to practice: Hebrew language skills, scriptural knowledge, prayer services conducted in an actual synagogue, development of monotheistic belief, and the posting in Kaifeng of a Chinese-speaking rabbi and/or Jewish Studies teachers. Practice in this regard is defined as an emulation of tradition rather than any strict observance of *Halakha*. By contrast, several of the respondents did not consider practice as a significant feature in their sense of cultural identity; to this group, the all-important factor was the study of Kaifeng Jewish history. Those who espoused this latter view were less engaged with concrete aspects of the revival of cultural identity such as prayer services or Judaica classes. Moreover, they were uniformly males bearing the Li clan patronymic.

While the purview of the interviews was not to establish any statistical or causative evidence, anecdotally, it would appear that those at the forefront of contemporary practice are generally those more removed from any patrilineal lineage. These are either descendants through the maternal line bearing the surnames of Han fathers or the Han spouses of any bloodline posterities. For a Han woman marrying a male with Sino-Judaic ancestry, the adoption of his customs would not be dissimilar to the phenomenon that occurred during the early Jewish settlement in Kaifeng. Patrilocality, after all, was a prominent facet of traditional Chinese culture, which is still extant in some families. More puzzling to me was the opposite scenario, as in the case of Gao Chao, where a Han male “marries in” to a Jewish identification through a female descendant. In 2011 I had the opportunity to discuss this anomaly with Dr Zhang Yingchun, an expert on traditional Chinese philosophy at Zhejiang University. She explained that although the adoption of a husband’s customs and ancestral line was indeed the Confucian norm, in exceptional circumstances, when the wife’s ancestral

line was perceived to be particularly prestigious, that custom could be inverted. This hypothesis might be supported with the perception of esteem derived from the myths of the Yicileye, who hailed from a faraway land to which their future offspring were to someday return. Furthermore, despite the relatively recent introduction of the term *youtai*, or “Jew”, into the Chinese lexicon, the inflated Judeophilia so pervasive in China today may also be a contributing aspect to the formation of such a view (Urbach 2008, 134). Regardless of the veracity of the hypothesis, ancestor veneration remains a prominent facet of Chinese culture; the discursive subtext of collective memory thus underscores and connects both polarities of practice and history (Paper 2012, 79-30).

The most prominent spokesman advocating Sino-Judaic identification through history was Kaifeng businessman Li Wei. Although Li is illiterate in Hebrew and seldom attends Friday night services, he takes great pride in his Jewish identity. When I had finished questioning him for the interview, he requested that I again turn on the recorder so that he could launch into a twenty-minute oration on the history of the Kaifeng Jews (most of which was superfluous to the interview’s intent). He maintained that in light of the small numbers of the community, intermarriage, rather than a prerogative, was in fact an imperative preventing genetic abnormalities in their offspring. In parrying the charge of “assimilation,” a term at which many in the group took umbrage, he pointed out how Mongols or Manchus who intermarried with the Han majority lost any sense of their ethnic roots after two or three generations. The Kaifeng Jews, by contrast, had managed to preserve their unique identity for over a thousand years.

As mentioned above, this is the historical framework that is acceptable to the Chinese government. According to the policy on the Kaifeng Jews known unofficially as “The Three No’s” (*san bu yuanze*), there is no such entity as a present-day Kaifeng Jew (Urbach 2008, 98). The history of the Yicileye presence in China’s past, however, is openly acknowledged and frequently referenced in op-eds published in the Israeli media by Chinese diplomats. The issue of practice, however, is more ambiguous. While Judaism is practiced for the benefit of Jewish expats in a few of China’s major cities, a Kaifeng Jew is prohibited from taking part in these rituals or even entering the

synagogues in which they are conducted, lest the rabbis of these congregations be in breach of the law forbidding proselytization.

Although the 1953 policy statement, approved by Mao Zedong and other top leaders, denied minority status to the Kaifeng Jews, it also attached a nebulous injunction to the local municipality to be “more caring for them in various activities” (Xu 2008, 205).

The prayer services, Hebrew classes, and holiday celebrations are generally permitted in this ambiguous context, although periodic government reaction—usually in the form of intensified police surveillance—has occurred in the wake of any seeming transgression of a rather tenuous boundary. Moreover, in the past decade the community has become more adept at negotiating, and thereby extending, the parameters of cultural identification permitted to them.

Epilogue

When I departed Kaifeng for my return to Australia in late October, I had the sense that Shavei Israel’s new centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng was a major milestone for the community. From a material perspective, the building provided ample space for all of the group’s social, educational and cultural activities; it even offered an extra bedroom used by special guests and educational emissaries. These physical amenities, along with Shavei Israel’s clout in assisting *aliyah*, seemed to serve as powerful incentives to bind the fragmented community into a unified whole. I also imagined that such a unified community would engender greater opportunity to project a political voice in their drive for renewal of their cultural identity.

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Five, news of Freund’s arrival in Kaifeng in March 2014 accompanied by a large delegation of government and religious figures suggested that the Kaifeng Jews were gaining momentum in their crusade for cultural recognition. However, the international publicity generated around the Passover Seder which followed Freund’s visit may have rebounded in its expressed avowal of a Kaifeng Jewish cultural identity. Thus, it is probable that following the media’s dissemination of stories on the 2014 Seder, the authorities decided to shut the centre down.

Following the closure in 2014 the community once again disintegrated into disparate factions. There is a joke about a lone Jew discovered after many years stranded on an uninhabited island. Upon arrival, his rescuers notice that he has constructed two small huts on the island to function as synagogues. When asked why two synagogues were required, he replied, "This is the one I pray in every day, and that is the one I never step foot in." If such divisiveness is emblematic of Jewish culture, then the tiny Sino-Judaic community of Kaifeng, with its hundred plus adherents constructing and identifying with multiple "synagogues", is exemplary of that quintessentially Jewish pattern.

Gao Chao and Bai Xiaojun (Levana), who have a close relationship with Eran Barzilai, assumed the leadership of the Shavei Israel offshoot. The Israeli NGO subsidized the rental of two small, fronting apartments with a kitchenette, in the same bloc as the former Beit Hatikvah, to function as a new centre. By then, ideological and personal tensions between the Sino-Judaic Institute's representative Barnaby Yeh and the Shavei administration had risen to the surface. Gao Chao refused to supply Barnaby with a key to the new apartments, which forced the latter to search for a new venue for both his adult education classes and the *cheder*, or kindergarten, he had recently launched for young children. Initially, he used the premises of Guo Yan on *jingjiao hutong* (Teaching of the Scriptures Lane) near the location of the old synagogue. Guo was away in Guangzhou Province taking courses in tourist hospitality for a period of several months; her brash and outspoken aunt, Zhao Jihong (Hannah), not only managed the small tourist display arranged by her niece, in the wake of the centre's closure, she also decided to open a cultural centre of her own. Unfortunately, her manner failed to attract a critical level of support among the descendants, though in 2014 a Rosh Hashanah prayer service was conducted on her premises. Its principal attendees, however, were North Korean evangelists, possibly linked to the old Association of Kaifeng Jews.

In between lodgings, Barnaby resided for some time in the home of Li Wei, whose business sense endowed him with the skills to inherit the leadership for those in the community who were more interested in developing a local model of culture. For some time, Barnaby conducted classes for both adults and children in Li Wei's home.

Moreover, Li's historical knowledge of the local clans led him to the nearby town of Lankao, where he discovered several other families from his clan who were only too pleased to take part in the revival of Sino-Judaic cultural identity. In April 2014 under the sponsorship of the Sino-Judaic Institute, Li Wei helped organised a Passover Seder for fifty descendants, including the Lankao newcomers, in a local hotel, a more modest venue than the New Century. Some municipal officials were also invited to attend this event, where US journalist Becky Davis was also present. The day after Passover on April 6 2015 an article by Davis appeared in the *New York Times* Sinosphere titled "Ancient Chinese Community Celebrates Its Jewish Roots, and Passover". The article included comments from Wang Xiangxuan, one of the local officials in attendance:

"Because Jews are only in Kaifeng, it's a very special case," said Wang Xiangxuan, a finance official who attended the Seder. "The government understands this, and is very supportive. The Jewish issue here is a matter of history rather than religion."

Mr. Wang said the city government had begun discussions on preserving and rebuilding the city's Jewish sites, including its lost synagogue.

"We can turn Kaifeng into a little Israel, which will help us develop our economy," he said, adding that officials were also considering rebuilding a Jewish community center and museum complex that would house a synagogue, a library, a kindergarten and a Jewish snack bar, though the menu items are still a mystery. "We don't know what Jews eat," he said.

In his comments Wang contradicted official policy by bluntly stating that there are Jews in Kaifeng. His revelations about rebuilding a community centre, with a synagogue as one of its components, would also be construed by the authorities as an unwelcome revelation, given the formal suspension of the Construction Office project two decades earlier. Informed sources have told me that the official in question was reprimanded for his comments but nevertheless remains in his position.

In 2015 You Qing, a Kaifeng woman who had been working in Flushing NY for three years, filed for a Green Card as a political refugee with the claim that the Chinese government persecuted her because of her Jewish religion. Simultaneously, in the course of investigations into this incident by the Kaifeng authorities, allegations were made by You's relatives to the local police implicating Barnaby and several other local descendants as agitators for Kaifeng's Sino-Judaic cultural activism. There was a flurry of activity following these accusations. Barnaby, who was visiting family in Taiwan

when the crisis broke, returned clandestinely to Kaifeng to gather up his belongings and in July 2015 departed to the US, where he currently resides. Meanwhile, the community wrote a long letter with copies sent to the Sino-Judaic Institute, Shavei Israel, the US Department of Immigration and the Jewish community of Flushing firmly denying any allegations of persecution and expressing complete loyalty to the Chinese government and the CPC. There are lingering tensions between You's family members in Kaifeng and the rest of the Sino-Judaic community as a result of this incident.

Since Barnaby's departure, Li Wei has taken over leadership of the faction not aligned with Shavei Israel. He has developed a new school called the *Yindao Shenghuo* (引导生活), or Guide to Life.¹⁵⁵ Li lists seven goals of this most recent cultural enterprise:

- To learn the Torah
- To search for the descendants of Kaifeng Jewry and have them understand Jewish culture
- To counter the invasion of Christianity, Catholicism, and Buddhism
- To strengthen ties with foreign Jewish communities
- To tutor children, youth, teenagers, and the middle-aged to learn Torah and Hebrew
- To organize Kaifeng Jews into celebrating Jewish festivals
- To learn the ancestral prayer text (*Nusach Sin*, the liturgical version particular to Kaifeng)

In adopting the mantle of his mentor, Barnaby Yeh, and utilizing his own local connections and monetary resources to improve communal life, there is every chance that Li Wei will succeed in expanding the purview of local cultural activism set by Barnaby. Meanwhile, the community remains fractured: the former centre for the Jewish Community of Kaifeng has a few supporters linked closely with Shavei Israel; Guo Yan and her aunt Zhao Jihong manage the old building on Teaching the Torah Lane; Shlomo Jin's younger brother, Guangzhong, continues to usher tour groups to the family burial plot and, as did the elder Jin, maintains contacts with Christian

¹⁵⁵ Barnaby renders a Hebrew translation of *Beit Mesorat Orach Chaim*, literally, "the House of the Tradition of the Guide for Life".

groups; Shi Lei's operations ensures a limited influx of foreign tourists to Kaifeng and their personal contact with some of the descendants; finally, the recent efforts of Li Wei offer the promise of a grassroots initiative in concordance with the policies of the Sino-Judaic Institute and thus possibly securing its support.

My fieldwork in Kaifeng has led me to conclude that the attribution of the revival of Sino-Judaic cultural identity to "economic opportunism" is a reductive observation based on faulty assumptions as to the meaning of "Jewishness" in the context of Kaifeng. While its association with foreign NGOs had undoubtedly provided certain material benefits to the community—scholarships, seminars and, primarily, the facilitation of *aliyah*—these fail to convey the full picture of the renewal of Sino-Judaic identification. Ultimately, identity is a subjective experience that no objective observation or deduction can accurately capture. It is only through shared conversations and encounters that it is possible to glean the contours of what that identity signifies to its subjects. Anyone who has heard the enthusiasm in Neta's voice when she sings *Hatikvah*, the national anthem of Israel; seen the joyful expression of Gao Chao leading the group in a rendition of a traditional melody; or witnessed the tears in the eyes of Levana's Han mother, Zhang Xiuying, as she attests to the healing power of faith, would be able to fathom that an occurrence transcending material advantage is taking place. Internal factors—unmeasurable through mere observation—such as ancestral veneration, clan lineage, shared ritual, traditional practices, and historical memory have generated what Durkheim refers to as "collective effervescence."

Before my very first visit to Kaifeng in 2009, I met with Avrum Ehrlich, who was then a professor at Shandong University. He had recently conducted a seminar at the university for the descendants and had also visited with the group in Kaifeng. We had arranged a meeting over coffee in Beijing at the Sanlitun Starbucks to discuss his observations of the community. Prior to our farewells, he gave me parting—if paradoxical—words of advice: *Remember*, he said, *they are Jewish because they are Confucian*. Despite the various global influences and perspectives on Jewish identity extending to Kaifeng, in the end, it was impossible to extricate the identification of its Jewishness from the matrices of Chinese culture.

Sino-Judaic identity remains an amorphous mix of unresolved dichotomies, poised between irreconcilable oppositions. On the one hand, the choices they confront seem to mimic those of Jews everywhere: whether their future lies in a return to the ancestral homeland of their Yicileye forebears or a preservation of a millennium of historical presence in China; whether the determination of their Jewishness is imposed by an external standard of Jewish law or by those developed organically within local cultural contexts; and whether pursuing that identity entails an increase in traditional practices or an appreciation of the links to a historical past. Yet, the dynamic resolution of these generic conundrums, and the new ambiguities thus produced, are distinctively Chinese phenomena. In fact, fluidity and ambiguity are hardly novel to the Kaifeng Jews. They were not only conspicuous aspects of the ancient Yicileye culture but, more fundamentally, adaptations that enabled its preservation for a thousand years. While it cannot be predicted with certainty what the future holds in store for today's Kaifeng Jews, there is a palpable sense that, despite the many uncertainties, they will not easily be deterred from further developing their cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

When I imagine the initial arrival of a small group of Jewish traders to tenth century Kaifeng, then the largest city in the world, I am reminded of the immigration of my maternal grandfather. At the dawn of the twentieth century he arrived from the little town of Lodz, Poland to the metropolis of New York City. Eventually settling down close to family relations in Waltham, Massachusetts, like the Kaifeng Jews whom the Emperor relegated to the business of dyed textile (and like many of his fellow Jewish immigrants), my grandfather went into the “*schmatta*” business, setting up his own small shop as a tailor and furrier.¹⁵⁶ Like the Kaifeng Jews, he gradually lost his native Polish and Yiddish to become a fluent speaker of American English, though he never shed his Yiddish accent. He abandoned the strict Jewish orthodoxy of his upbringing to become a secularized American. He no longer observed the Jewish Sabbath as he had as a young boy in the shtetel, but rather worked on Saturdays to save the money that would one day put his children through college. The religious faith of his childhood upbringing yielded over time to the secular agnosticism common in the immigrant generation who lost family members in the Holocaust. Nonetheless, he attended the Friday-night services conducted in his local synagogue, seated next to his wife, an occurrence which could not have transpired in the gender-segregated *shtiebel* of his native town in Poland.¹⁵⁷

Over time, my grandfather became a faithful reader of the *Boston Globe* and a huge fan of the Red Sox. In addition to the Jewish holidays celebrated with family, he also participated in the celebration of Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. He was something of a movie buff, an amateur projectionist who would often entertain us grandchildren in his living-room with his unusual collection of cartoons and shorts. He passed away on the sixth day of Hanukkah in 1983. At the time of his death, apart from this writer and his family who had moved to Israel, all of his descendants were American citizens residing in the US. Twenty-three years later, one hundred years after

¹⁵⁶ *Schmatta*. the Yiddish word for “rags” has become common parlance in American-English for the garment industry.

¹⁵⁷ *Shtiebel*, which translates in Yiddish to “little house”, is the term used to refer to the small “houses of study” (Beit Midrash) which functioned as synagogues in Eastern Europe.

he was first processed on Ellis Island, he would have been surprised to learn that his progeny now reside in five different countries and converse in several other languages apart from English. It would puzzle him to learn that there was such a phenomenon as Chinese Jews and that one of his grandsons living in Australia would be writing a thesis arguing how globalization, in its past and present forms, effected the intercultural exchanges and consequent translations that transmitted the cultural identity of the Kaifeng Jews, though his own Jewish identity was a product of similar effects. He would be similarly perplexed at the Kaifeng Jews' authenticity claims, of which the cultural context was different than that of European or American Jews.

Events did not move so quickly in the century after the first Judeo-Persian settlers came to Kaifeng. Migration away from Kaifeng only took hold in the fifteenth century, the phase of globalization labelled "*multicentric*" in Nederveen Pieterse's periodization scheme. This period witnessed the demise of the Silk Road, the arrival of European merchants by sea and the rapid decline of Kaifeng's economy. A century after their arrival, the Kaifeng settlers' descendants built a synagogue, architecturally modelled after a Chinese temple. Just as my grandfather's synagogue proudly displayed an American flag on its podium, so too the Chinese Jews placed a ceiling placard in Chinese wishing the Emperor long life directly under the Jewish declaration of monotheistic faith. By the time of my grandfather's death at the age of ninety-four, he had undergone a complete transformation from the Old Country cultural identity he had carried with him on board the steamer crossing the Atlantic into the modern, secular American Jew he would become after his arrival in the New World.

Problematizing Eurocentric boundaries

My grandfather may have diminished his religious faith and practice, but the ethnic component of his translated identity was always a certainty. It was authenticated by the dominant model of rabbinic Judaism that had emerged in the European Diaspora and through a chain of Jewish mothers before his own. No matter his beliefs or practices, my grandfather would always self-identify as a "real Jew", while those positioned outside the boundaries of authentication, even if they self-identified as such, were not.

Neta, like all of the members of her group, is also certain of the “Jewishness” of her cultural identity. The boundaries of that identity, however, have been constructed in historical and cultural contexts very different from those of European Jews. We can only properly appreciate the significance of ancestor veneration and patrilineal clan descent as authenticity claims outside of these Eurocentric boundaries of authentication and within the cultural framework of the Kaifeng Jews.

In the SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies quoted in Chapter Three (72), postmodern and poststructuralist researchers equate the concept of the “authentic” as “genuine, natural, true and pure” with that of essentialism, and, as with the latter, reject its use. Yet, in the everyday experience of my grandfather—like millions of others—he thought of himself as a “real Jew”, that is, he believed his authenticated Jewish identity to be authentic. Neta, a Han Chinese married to a Jewish descendant, believes the same about her own unauthenticated Sino-Judaic identity. Guo Yan believes further that her translated form of Sino-Judaic cultural identity is as authentic as any other.

In the Introduction (11) I discussed Nederveen Pieterse’s assertion that the significance of hybridity is that it “problematizes boundaries”. He suggests that hybridity by itself “is unremarkable and is noteworthy only from a point of view of boundaries that have been essentialized.” According to this, without the essentialized boundaries of Eurocentric authentication, the hybrid culture of the Kaifeng Jews would be “unremarkable”. Unremarkable, because, as discussed in Chapter Three, even the authentication process itself is a hybrid model, translated from other Diasporic cultures; the view of authentication as representative of a natural, ahistorical and essentialized process is a fiction manufactured through the cultural hegemony of those particular representations, whether in Orthodox *halakha* or CPC taxonomical systems.

In this thesis I have referred to a number of scholars who view culture broadly as a dynamic process. With that understanding, I have framed the transmission processes of Sino-Judaic cultural identity as the interplay between external exchanges and internal subjectivities. In *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humanity* (2011, 181-182), Yuval Noah Hariri has proposed that even without external exchanges a culture will dynamically transform through resolution of its own internal dichotomies:

During the first half of the twentieth century, scholars taught that every culture was complete and harmonious, possessing an unchanging essence that defined it for all time. Each human group had its own world view and system of social, legal and political arrangements that ran as smoothly as the planets going around the sun. In this view, cultures left to their own devices did not change. They just kept going at the same pace and in the same direction. Only a force applied from outside could change them. Anthropologists, historians and politicians thus referred to 'Samoan Culture' or 'Tasmanian Culture' as if the same beliefs, norms and values had characterised Samoans and Tasmanians from time immemorial.

Today, most scholars of culture have concluded that the opposite is true. Every culture has its typical beliefs, norms and values, but these are in constant flux. The culture may transform itself in response to changes in its environment or through interaction with neighbouring cultures. But cultures also undergo transitions due to their own internal dynamics. Even a completely isolated culture existing in an ecologically stable environment cannot avoid change. *Unlike the laws of physics, which are free of inconsistencies, every man-made order is packed with internal contradictions. Cultures are constantly trying to reconcile these contradictions, and this process fuels change* [emphasis added].

To Hariri, then, even a culture in isolation would be in a constant state of flux, translating its own intrinsic contradictions into novel forms of expression. In this sense, culture is a process of continual translation. Such a view dispels the notion of reified boundaries and enables the acknowledgement and validation of the Kaifeng Jews' authenticity claims within their particular cultural framework. While avoiding the label of "authentic", we can nonetheless validate the truth and sincerity of those claims to recognise the group's unique historical and cultural contribution.¹⁵⁸

Fast-forwarding Chairman Mao

The revival of Sino-Judaic identity also poses a challenge to the boundaries of authentication drawn by the Chinese authorities. As discussed, the justification of those boundaries has been the 1953 policy document refusing the Kaifeng Jews' request for recognition Jews as an ethnic minority and containing a cryptic warning that such recognition could place China in a "passive position politically". At the same time, the document prohibited discrimination against the group. Until 1996, this ambivalence allowed community members to be registered as Jewish on their local

¹⁵⁸ In the political arena, public campaigns by a number of groups in Israel and the US contesting the hegemony of the Chief Rabbinate in matters of Jewish identity reflect the intellectual challenge to both the artifice and exclusiveness of essentialized cultural boundaries.

registry cards, thereby eligible for minority benefits. After the incident of Jin Guangyuan's eviction from the Israeli Embassy, when the issue of their registered Jewish status became more public, the authorities rescinded that status.

One of the critical impediments to any substantive shift from that 1953 policy document is its initial imprimatur from the Party's founding leadership, in particular, from Chairman Mao Zedong. In the complex web of Chinese state bureaucracy, it is not a simple feat to overturn an edict endorsed by the Chairman. Yet, were the Chinese able to overcome this bureaucratic inertia and adapt Mao's policy to a modern context, I suggest the results could not only benefit the Kaifeng Jews but serve local and national Chinese interests as well. The standing of Maoist China in 1953 was very different from its position today, a period (*21C globalization*) Nederveen Pieterse characterises by the ascendance of China as a world power. In those early decades of Maoist rule, China was a poor and insular nation with a struggling economy and few diplomatic links to the outside world. The China of today is an economic powerhouse, intrinsically linked to the global market and actively projecting its soft power. If China were to decide to promote the preservation of Sino-Judaic cultural heritage in Kaifeng, it appears unlikely that this could in any way affect its global standing or put it in a more "passive" position politically.

On the contrary, the world would be pleasantly surprised to learn of a Jewish enclave that persevered in Kaifeng, China for over a millennium. The existence of these Chinese Jews and the absence of any persecution against them could challenge the perception of China as a xenophobic nation. Moreover, the project to build a Jewish history museum in Kaifeng, one which has reared its head intermittently since it was first proposed in 1992, was only suspended and never officially cancelled. Even as late as April 2015 municipal officials still expressed hope that such a project would be a boon to Kaifeng's sluggish economy. Thanks to Domenge, we know exactly what the old synagogue looked like; many of its Torah scrolls and manuscripts are currently housed in museums in London, Toronto and Cincinnati. Further research in tourism studies could examine possible linkages between a potential Kaifeng Jewish history museum and the attractions of the nearby Shaolin Monastery and the Luoyang Buddhist Grottos. All of the Chinese academics I have spoken to believe that a museum

of Jewish history in Kaifeng would be a significant achievement for both scholarly research and the tourist industry. When it comes to involving the living descendants in such a project, however, these academics are understandably more reticent.

Yet, that need not be the case. In reality, since 1979 it has been the living descendants rather than the paltry exhibits currently displayed in a few minor venues that define tourists' interest in the Kaifeng Jews. Whether through direct interactions with individuals like Shi Lei, Guo Yan or Jin Guangzhong, or the indirect interchange between local institutions and global NGOs, the living descendants—today's Kaifeng Jews—have for some time now sought to engage with visitors and forge their own connections to outside knowledge and their own history. With ample publicity on their activities in the international media, to ignore them is to deny an existent reality.

Furthermore, recent criticisms and shutdowns of the Confucius Institute have prompted an official re-evaluation of China's "soft power" policy. In 2014 at the Academy for International Communication of Chinese Culture (AICCC), the director, Professor Huang Huilin, discussed her theory of China's "Third Pole Culture", as distinct from the two poles of the US and Europe. The AICCC defines this Chinese contribution to world culture on its website (Sigley 2014):

Rooted in the traditional Chinese civilization, the Third Pole Culture advances with the times and respects cultural differences under the premise of initiating cultural diversities. Currently, the diversified patterns of world culture co-exist under mutual influences. The Chinese 'Third Pole Culture' advocates the idea of 'harmony' through a practical and creative approach, adjusting itself with the times and learning from each other with the purpose to build a commonly recognized code and order for the world culture and to contribute to the ever-evolving development of human society.

Certainly, both Sino-Judaic history and its contemporary revival among Kaifeng's living descendants emphasize the respect for cultural differences included in this description of Third Pole Culture and could be a significant feature in China's campaign to project its soft power.

The first directive in Mao's 1953 policy document was to deny the Kaifeng Jews official recognition as an ethnic minority in China; such recognition could foment the vague political ramifications the document warns of. However, the Kaifeng Jews do not contest that decision, nor do they seek to attain that official status. Their interest is the

acknowledgement, validation and practice of their unique cultural heritage. In fact, the document's second directive, which it describes as a "major issue", encourages the authorities to "*take the initiative*" in fostering those aims:

The major issue is that we should take the initiative to be more caring to them in various activities, and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them. (Xu 2006, 99)

By adapting the intent of the 1953 CPC policy into contemporary contexts of *21C globalization*, the Chinese authorities could create those initiatives to better assist the Kaifeng Jews in furthering their cultural heritage, while simultaneously providing social, economic and political benefit to China.

A banner for the nations

"He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth." (Isaiah 11:12)

Since the Jesuits first transmitted to the West knowledge of the existence of Jews in faraway Kaifeng, in many respects, the impact of this marginal group has exceeded its insignificant numbers. The Yicileye's translation of the Biblical names of God into the Chinese vernacular buttressed the Jesuits' stance favouring idiomatic translation during the 300 years of the Vatican's Rites Controversy. The Jewish presence in China helped a charismatic rabbi from Amsterdam convince Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews back into Britain to expedite the prophecy of Isaiah quoted above. The philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz urged the Church episcopacy to make every effort to acquire the Kaifeng Torah scrolls, wrongly convinced that these, unlike the supposedly adulterated versions of European scrolls, pre-dated the Talmud and would thus confirm the advent of Christ. Immanuel Kant grappled with the question of their cultural longevity, which controverted his theory on the acculturation and assimilation of religious minorities. The Kaifeng Memorial Hall, first constructed in 1163 BCE endured until the mid- nineteenth century, at that time rendering it one of the oldest serviceable synagogues in Jewish history.

Today, the hundred or so Jewish descendants reembracing their cultural heritage make news headlines in Jerusalem, London, New York, Toronto, Beijing and elsewhere. While their modest endeavours to revive their Jewish culture are tolerated by the

Chinese authorities, these efforts, along with any accompanying publicity they generate, are judiciously scrutinized and can sometimes trigger consequences. Yet, in an article written in the *Jerusalem Post* by China's ambassador to Israel, Gao Yanping makes mention of the group as a symbol of Sino-Judaic amity (Gao 2014).¹⁵⁹ Finally, since contact began in the early eighties with Jewish visitors representing various denominations, the Kaifeng Jews continue to play an important role in the contemporary discourse on "Who Is a Jew?"

Apart from the extraordinary impact the Kaifeng Jews have had on these global events, the story of their remarkable survival and revival as a small minority in Imperial China reflects on today's crucial issues of immigration, diversity and multiculturalism. A major element in that story was the permeability of cultural boundaries in the host country. That porousness, intrinsically linked with China's syncretistic religious cultures, enabled the flow of cultural confluences to be translated into the amalgam of Sino-Judaic identity. This form of cosmopolitanism, which existed in the Northern Song capital seven centuries before Kant's treatise *Perpetual Peace*, was conspicuously absent in tenth century Europe, where its Jewish inhabitants generally remained separated, insular and persecuted until the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Today, as the issue of immigration poses a stark challenge to physical, cultural and political boundaries, the model of adaptation of the Jewish immigrants to Kaifeng is a useful one. It frames multiculturalism and diversity within potentialities of openness, sharing and change rather than a fallacious picture of disparate, closed and static entities. It enables immigrants to seek the commonalities with their host cultures rather than the highlighting of differences.¹⁶⁰

Finally, the amazing durability of Sino-Judaic identity is in many respects microcosmic of the Jewish experience generally. In this quote from Mark Twain's essay "Concerning the Jews" published in *Harper's Magazine* in March 1899, all the attributes he ascribes to the generic Jewish nation could be equally applied to the Jews of Kaifeng:

¹⁵⁹ "The friendship between the Chinese and Jewish nations dates back more than 1,000 years. The Jewish people in [the] then-Chinese capital, Kaifeng, enjoyed equal rights to the Chinese."

¹⁶⁰ In this respect, the adaptation of the Kaifeng Jewish immigrants to Israel, beyond the scope of this study, merits further research.

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, and have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

At the end of my Acknowledgments I made mention of my late father who taught me that every person, no matter who it was, had a story to tell and something we can learn from. In retelling the narrative of the transmission of Sino-Judaic cultural identity, I have tried to keep this in mind so that the story might serve to inspire others. It shows how a people small in number, through its willingness and ability to integrate aspects of other cultures, can preserve its identity despite numerous impediments. Like the Jewish people as a whole, who still today confront serious challenges, the Kaifeng Jews do not seem likely to dissipate into the ash heap of history anytime soon. On the contrary, all indications are that they will continue to do as they have done in the past: translating, transmitting and creatively reproducing their exceptional cultural identity.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1:

Translation from Chinese of the lapidary inscriptions of the 1489 stele

(Weisz 2006, 3-4)

Now Israel established the religion

Abraham the Patriarch was the 19th generation descendant from Pangu and Adam.

Ever since the creation of Heaven and Earth, the Patriarchs transmitted in succession what has been given and received,

Did not make idols, did not flatter ghosts, did not believe in sorcery.

In his time, ghosts were not numerous, idols were without spiritual guidance.

Sorcery was without benefit.

Thinking of those in Heaven.

It was light and pure above.

Attained respect without comparison.

The Way of Heaven did not speak

The four seasons revolved and everything was created.

He observed, spring was for birth, summer was for growth, fall was for harvest, winter was for storage.

(Birds) flew, (creatures) lived in water, (animals) were active, and (plants) were planted. (They) were lustrous, humble, open and fallen. The living were self born, the flourishing were self flourishing. The shapes were self formed, the colors were self-colored.

The patriarch suddenly woke and realized this dark mystery.

He set to teach the Correct Religion; he was the assistant to the True Heaven.

He waited wholeheartedly to receive the pure transmission

That time, he established the religion the origin of which was transmitted to today.

Examining it, it was the 146th year of the Zhou Dynasty.

Once transmitted, it reached Moses, the Patriarch of the Correct Religion.

Examining it, it was the 613th year of the Zhou Dynasty.

He was born intelligent and pure, completely righteous and benevolent, completely principled and virtuous.

He searched for the scriptures on the top of Mount Sinai

He fasted for forty days and nights

Discarded his lustful desires

Absolutely refused sleep and food

He prayed sincerely, devoting his mind to the Heart of Heaven,

The Correct Scriptures consisted of one book, 53 chapters.

Since its inception, its contents touched upon the subtle and mysterious.

Report from an 1835 edition of the Catholic publication *The Chinese Repository
citing Père Charles le Gobien's *Lettres édifiantes* (1707).**

From Welch, Ian Hamilton. 2013. "In the Forest of the Light:" *Christians and Jews in nineteenth century China*. Australian National University Open Access Research. 11-13. <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/11073>

The Romish missionaries, soon after they entered this country, found a synagogue of Jews in some of the northern provinces. "Father Ricci who made this discovery," says a writer in the Asiatic Journal, "was not able to draw from it those advantages which he had desired. Confined to the city of Peking, by the duties of his mission, he could not undertake a journey to Kaefung foo, the capital of Honan, which is distant therefrom about two hundred leagues. He contented himself with interrogating a young Jew of this synagogue, whom he met at Peking. He learned from him, that at Kaefung foo there were ten or twelve families of Israelites; that they had come thither to rear again their synagogue; and that they had preserved, with the greatest care, for five or six hundred years, a very ancient copy of the Pentateuch. Father Ricci immediately showed him a Hebrew Bible. The young Jew recognised the character, but could not read it, because he had devoted himself solely to the study of Chinese books, from the time that he aspired to the degree of a scholar. The weighty occupations of Father Ricci did not permit him to add to this discovery. It was not until after the lapse of three or four years that he obtained the opportunity of sending thither a Chinese Jesuit, with full instructions to investigate what he had learned from the Jewish youth. He charged him with a Chinese letter, addressed to the chief of the synagogue. In this letter, father Ricci signified to him, that besides the books of the Old Testament, he was in possession of all those of the New, which testified that Messiah whom they were expecting, was already come. As soon as the chief of the synagogue had read the part of the letter, which related to the coming of Messiah, he made a pause, and said, it was not true, as they did not expect him in less than ten thousand years. But he entreated Father Ricci, whose fame had appraised him of his great talents, to come to Kaefung foo, that he might have the pleasure of surrendering to him the care of the synagogue, provided he would abstain from the meats forbidden to Jews. The great age (174) of this chief, and the ignorance of his successor, determined him to make these offers to Father Ricci. The circumstance was favourable for obtaining information of their Pentateuch; and the chief readily consented to give them the beginning and end of every section' they were found perfectly conformable to the Hebrew Bible of Plautin, except that in the Chinese copy there were no vowel points.

In 1613, Father Aleni who, on account of his profound knowledge and great wisdom, was called by the Chinese themselves, the Confucius of Europe, was commanded by

his superiors to undertake a journey to Kaifung for the purpose of ascertaining what could be gained from the discovery. He was the fittest man in the world to have succeeded in it, being well skilled in Hebrew. But times were changed. The old chief was dead. The Jews with readiness showed Father Aleni their synagogue, but he never could prevail on them to show him their books. They would not even so much as withdraw the curtains which concealed them. Such were the feeble beginnings of this discovery, which fathers Trigault and Semedo, and other missionaries, have transmitted to us. Learned men have often spoken of them, sometimes very incorrectly, and have always expressed a desire of further information.

The residence afterwards established by the Jesuits at Kaifung excited fresh expectations. Nevertheless, fathers Rodriguez and Figueredo wished in vain to profit by this advantage. Father Gozani was the first person who was at all successful in his endeavors. Having an easy access, he took a copy of the inscriptions in the synagogue, which are written on large tablets of marble, and sent it to his superiors at Rome. These Jews informed him, that there was a Bible at Peking, in the temple, where were kept the king, or canonical books of strangers. The French and Portuguese Jesuits obtained permission from the emperor to enter the temple and examine the books. Father Parennin was present. Nothing of the kind was found. Father Bouvet said, that they saw some Syriac letters, and had every reason to believe that the master of the pagoda gave bad information to the Jesuits in the course of their search. It would now be very difficult to obtain admission into this library; and every attempt hitherto made by Father Gaubil has been unsuccessful. He never could understand what these Hebrew and Syriac books were. In the interim, a Tartar Christian, to whom he had lent his Hebrew Bible, assured him also that he had seen books written in the same character; but he could not tell him what these books were, not what might be their antiquity. He only declared to him, that it was a thora, that is to say, a book of the law. While the Jesuits were making these fruitless researches in Peking, the Jews, less reserved than the Chinese, gave voluntary information of their different customs to Father Gozani; and by the beginning of the century, he was enabled to publish an account as circumstantial as could have been expected from one who was not acquainted with the Hebrew language. This account is published in the eighteenth volume of the *Lettres edifiantes et curieuses*. In a letter to a member of the society of Jesuits, dated at Kaifung foo, in Honan, Nov. 5th, 1704, J. P. Gozani thus wrote: —

“As to what regards those who are here called tiao-kin-kiao, (tenou kin keaou, or ‘the sect that plucks out the sinew,’) two years ago I was going to visit them, under the expectation that they were Jews, and with a view of finding among them the Old Testament. But as I have no knowledge of the Hebrew language and met with great difficulties, I abandoned this enterprise for fear I should not succeed in it. Nevertheless, as you remarked to me that I could oblige you by obtaining information concerning this people, I have obeyed your orders, and

have executed them with all the care and precision of which I was capable. I immediately made them protestations of friendship, to which they readily replied, and had the civility to come to see me. I returned their visit in the *li-pai-sou*, (*le pae sze*) that is in their synagogue, where they were all assembled, and where I held with them long conversations. I saw their inscriptions, some of which are in Chinese, and the rest in their own language. They showed me their books of religion, and permitted me to enter even into the most secret place of their synagogue, where they themselves are not permitted to enter. There is a place reserved for the *chamkias* (*chang keaou*,) or chief of the synagogue, who never enters there unless with profound respect. They told me that their ancestors came from a kingdom of the west, called the kingdom of Juda, which Joshua conquered after having departed from Egypt and passing the Red sea and the desert; that the number of Jews who came out from Egypt was about six hundred thousand men."

"They assured me, that their alphabet had twenty-seven letters, but they commonly only made us of only twenty-two; which accords with the declaration of St. Jerome, that the Hebrew has twenty-two letters, of which five are double. When they read in the Bible in their synagogue, they cover the face with a transparent veil, in memory of Moses, who descended from the mountain with his face covered, and who thus published the Decalogue and the law of God to his people. They read a section every Sabbath day. Thus the Jews of China, as the Jews of Europe, read all the law in the course of the year. He who reads, places the *ta-king* on the chair of Moses. He has his face covered with a very thin cotton veil. At his side is a prompter, and some paces below a *moula*, to correct the prompter should he err. —They spoke to me respecting paradise and hell in a very foolish manner. There is every appearance that what they said was drawn from the Talmud. I spoke to them of the Messiah, promised in the Scriptures. They were very much surprised at what I said to them; and when I informed them that his name was Jesus, they replied to me that mention was made in the Bible of a holy man named Jesus, who was the son of Sirach, but they knew not the Jesus of whom I spake to them."

* *The Chinese Repository*, Vol III No 4, August 1834-1835, p 172.

Full text of 1850 letter of Kaifeng Jew Chao-Nien-tzu [Zhao Nianzu] to Mr. Temple Hillyard Layton, the British Consul at Amoy [Xiamen].

From Welch, Ian Hamilton. 2013. *"In the Forest of the Light:" Christians and Jews in nineteenth century China*. Australian National University Open Access Research. 14-15. <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/11073>

[On the outside envelope]

"The enclosed letter to be delivered to His Worship Mr Layton, H.B.M. Consul at Amoy, in the province of Fuh-kien, for transmission to the chief teacher of the Jewish religion."

"Year, Kang-siuh seventh month, thirteenth day. Sent from the street Siao-kiai'

"On the 23d of the month of the year Kang siuh (1850), we received your valued letter, and acquainted ourselves with its contents.

"In reply to the inquiries which you therein make, we have to state, that during the past forty or fifty years, our religion has been but imperfectly transmitted, and although its canonical writings are still extant, there are none who understand so much as one word of them. It happens only that there yet survives an aged female of more than seventy years, who retains in her recollection the principal tenet of the faith.

"Morning and night, with tears in our eyes and with offerings of incense, do we implore that our religion may again flourish. We have everywhere sought about, but could find none who understood the letters of the Great Country, and this has occasioned us deep sorrow. But now the unexpected arrival of your letter fills us with happiness. We heard that a letter had last year been received by one Tie, from a country of the Western Ocean (Europe), but this to our regret we never got a sight of. However, the receipt of your present letter assures us that the holy religion (Shing-kiao) contains still a germ of vitality, and that in the great English nation the history of its origin has not been lost. If it shall be possible again to erect our temple, it will give joy not only to our own community but likewise the holy men of Tien-chuh [reference

to India] will rejoice exceedingly. It will be needful, meanwhile, that the proceedings with a view to this end be conducted prudently and with caution.

"Our temple in this place has long been without ministers; the four walls of its principal hall are greatly dilapidated, and the compartments of the hall of the holy men are in ruins. The water chamber (bath) [Hebrew *mikvah*] and the treasury are in ruins likewise. Through the whole day have tears been in our eyes, and grief at our hearts, at the sight of such things. It has been our desire to repair the temple, and again to procure ministers to serve in it; but poverty prevented us, and our desire was vain. Daily with tears have we called on the Holy Name. If we could again procure ministers, and could put in order our temple, our religion would have a firm support for the future, and its sacred documents would have a secure repository. This it needs no divination to be assured of.

"In our community the family of Chao has produced the men who have been most distinguished, who have held offices in the government, been eminent in the arts, and enjoyed the imperial confidence. One of its members in former times, Chao-yong-ko, was an intendant in the province of Yunnan, and another, Chao-yang-shing, was a General in the province of Che-kiang. "

This is with the salutation of CHAO-NIEN-TSU

APPENDIX 4

The Full Text of the 1953 Document classifying the Kaifeng Jewish descendants as Han Chinese (Xu 2006, 99)

The United Front of the Bureau of Central South:

The telegraph dated April 3 regarding the Kaifeng Jewry is received.

Judging from your telegraph, the Jews scattered in Kaifeng have no direct connections economic wise [sic], they don't have a common language of their own and a common area of inhabitancy. They have completely mixed and mingled with the majority Han population, in terms of their political, economic and cultural life, neither do they possess any distinctive traits in any other aspect. All this indicates that it is not an issue to treat them as one distinctive ethnic group, as they are not a Jewish nation in themselves.

Secondly, aside from the Kaifeng Jewry, there is stateless Jewish population in Shanghai. Jewish presence in some other large and mid-sized cities are also possible, however scarce it might be. It is an intricate issue. It could cause other problems and put us in a passive position politically if we acknowledge the Jews of Kaifeng. Therefore, your request of acknowledging Kaifeng Jewry as a separate nationality is improper based solely on the historical archival evidence you found. You have only seen the minor inessential differences between the Kaifeng Jews and their Han counterpart, and fail to see their commonality and the fact that they're essentially the same. (The publication found in People's Daily during National Day celebration time last year regarding "a Jewish nationality" was provided by the Central Ethnic Affairs Committee.) Kaifeng Jewry should be treated as a part of the Han Nationality.

The major issue is that we should take the initiative to be more caring to them in various activities, and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them. This will help gradually ease away the differences they might psychologically or emotionally feel exists between them and the Han.

The United Front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

June 8, 1953

GLOSSARY

aliyah [Heb. אֲלִיָּה]- immigration to the Land of Israel (lit. “ascending”).

baijiu [Ch. *báijiǔ*, 白酒]- lit. “white spirits”, a strong distilled spirit usually fermented from sorghum or rice and commonly consumed in China.

challah [Heb. חַלָּה]- traditional braided loaves of bread eaten on the Sabbath.

cholent- [Heb. צִילָנֵט]- a Jewish Sabbath dish of slowly baked meat and vegetables, prepared on a Friday and cooked overnight (Fr. origin= *chaud lent*).

etrog [Heb. אֶתְרוֹג]- citron, one of the Four Species incorporated into the ritual of the Festival of Sukkot.

lulav [Heb. לִילָב]- palm branch, the one of the Four Species to which three twigs of myrtle and two willow branches are customarily bound.

gaige kaifang [Ch. *gǎigé kāifàng*, 改革开放]- China’s “reform and openness” policy.

goy [Heb. גּוֹי]- a gentile, from the standard Hebrew biblical term for “nation”, including that of Israel.

halakha [Heb. הֲלָכָה]- Jewish law and jurisprudence, based on the Talmud.

halakhic- Anglicized adjectival form of *halakha* used to describe or classify matters related to Jewish law.

haredi [Heb. חֲרָדִי]- ultra-orthodox (lit. “one who trembles”).

Hui [Ch. *huí*, 回]- A member of a traditionally Muslim people of northwest China, descended chiefly from the Han and a significant Chinese minority.

hukou ben [Ch. *hùkǒu běn*, 户口本]- household registry cards issued locally throughout China.

jiaotang [Ch. *jiàotáng*, 教堂]- church; generically, a place of worship.

jinshi [Ch. *jìnshì*, 進士]- lit. “advanced scholar”, the superlative degree conferred to a graduate of the triennial Imperial court exams.

juren [Ch. *jǔrén*, 舉人]- lit. “recommended man”, the degree conferred upon a graduate of the triennial provincial exams

kehillah [Heb. קְהִלָּה]- a Jewish congregation.

kosher [Heb. כָּשֵׁר] – any food product or premises satisfying the requirements of Jewish

law.

kashrut [Heb. כַּשְׁרוּת]- the body of Jewish religious laws concerning the suitability of food.

kiddush [Heb. קִידּוּשׁ]- a ceremony of prayer and blessing over wine, performed by the head of a Jewish household at the meal ushering in the Sabbath (on a Friday night) or a holy day, or prior to the lunch meal on Saturday.

lanmao huihui- [Ch. *lán mào huíhuì*, 蓝帽回回] blue-hatted Hui, the epithet given to the Yicileye due to their custom of wearing blue turbans rather than the white kind worn by the Hui.

mantou [Ch. *mántou*, 馒头]- steamed bread.

minzu [Ch. *mínzú*, 民族]- nation or ethnicity, a political expression linked to the modern Chinese history of nation-building and ethnic minorities.

oleh [Heb. עוֹלָה]- an immigrant to Israel (lit. “one who ascends”).

qingzhensi [Ch. *qīngzhēnsì*, 清真寺]- mosque, lit. “temple of purity and truth”, the name originally given to the Yicileye’s synagogue. It has been argued that Hui Muslims only later appropriated this term.

san bu yuanze [Ch. *sān bù yuánzé*, 三不原则]- “The Three No’s”, unofficial title of policy on Jews and Judaism in China: 1) Judaism is not one of China’s five recognized religions 2) Jews are not one of China’s fifty-five ethnic minorities and 3) there are no Jews in Kaifeng.

shuhu huihui [Ch. *shù hū huíhuì*, 朮忽回回]- a term, possibly referring to Jews, that appeared in a Yuan Dynasty regulation banning ritual slaughter. The *huihui* suffix would indicate the conflation of Jews with Hui Muslims.

sukkah [Heb. סֻכָּה]- a temporary hutlike structure partly roofed with branches, used as a ritual dwelling space by Jews in celebrating Sukkot.

Sukkot [Heb. סוּכּוֹת]- a major Jewish festival held in the autumn to celebrate the sheltering of the Israelites in the wilderness. It is marked by the construction of small booths covered in natural roofing.

tallit katan [Heb. טְלִית קָטָן]- fringed garment traditionally worn either under or over one's clothing by Jewish males.

tian [Ch. *tiān*, 天]- heaven, used in the stela inscriptions and synagogal placards as a euphemism for God.

tiaojin jiao [Ch. *tiāo jīn jiào*, 挑筋教]- lit. “the sect that plucks the sinews”, the name

the Yicileye used to distinguish themselves from the Hui originating from the Jewish custom to remove the sciatic nerve during the butchering process.

tzitzit [Heb. תצִיִּצִית]- specially knotted ritual fringes, or tassels, worn in antiquity by Israelites and today by observant Jews.

wotuo [Ch. wò tuō, 鞞脫]- a term appearing in the Yuan Dynasty Administrative codes, possibly referring to the Muslim merchant guilds.

youtai [Ch. yóutài, 犹太]- Jewish.

youtai ren [Ch. yóutàirén, 犹太人]- Jew(s).

Yicileye [Ch. yī cì lè yè, 一賜乐业]- the Chinese name adapted by the original Jewish migrants (likely a colloquial transliteration of “Israelite”).

yiseliè [Ch. yǐsèliè, 以色列]- modern-day Israel.

yizkor [Heb. יִזְכֹּר]- the Jewish memorial prayer recited on certain holidays for deceased relatives.

yuebing [Ch. yuèbǐng, 月饼]- moon cakes, customarily eaten on the evening of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, while gazing at the radiance of the moon.

zhangjiao [Ch. zhǎng jiào, 掌教]- lit. “elder teacher”, one of the terms that may have been used by the Yicileye for “rabbi”.

zunchong daojiangsi [Ch. zūnchóng dào jīng sì, 尊崇道经寺]- lit. the “Temple Respecting the Scriptures of the Way”, the name of the synagogue as inscribed in the 1512 stele, used to distinguish it from the earlier moniker *qingzhensi* designating a mosque.

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