THE PRESENCE OF JEWS IN ANCIENT CHINA: KAIFENG

by

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Dedication

First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this to the memory of my loving grandfather, Papa Stanley “V” Kassimir, who loved my interest and work in both East Asia and Judaica but unfortunately passed prior to completing this research. You are truly missed.

I would also like to thank my grandmother, Nanny Pauline Kassimir, for her unrelenting love and support through this and all of my endeavors.
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# Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Acknowledgments iii

Abstract v

Introduction: The Presence of Jews in Ancient China 1

Chapter One: Almighty, Omnipresent, and High Above: Y-hwh and Di帝 5

Chapter Two: “East to the Land of the East” 7

Chapter Three: The Things They Carried: Religious Practices, Demonic Worship, and Sorcery 10

Chapter Four: And Then There Were Floods 12

Chapter Five: A Prolonged Arrival: When Did the Jews Actually Arrive? 15

Chapter Six: So, What’s in a Name: Pangu or Adam? 17

Chapter Seven: The Construction of Identity 20

Chapter Eight: Comparative Analysis of Physical Assimilation Practices With a Focus on Jews in China 25

Chapter Nine: Extended Overview of the History of Jews in China 28

Chapter Ten: Sinofication of Jews or Lack Thereof 36

Chapter Eleven: Racial Identity in Marco Polo’s The Travels 45

Conclusions 54

Postscript: Kaifeng Jews: Interviews With Descriptions 66

Bibliography 76
Abstract

Despite the amount of research, there doesn’t yet exist a consensus as to the exact date at which the Kaifeng Jews first migrated from their ancestral home in the Middle East, eventually establishing a community in China (as part of the larger overall Diaspora affecting the Jews at the end of the Babylonian Exile). The evidence and scholarship largely supposes such an arrival time span from the late Xia Dynasty until approximately the Tang and Song dynasties. By consulting the relevant literature, historical record, a wide range of academic scholars and conducting one-on-one interviews with Kaifeng Jew descendents, a more precise date of emigration for this subgroup of Jews eastward into China can be more accurately extrapolated.

A recording of the documentary, lecture, and other research such as both person and collected photos can be found on my website:

http://web.me.com/spencer.kassimir/Site/Thesis_Home.html

I hope that this will inspire many more to become involved in this field as well as others.
Introduction: The Presence of Jews in Ancient China

The notion of Jews being present in ancient China is not a new concept. In fact, it is an area that has been extensively researched and analyzed despite only coming to light in the West as recently as 1605 by the Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (who died only five years later). Yet despite the research there is not a lot of information concerning exactly where or when the Jews first came to China. The potential time of arrival span is predominantly from the late Xia Dynasty all the way up through the Tang and Song dynasties. There are many reasons for there being such a large potential for the arrival timeline.

To begin, there is the issue of Jewish biblical and Chinese mythological dating; this is an issue that I will address by also overlapping their respective timelines. This is the most contentious issue as it requires a recognition of the overlap for the validity of these recorded events. Thus, if there is in fact no recognition, the argument will fail to establish any sort of authenticity even if there were to be reasonable doubt for seemingly connected or related events due to the origin source still being speculative. Because of this, I have chosen to use both sets of dates as templates to work around.

Following this premise, I will examine the religious, cultural, supernatural, and other similarities between the two cultures based on the standpoint of these specific dates. In short, I am going to compare the ideologies and views of Y-hwh versus that of Di as well as the practices of worship towards the two monotheistic entities. I will also examine the similar flood myths that both canons contain and evaluate the similarities and differences, including their “given” dates.
Next I will be looking at the migration of the sons of Abraham and Keturah (Hagar) who were “sent eastward to the land of the east/eastern country.” This also incorporates dating in addition to analyzing the potential migration routes that could have been used. Unfortunately, I am not a specialist in the Cochin Jews of India, which makes things a little more difficult as their presence in South Asia logically predates that of their presence in East Asia.

Another necessary question is how one would define “having a presence” in China. There had always been Jewish traders making the journey back and forth from China as far back as the earliest days of the Silk Road, but the question then is does this constitute a “presence”? Personally, I think it does. I do, however, recognize the possible impact of their potential Chinese neighbors would have been much greater if they were not simply in a constant state of travel but rather had an established community with families in China. Thus, the Jewish “presence” in China should be looked at in two ways—that of a non-permanent traveler and that of a settled resident. Still this does not preclude the possibility of multiple migrations to China.

What further breaks down this idea of a Jewish presence is how one defines being Jewish. This ties into the identity of the sons of Abraham and Keturah as it is accepted by Semitic religions that the Jewish line follows that of Abraham’s eldest son, Isaac, exclusively. In addition, the way in which modern Judaism is practiced is not based on the traditions of these times but instead on the giving of the commandments to Moses in 1313 B.C.E. (during the Shang Dynasty), which happened 400 years later. Because of this I will be using the terms “Pre-Sinai Jews” for those who were descended
from Abraham via Isaac and then “**Judaic Influenced Groups**” for those who are descended from the other sons born after Isaac from Keturah, as opposed to those born of Sarah.

There are also many other similarities between the two cultures that need to be addressed, mainly the story of the first human. Traditionally, the Chinese culture ascribes Pangu to this event, whereas the Jewish and Semitic view is that Adam was the first human. However, the names used for this first person by the Jews in China had actually been interchanged freely at times, which leads me to ask whether or not this was an assimilated name that they picked up from their surrounding cultures or if they are in fact synonymous persons. In addition, there is an interesting matching between the similarities in Chinese acupuncture and acupressure points with those of Jewish Teffilin, which is used for Morning Prayer. As there are a great deal of practices that seem to fit from one culture to the other, I find myself asking a question similar to that of Adam vs. Pangu, i.e. are acupuncture/pressure and Teffilin influenced by each other, or are they resultant of two separate epiphanies in discovering and applying learned knowledge?

Another oddity in this discussion was written about by a later sage in Judaism named Rabbi David Luria, also known as the RaDaL (1797-1855). He was well versed in both Judaic and secular studies and was the one who wrote about a great “iron wall” being the place where the sons of Abraham and Keturah departed for. Though there is no record of a great Iron Wall in China, there is of course the Great Wall, and there is also, more interestingly, a mention of a great iron wall in China in the Japanese *Tales of the*
Heike.¹ I look to further explore these similarities in the hope of better connecting the potential dots surrounding the presence of Jews in China, though my ultimate goal is to establish a causal connection between the Judaic Influenced Group of the sons of Abraham and Hagar with that of Shang Dì in Shang China.

Chapter One: Almighty, Omnipresent, and High Above: Y-hwh and 父

It is rather problematic that there is very little recorded information on ShangDi (Di), but what does exist tends to have certain similarities to that of the Jewish G-d. This is in part because, according to John Major, “the deity was not included in the regular liturgical round of ancestral sacrifices and oracular consultations.” However, starting with the basics, both are referred to as the “Lord Above” and each are considered to be monotheistic entities. They both are considered to have the power to stop meteorological events such as droughts, floods, storms, and even plagues. But where they differ is the manner in which they were prayed to.

Shangdi was rarely prayed to directly and was seen as being rather distant. The only times that Shangdi would be invoked was by a king. In addition, both Y-hwh and Di were both not allowed to be depicted in a physical form by practitioners. More often than not, as times changed and Shangdi’s role as supreme was adapted, fewer gods were contacted for more localized issues. What is interesting is that this condition of creating lesser gods from a singular is also discussed by the RaMBaM in regards to Abraham. Prior to Abraham, people began to worship idols in the form of stars and nature-based images. This is because the people believe G-d to be too inaccessible and thus perceived these lesser creations of G-d to be more directly accessible to humans. On page 261 of

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2 Major, John S. 8299-8300
The Cambridge History of Ancient China, it is clearly stated that one of the main reasons for the de-emphasis on the focus of Di is because of this inaccessibility in favor of the more localized lesser gods/messengers. “Di’s virtual disappearance from the records suggests either the increasing confidence with which the Shang Kings relied on the powers of their ancestors, their increasing indifference to Di’s existence, or their increasing realization that Di’s will was so inscrutable that it was fruitless to divine about his intentions.” However, the Judaic view of Y-hwh is that Abraham rekindled that connection. Why this was not done is China I am not sure. However, the fact that this same breakdown with Di from a purely monotheistic figure to that of the highest of many gods also existed during the time of Abraham is attention-worthy due to the similarity in thought process as well as the time at which they both occurred.

It is, however, important to realize that Abraham being a catalyst for maintaining the monotheistic approach to G-d predates that of the breakdown of Di by at least 250 years. Because of this there are now multiple possible reasons as to why or how Di broke down into being the “head” of a pantheon of gods instead of remaining the one exclusive.

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Chapter Two: “East to the Land of the East”

There is the possibility that Di never was purely monotheistic. The first reason for this premise can be attributed to the fact that there is actually little record of Di. But from the Judaic perspective, the more problematic understanding of why Di may never have been a fully monotheistic entity is because the sons of Abraham and Keturah were potentially not fully monotheistic in their practices either. Though in terms of dates, it would appear to be a possibility that the sons of Abraham and Keturah leaving the Middle East around 1677 B.C.E. could have had influence in the emergence of Di as a god in Shang China in approximately 1429 B.C.E. Yet according to Talmud commentary, there are a few debates on whether they were actually fully monotheistic, though all opinions concur that these were not to be considered as the lineage of the Jewish peoples.

In Genesis, it states that, “And to the sons of Abraham’s concubines, Abraham gave gifts, and he sent them away from his son Isaac while he [Abraham] was still alive, eastward to the land of the East…”6 This one line has since been analyzed for thousands of years as to what “East” actually meant. Biblical and modern Hebrew are both written without vowels, which becomes an issue of contention on translation because it requires the translator to possess an oral knowledge of the language passed down through generations, thus making interpretation open to differences of opinion through each person it passes through.

Rabbi David Luria, also known as the RaDaL (1797-1855), believed that this mythological East in fact meant China. He stated that they “were placed by Abraham in the eastern most country where they were surrounded by a great iron wall.” RaDaL was known to be extremely well versed in both Judaic and secular education when he lived in modern-day Lithuania, where he studied. He also is considered one of the most formative latter sages post-Talmud (originally orally transmitted but written in 200 C.E. for the Mishna and 500 C.E. for the Gemara) and post-Midrashic era (400 C.E.- 1200 C.E.).

There is no record that I have found pertaining to a “great iron wall” in China. However, there is mention of one from another Asian text. In the Japanese Tale of the Heike, translated by Helen McCullough, there is reference to not only a great iron wall but also a note that it was built by Shi Huangdi, who reigned the during the Qin dynasty.

“Shihuangdi’s capital was 18,380 leagues in circumference. The palace building stood on artificial elevation three leagues high…. To prevent the entry of messengers from the land of the dead, an iron wall 400 feet high surrounded the compound. An iron netting hung above the buildings. In spring time, the wall obstructed the homeward flight of the wild geese that visited the rice fields in autumn; thus, an iron gate, the Wild Goose gate, was provided for the birds.”

There are two questions that need to be asked in terms of this similarity. First, did the RaDaL get his information of the iron wall from the Tale of the Heike? Second, is any account of Shi Huangdi credible? For that matter, is it credible that this source was written 1,400 years after his existence in a completely different country? While I am not

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7 Rabbi David Luria
certain, it seems highly suspect that the RaDaL would have been able to speak Japanese and/or to find a translated edition in Hebrew, Lithuanian, or any of the other Western languages he could speak. In addition, I am unsure of the legitimacy of anything related to Shi Huangdi as I am not an expert. Regardless, I find it fascinating that two sources, hundreds of years apart, across oceans and continents, would make the same seemingly apocryphal statement of there being a giant iron wall approximately during the same time in history.
Chapter Three: The Things They Carried: Religious Practices, Demonic Worship, and Sorcery

Further taking into account the comments of the children of Abraham and Keturah, I began researching exactly what was meant by the gifts they were supposed to have been carrying. The Sanhedrin was a group of 71 elders considered to be the “supreme court” of Judaic law in the time around the destruction of the second temple in 69 C.E. They are also attributed to being the ones who first started the recording of the Talmud—also known as the oral law, whereas the Torah is the written law. In the Hebrew of Genesis it says, “He gave them the name of tumah.”\(^9\) Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (February 22, 1040-July 13, 1105) better known as Rashi, elaborated on this by saying that giving them tumah specifically meant giving them impure powers/knowledge of black magic. Why he gave them these gifts is another matter that is debated, with reasons ranging from that he was returning the knowledge of their other biological cultures to others such as him already having given everything else he had to both Isaac and Ishmael. Regardless of this, there is a fairly unanimous consensus that the knowledge that he gave them was of the black arts, which again leads me back into Shi Huangdi.

I have already established that the period during which Shi Huangdi would have lived fits rather well in terms of the amount of time it would have taken to migrate from the Middle East to China. What is particularly fascinating is the fact that Shi Huangdi is known to have had extensive knowledge of the black arts and demonology. In the Chinese legend of the Bai Ze (白澤) or Hakutaku in Japanese (白沢), Shi Huangdi received detailed information of these things from the beast, which he recorded in the

\(^9\) Genesis 25:6
Baizetu (白澤圖).¹⁰ In fact, this myth permeated beyond China to the Ryukyu Islands and Japan proper. The Baizetu (白澤圖) contained 11,520 different types of supernatural and demonic creatures. Because of this, I hope to further investigate the bestiaries of what remains of this text as well as the ones from Genesis to see if there is more overlap. I will also be looking into the origination of the black arts from the native cultures of the sons of Abraham and Keturah in addition to those practiced in the time of Shi Huangdi.

Chapter Four: And Then There Were Floods

The existence of flood myths is more abundant than one might believe and, for that matter, predates the birth of Abraham. According to Genesis, the great flood took place in 2105 B.C.E., predating the Xia Dynasty by around 100 years. In fact, some flood myths even predate Noah. However, there are overlying similarities and themes that connect all of them. Mark Edward Lewis, in his book The Flood Myths of Early China, elaborates on this by subdividing them each into the following chapters: Flood Taming and Cosmogony, Flood Taming and Criminality, Flood Taming and Lineages, and Flood Taming Couples and the Body. In short, these flood myths are about punishment, creation, rebirth (or restarting of a pact or lineage), or human assertion of dominance over the animal kingdom.

Before breaking down and comparing the Chinese flood myths, it is important to understand the Jewish and pre-Judaic flood accounts. The short version is that in the story of Noah, the people are not acting as they should, so G-d talks to the one righteous man and tells him to build an arc, house a male and female of every living creature as well as his three sons, their wives, and his own wife. Everyone laughs at Noah about there being a flood in the desert until they all meet their end. They remain in the arc for 40 days and nights, see a rainbow (G-d’s reminder that He will never do this again) and then repopulate the earth. Though this is the simplified version, when referenced against the chapter titles of Lewis’s book, there is no direct corollary to “Flood Taming…” In fact, this story does not touch on cosmogony or the body at all, as his titles do. These two
titles do, however, get addressed in the pre-Judaic story of Atrahasis and Enki\textsuperscript{11}, which some scholars believe the story of Noah is based on.

Regarding Noah, this is not to say that the other aspects of criminality and lineages are applicable, although by their own respective definitions they appear to be. The flood and the arc essentially act as a “reset button” for humanity, thus providing that all peoples are of Noah’s lineage. Yet with respect to lineage from Lewis’s perspective, this has more to do with the importance of how the stories are transmitted rather than the importance of the stories themselves:

“While this political reading of the myths is certainly correct as far as it goes, it is noteworthy that these tales of a world prior to the existence of the dynastic state are also accounts of a world in which the true family and the virtues that underpinned it did not yet exist. The family in the Warring States and early imperial China, like those in most times and places, was a social unit that was constituted across time. It fully performed its functions and was capable of perpetuating itself only to the extent that property and status were transmitted across generations from fathers to sons or, in some cases, to daughters. Without such transmission, groups based on kin ties could not cohere for more than a single generation. Thus, the inability of rulers to transmit their positions to their sons indicated either that these rulers were failed fathers who could not form a family or that the conditions for the formation of a family did not exist in their time.\textsuperscript{12}

He later quotes Sima Qian to further this premise. But as we see, this has to do more with the transmission of information rather than the idea of lineage being established within the story itself.

The major similarities rather have more to do with that of Nüwa and Atrahasis. Both claim people were made from the mud, and both are premised on the existence of many gods. The Akkadian epic is more similar to that of the Greek gods because in that

\textsuperscript{11} Class notes from REL111 with Dr. Bruce Zuckerman. Fall 2003.
story the mud people are killed off because there are too many of them. This really has
very little to do with what sort of effect Judaic Influenced Groups would have in the
region because it is not part of their canon. Thus I find it hard to tie many connections in
linking the Chinese stories of floods to that of Noah, aside from the obvious. I do believe
they share similar attributes in the respect of the world being punished for bad behavior,
but going beyond that would be a bit of a stretch at this point.
Chapter Five: A Prolonged Arrival: When Did the Jews Actually Arrive?

I feel that the best way to establish an understanding of this question comes from the charts that I have attached. By aligning the Biblical dates, converting them to the Gregorian calendar, listing the Biblical events and then matching them with the respective Chinese events and dynasties, I have found this to be the most comprehensive and exoteric method of displaying them.

As we can see from Akeda and Abraham in 1677 B.C.E., this would have been the earliest potential of a Judaic Influenced Group leaving the Middle East and having a potential impact on Eastern cultures. This takes into account the time for a migration as well as cultural establishment, so I feel that it is reasonable to believe that if this were to have occurred, they would have arrived no later than the early Shang Dynasty.

The next potential (and first Jewish presence) would be in the years 574, 566, and 556 B.C.E., as they are the dates when the first two lost tribes, second two lost tribes, and then remaining six of the lost ten tribes were exiled. This would have been the first major Jewish exodus that could have made an impact on China. In fact, in Sydney Shapiro’s book, he clearly states that this would have been the first potential group that would have settled outside in China as, prior to that, it was most likely only traders and merchants that would have had any presence there.¹³ The latest potential date from this era would have been 423 B.C.E. as it coincides with the destruction of the First Beit HaMikdash. This was during Eastern Zhou/Spring and Autumn periods.

There is then further evidence from three major stone inscriptions claiming different dates of arrival. The 1489 tablet states that it was in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the 1512 tablet claims the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.) and the 1663 marker claims it happened during the Zhou Dynasty (1066-256 B.C.E.). What is problematic here, aside from there being a difference in the dates, is that all of them could be potentially true. What is especially difficult in this area is that there is no real way of knowing if there were an overlap of teachings in this period, nor if these various potential migrations of people ever even interacted.
Chapter Six: So, What’s in a Name: Pangu or Adam?

According to Chen Yuan, “The Founder of the Israelite religion was Abraham, a 19th generation descendant of Pangu/Adam.”¹⁴ Pangu is believed to have been created via a cosmic egg over 18,000 years (18 being the number for life in Hebrew) and once he was perfectly balanced with both Yin and Yang, he emerged and created the earth over another 18,000 years. Adam was created by G-d and was balanced between similar ideas related to Yin and Yang. In fact, the Star (or Shield) of David is two overlapping triangles, which represent the concepts of male and female, dark and light, etc. In Hebrew, it is known as Zeir Anpin and Nukva. So what exactly did Chen Yuan mean by this? Was it a simple mistake of the first “human”?

Shapiro adds his commentary to the Chen Yuan translation, saying that the reasoning for this is that Jews made the effort to demonstrate the religious and cultural similarities between them and those of Confucians.¹⁵ Chen Yuan then continues to translate the following from the inscription entitled, “Chong Jian Qing Zhen Si Ji” (“A Record of Rebuilding the Purity and Truth Synagogue”) from 1489, during the rule of emperor Li Zong during the Ming Dynasty.

“In the 146th year of the Zhou dynasty (921 B.C.) Abraham established our religion, which has been carried on to this day. It was transmitted to Moses, Patriarch of the Correct Religion, in the 613th year of Zhou (454 B.C.)…. The Religion was passed on to Ezra, another patriarch of the Correct Religion. His way of worshipping G-d fully manifested the mysteries of the ancestral Way. The Way has no shape or form, but is above all else. Our religion was transmitted to China from Tianzhu…. More than 70 clans named Li, An, Ai, Gao, Mu, Zhou, Jin, Zhou, Zhang, Shi, Huang, Li, Nie, Jin,

Zhang, Zuo, and Pai…arrived during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), bringing entry tribute of Western cloth.”

What is written here is quite illuminating. First, it establishes that the last major patriarch that they recognized was Ezra (313 B.C.E). It also establishes this group’s earliest date in China during the Northern Song dynasty. The part that is most fascinating is that according to Biblical dates, Abraham was born in 1743 B.C.E., much earlier than this claim states. In 921 B.C.E., it would have already been the time of Judges, well after Moses and during the time of Eli (HaKohen). Chen Yuan then demonstrates that he feels this is not an error, but rather an issue with using different calendars. The Chinese calendar being lunar and the Hebrew being a seasonal lunar with solar calendar leads to the date discrepancy, according to page 24 of Shapiro’s book. The other interesting fact is how this appears to be written in an extremely Chinese-influenced fashion. It does not talk about G-d but rather, “The Way.” I believe this further demonstrates Shapiro’s understanding that these Jews in China had continued to make the effort to demonstrate the similarities between the cultures.

Finally, it explains how the religion made its way to China: It came from Tianzhu, which is understood to have been India. The Cochin Jews of India had established their presence in Cochin (modern-day Kochi) since the time just after the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash in 70 C.E. Thus, there is a large time gap between the first potential influences from those who came during the destruction of the First Beit HaMikdash and that of the Second. The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel have never been

completely identified, but many believe that we can now see their influence through other Eastern world events in India and China.
Chapter Seven: The Construction of Identity

Historically, specifically in terms of the Centrals States of China (中国), identity was defined by whether or not one was a member of the state or not. This is not to say that they did not have a sense of difference in terms of the modern interpretations of local identity, race and religion, but rather I believe these were less major points in the larger scheme of identification. This is, however, very different from the traditional Western viewpoint that has, until recently, taken religion as being the primary source of identity. This model, in fact, stems as far back as some of the earliest biblical references, but existed at least as far back as the time of Marco Polo in the 13th century. It is because of the arguments of Di Cosmo’s regarding state affiliation, Brindley’s with respect to barbarism versus ethnicity, and Marco Polo’s in terms of the foreigner’s viewpoint that I believe that there was no specific standard or criteria to which states had to adhere in order to establish their identity or to be allowed into the Central States.

The first scenario I would like to call the “1984 perspective” because I feel one way that identity was determined was via a situation similar to that of the book itself. In 1984, Oceania was in a constant state of war with one of two other nations. The reasoning the book proferred was that it maintained a status quo and sense of national pride and identity by having a constant reminder and identification with the general concept of “us versus them.” In this respect, this mechanism created a constant within each of the respective countries because there never ceased to be a time when they were not fighting for “their way of life.”
With respect to the role of the state, the most pervasive ideology that contributes to a “unified” perspective is that of Zhongguo (中国), or central state(s).\(^\text{17}\) Though intended as a plural with the collection of neighboring states in the region, the current country of China as a whole is understood to be a singular entity though its name remains the same. It is convenient that Chinese lacks the grammar to “pluralize” within the word to which it is affecting, and because of this the original meaning of a combined central state can be altered to an identity of a central state. But, the question remains, why did these states combine to create a collective group and thereby a larger unified identity? Di Cosmo points out that prior to 221 B.C.E., these states as individuals were able to support and protect themselves without the help of others. However, this changed as Di Cosmo argues that:

“Before the Ch’in unification in 221 B.C.E., the northern states were able to “contain the nomads, to push them away from the borders, and to inflict upon them resounding defeats, all without much trouble. In contrast, having emerged from the smoldering ashes of the Ch’in, the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.-C.E. 9) was forced for decades to accept humiliating peace treaties and, being incapable of defending the borders effectively, was subject to the nomad initiative both politically and militarily.”\(^\text{18}\)

Thus, this represents the “1984” scenario of creating a sense of identity by using national safety and the overarching “us versus them” theory to identify groups as either member states or not.

Because they were protecting against outsiders, each state had to contribute and not find itself to be the weakest link in the chain; otherwise, they would be cut off and no longer under the greater protection of the Central States. In a sense, it would be like

\(^{17}\) Di Cosmo, Ancient China and its Enemies, Page 275  
\(^{18}\) Di Cosmo, Ancient China and its Enemies, Page 161
getting demoted only with the consequences of no longer having the prestige and status of being a member of Zhongguo. This causes me to draw a parallel between that of the English Football [soccer] Premier League. Though seemingly unrelated, the way in which these two function and treat their members is not dissimilar. In the Premier League, at the end of the season, the worst-performing team is demoted to the oddly titled Championship League while the best performing team of the latter is promoted to that of the former. Both the Central States and the Premier League are concerned with the best and the strongest competitors for different reasons but use the same tactics to provide motivation in the form of carrots to the lesser states/clubs to move up and threaten those members of the top status with demotion for weakness.

Again I want to reemphasize that I believe the greatest confusion of identity as seen from a modern view regarding those in premodern China occurs in connection with the lack of plural in the word Zhongguo because a period that can be mistaken as a homogenous and largely peaceful time came to an end with an attack from the inside, as previously stated. Now because of that, and despite the fact that the Hsiung Nu had been in contact with the central states—not to mention also being the catalyst of a major advancement in the region’s mobility in the form of horses and chariots to the region—they were still a nomadic group that was not permitted to join the group in part because of their lack of a local permanent location of living. In essence, this goes back to the “1984” concept of “us versus them,” only this time, due to a lack of a permanent residence, the Hsiung Nu could never be a member state even in times of peace. Nomadism has been largely seen as an inferior way of life despite the fact that they took

19 Di Cosmo, Ancient China and its Enemies, Page 167
over after the collapse of the Han. Thus, since I believe that the Chinese viewed this roaming form of life as not being compatible with their overall identity, the formation of an immobile way of life was adopted or at least partially adapted to gain control of the region by the nomads.

As implied in part one, China is a country of crosspollination, as we see from the influence asserted by nomadic tribes outside of the central states in the form of technology (horses and carriages). Yet the question of what defines identity still needs to be addressed. For example, in the times of the biblical writings from the Hebrew Testament, racial ethnicity was not viewed as an issue of contention. For example, Moses’s wife Zipporah was described as being as, “black as a Cushite (descendant of Cush, Ethiopia/Africa)”\(^{20}\) though she was in fact Midianite. The only differentiation came from religion. With that, the identity of ethnicity in ancient China seems to be slightly more marked with asterisks. This is in part because throughout the dynasties, there has been an overarching theme of state-approved versus not.

Looking at a later Western perspective, Marco Polo recorded his travels, and with this I believe we can see a stark contrast between the local normative view of identity and that of a European. Constantly throughout The Travels, Polo identifies peoples predominantly by their religion, to which he attributes their customs. Yet, at the same time, we can see a lack of this view of identity when he describes the actions of Kublai Khan. In Khanbalik, “he stayed till February and March, the season of our Easter. Learning that this was one of our principal feasts, he sent for all the Christians and desired them to bring him the book containing the four Gospels. After treating the book to repeated applications of incense with great

\(^{20}\) Hebrew Testament, Numbers 12:1
ceremony, he kissed it devoutly and desired all his barons and lords there present to do the same. This usage he regularly observes on the principal feasts of the Christians, such as Easter and Christmas. And he does likewise on the principal feasts of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters.”

Not only does this demonstrate that as a westerner, Polo identifies people by their religion, but it also shows Kublai Khan was largely unconcerned with this factor as he participated in all of the ceremonies despite his being different. Again, this difference is particularly interesting because I believe this further demonstrates how identity lies within the state (including its leader), whereas we see otherwise in the European perspective. And though Kublai Khan was Mongolian and not Chinese, he represents part of the overall Chinese view simply by his presence and impact in the region.

It is because of these factors that I feel the overarching theme of identity lies within the confines of the “1984” concept. There seems to be a lack of definition in what makes a group acceptable to be defined as one of the group in terms of, for example, what it takes to be a member state. Rather, it seems that being identified with the group had more to do with a revolving door of whom the group will be allowed to be defined as “us” or otherwise become “them.”

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21 Polo, The Travels, Page 119
Chapter Eight: Comparative Analysis of Physical Assimilation Practices With a Focus on Jews in China

Authors Note: A great degree of this essay is based on my research regarding the misinterpretation of the role Marco Polo plays as many in academia feel that he only identified people by religion as per the status quo of his time. However, though he may have used religion as a primary form of identity, he clearly has an understanding of racial and physical differences as he goes into great detail. I have argued that this is in part due to the fact that he wrote this book for those that would never leave their towns in Europe and would thereby live vicariously with their imaginations through Polo’s writings. I have attached a copy of this, which can be found on page 45.

China as a culture has taken a limited interest or view that the presence of Jews in its midst is something all that unique. This is likely due to the fact that there are numerous “foreign” religions and ethnicities practiced within its borders. (In this particular aspect, the West has actually has a head start on Jewish integration.) Though Marco Polo discussed the presence of Jews, Saracens, Idoliters, Christians, etc. in his work *The Travels*, the first time there was any specific interest in the subject matter was 1605, when Father Mateo Ricci reported their presence back to the Vatican.

Why there was even interest in such a subject is a completely different question, but it is important in the context of assimilation: The Vatican believed that the Jews of the Middle East and Europe had organized and changed all of their Torah scrolls in order for there to be a lack of “proof” that Jesus was clearly stated as the Messiah—which was done in order to cast doubt on Catholicism. Aside from this being a nearly impossible task given the overwhelmingly large landscape and passage of time between the places and times since these scrolls had first been united, due to their isolation, the Jews in

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China had what was believed to be a potentially unadulterated authentic version of the Torah (Old Testament).

Despite the fact that these scrolls were identical to all of the others in Europe and the Middle East, the process of identifying, by the Vatican, a Jewish presence in China provides us with a great wealth of information on the status of Jews during this period. In fact, they had been so isolated that when Ai Tian, the Jewish man who met Mateo Ricci, saw a picture of Mary with the baby Jesus, he thought it to be Rebecca with Jacob. When the Father told him that his Messiah had already arrived and that the Jews were a dead religion, Ai Tian politely disagreed due to the fact that none of the criteria necessary in order for a person to be the Messiah had yet come to pass. However, it likely created a feeling that this Jewish community may in fact be the last in the world.

It has been established that there was a large Jewish population and that there was a temple in China.²⁴ We also know that the rabbi at the time was having trouble finding a successor and had asked Ricci if he would take over for him since he was well versed in the subject matter (though he did say that he would have to abstain from eating pork, amongst other things). Ricci, however, turned this offer down and died only five years later in Beijing. Was this the beginning of the end of the Jewish presence in Kaifeng and the beginning of the great Sinofication, or was this merely another hurdle along the way for the Jews to maintain their religious, cultural, and ethnic identities in China?

Other factors that should be considered are the assimilation histories of Jews in other countries, such as those that are or were Islamic and/or Christian. The question arises as

to whether or not there are any differences between the Sinofication/assimilation patterns of China versus the Christian and Islamic countries. And, if so, what were the political, religious, or ethnic pressures? Also, are there any overbearing similarities or causes of assimilation that are paralleled with other cultures within China, such as the Muslims, also known as the Hui?

There is a nearly unlimited amount of possibilities that can be explored in trying to determine how, why and at what point this change takes place within a culture or by a culture. Thus, in narrowing the focus of this study specifically to the Jews of China, I feel that the best methods of comparison and contrast are between the Jews of Europe (Christian countries), the Jews of the Middle East (Islamic countries), and other minorities within China that were existent at the same time as the Jews in China.
Chapter Nine: Extended Overview of the History of Jews in China

The history of Jews in China is an area of study that has not been examined to the extent of other minorities within China. In fact, the last major research on the topic was the translations of the Chinese studies of the subject. This is ironic given that the West, due to the Catholic Church’s interest in the subject matter, put China’s Jews well ahead of the local Chinese in priority since they believed that this community of isolated Jews had the “real” version of the Torah; the Church believed that the versions of the Torah available to them in Europe were tampered with by Jews to remove Jesus from the Hebrew Testament entirely.

The two sets of translations mentioned were undertaken by Allen Edward Ross in 1970 and Sydney Shapiro in 1984. Ross was the first to translate Chen Yuen’s research and had done this for his master’s thesis in 1970 at the University of Southern California (though he now resides in Florida). Shapiro, on the other hand, utilizes Ross’s research in addition to other sources in his book Jews in Old China. Being that he has lived in China since 1947 and now is 95 years of age, he presents the translations with extra commentary and research on the subject matter. I have been in contact with both men, which will hopefully yield more information on the subject matter.

Based on these translations of the Chinese research, in addition to the large amounts of Western research predominantly contributed to by various members of the Catholic Church, what follows is what has come to be understood as a general history of the Jews in China. This is extremely important as it not only chronicles the events that took place
but also helps towards achieving a greater understanding of why Sinofication took place here.

The earliest texts that make mention of the physical presence of Jews in China date to the Song Dynasty. These texts appeared in the form of a letter written by the Arab Abu Zaid, who told of a massacre of foreign groups of people around 877 CE. This included “Muslims in this town...[where] dwell a great many Jews, Christians and sun worshiping Turks” (46, quoted in 218). The name “Gate of the Jews” indicates that they were numerous and wealthy, which is probably what enabled them to be among those who were “kind” and “solicitous,” as Wu Zimu noted. However, many recognize the fact that the Jews could have in fact been there much earlier. Gao states that the Chinese could not tell the difference between the Jews and the Arabs. “In outward features they were no different from the Arabs. They spoke Arabic. During Tang, Abu Zaid and Mas’ud, who were themselves Arabs, could spot them as Jews, but the Chinese people could not.” No wonder Tang and Song historians make no specific mention of them, and refer only to Dashi merchants and foreign traders generally.

Because of this, there is an extremely large time frame during which the Jews could have first arrived in China. The earliest claim was written soon after the three major temple rededications. This particular text claims their arrival during the Zhou Dynasty, and though this is not impossible, some speculate its authenticity. Sydney Shapiro

believes that this was done so as to add more validity of their presence in China, as stated in his book *I Chose China*. Specifically, the earliest rededication is the latest date given, with the *latest* rededication citing the *earliest* date! Shapiro outright says that this is only an attempt to extend the history of the integration for greater validation purposes.\(^{28}\) However, when I asked him his opinion about the potential of a presence during the Shang Dynasty, he said he had never heard of this potential and was curious to know more.\(^{29}\) On the other hand, Tiberiu Weisz, who translated all of the known Kaifeng stone inscriptions, says otherwise. “The dates given on the stones are largely irrelevant… The purpose of them was to preserve the religion by teaching the prayers and practices… Without a doubt these Jews came from the Babylonian exile. They stayed for a period in India as the tablet claims that this is the place of the religion’s origin and then eventually continued further east.”\(^{30}\)

I have chosen to research this as it is the one period not discussed by either the Catholics or the Chinese researchers, nor was it explored in the history of the Kaifeng Jews. However, it is largely believed that the sons of Abraham and Keturah (Hagar) were sent to the east (understood by all Talmudic scholars as meaning a one-way journey as far as they could go). This would mean their journey ended in China. Concurrently, a monotheistic trend can be found in other communities, even in other countries and on

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\(^{29}\) Conversation with Sidney Shapiro

both coasts of India. Even more interesting, the traditions and practices of these Abrahamic monotheistic people are extremely similar to those of the people who worshipped another monotheistic figure in China, Di or Shang Di.

The second of the synagogue rededication tablets states that the arrival would have been during the Han period. There is little doubt this could be the earliest arrival of the Jewish people as understood by Judaic definition of what it means to be Jewish. By this definition, Judaism begins at Sinai with Moses; everything prior to that is viewed to be part of the cannon but not specifically Judaism the way it is defined today. The reason that this is the most likely earliest mention in the texts is due to the destruction of the first temple and later the second. This means that by the time of the second temple, at least the “Lost Ten Tribes” would have already been out of Israel, most likely as far as Babylon. Weisz, in our interview, later stated that since these Jews’ last records in their cannon stretched to Ezra, the point where the Jews had an opportunity to go back from Babylon, it is likely that some opted to stay or continue further due largely to what is seen as a change in policy. “Though most practicing Jews would disagree that this is a ‘change in policy,’ this is the point where many cite that the religion is only passed down through the mother’s side. I can only believe that many disagreed and did not want to return because of it.”

Many of the later traditions and cultural norms of the Kaifeng Jews were Persian in nature. These Jews also spoke Arabic.

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32 Keightley, David N. The Ancestral Landscape: Time, Space, and Community in Late Shang China, Ca. 1200-1045 B.C. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 2000
33 Interview with Tiberiu Weisz 05-03-10
The Kaifeng Jews themselves gave three different arrival dates. Their 1489 inscription says Song, their 1512 inscription says Han, their 1663 inscription says Zhou. The more recent the inscription, the more ancient the date of arrival. According to the 1512 inscription ‘…in Han times, the Religion entered China’ (7). This is the only written evidence the Jews have left us. But there is also a verbal tradition. In 1723, Jesuit priest Gaubil traveled from Beijing to Kaifeng, and asked about arrival time. He says the Jews told him it was 1,650 years previous (87 p. 57 quoting 223). That would make it during the reign of emperor Ming Di (58-75 A.D.) of the Eastern Han Dynasty. Gaubil did not accept this statement, nor did he pay much attention to the 1512 inscription, since he himself was a proponent of the Zhou Dynasty theory, as mentioned above. But some 40-odd years later Brotier, another Jesuit, compiled his own letters and those of three other Jesuits into a volume entitled Memoire Sur Les Juifs Etablis en Chine in which he quotes Gaubil as saying: ‘The (Kaifeng) Jews stated they had come to China during the reign of Han emperor Ming Di…. Several of them insist that this is the date of their arrival’ (58,77).

The reality is that simply because different Jews gave different dates of arrival does not necessarily mean that any are “wrong,” i.e. there could have been a number of different migrations.

Again, because there is such a long time period of possibility for the migration, we can clearly see the potential for multiple migrations into the region. The question thus is which groups asserted the most influence and did this potential of multiple migrations help aid the maintaining of the Jewish identity longer than if there would have been only one group on one journey? “Wherever the Jewish race went, there the Jewish religion was practiced. To know when the Jews entered China is to know when their religion arrived. Opinions vary as to the time. The 1489 inscription says Song (960-1279), the 1512 inscription says Han (206 B.C-220 A.D.), the 1663 tablet says Zhou (1066-256

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Thus, there is definitely reason to believe that multiple arrival dates are possible, and these multiple arrival dates would have been used as a potential tool in maintaining their identity.

Despite his writing of *The Travels* in the mid-14th century, Marco Polo’s recognition of the presence of Jews is extremely overlooked. However, his account does contribute a great deal to the understanding of the state of the Jewish community, as well as an understanding of it in terms of Sinofication. First, it should be noted that Polo was very normal for his age. “He is true to his age in classifying [the] people he encounters primarily on the basis of religion rather than of culture or colour. He does not, however, go much beyond the rudimentary classification into Christians, Jews, Saracens, and idolaters. While well aware that Nestorians, Jacobites, and Armenians are ‘imperfect’ Christians, he betrays no interest in doctrinal differences.”

Thus Polo focuses nearly exclusively on religion as the primary, if not only, form of defining ethnicity. What this shows is that at least as late as his presence there, the Jews practiced in a way similar enough to that of the European and the Middle Eastern Jews for him to recognize it. Because of this, I feel that it is fair to assume that their separation from the Jewish community as a whole did not affect their identity, not only in terms of practice but also physically. There was likely not much intermarriage at this point with the Chinese. However, we see that over the next few centuries this does change, if it had not happened already.

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37 Refer to my essay on Marco Polo in the attached reading.
What is to be noted, however, is that these Jews were not “rediscovered” until 1605 when Father Mateo Ricci met a man named Ai Tian, who, as noted earlier, mistook a picture of Mary with Jesus for Rebecca with Jacob. The name Ai Tian is clearly Chinese and not Jewish; according to accounts, his features were also Chinese as Ricci did not recognize him as being different from the multitudes of other Chinese people he came into contact with. Many have felt that this was the beginning of the end of the Jewish identity for various reasons, though I would disagree because if Ai Tian no longer looked European or Middle-Eastern, the physical change could be justified as being already one aspect of loss of identity via intermarriage. However, one given reason for this is that due to their isolation for so long, their ability to retain the customs and practices of Judaism had in fact begun to deteriorate. This is fairly unfounded as many of the practices, with the exception of circumcision, were still practiced, including Kashrut dietary laws. The only reason circumcision ceased to be practiced is because it directly contradicted Confucian law, which prohibited any sort of “tampering” with the body.

A major factor that contributed to this deterioration was the fact that the synagogue and other structures in Kaifeng were constantly being flooded or demolished. It is difficult to maintain a presence when your home (so to speak) is being constantly destroyed. But getting back to Father Mateo Ricci, he found the Chinese Jewish community on the brink of losing its identity for another reason: The rabbi of the community was nearly the only person learned enough to maintain any sort of education and leadership. His son was not going to take on the role, so the rabbi actually asked Ricci if he would assume the part if he were to only teach the original texts (the Kaifeng
Jews’ Torah only taught as recently as the times of Ezra) and abstain from eating pork. Ricci refused. However, history showed that this would not have been a true permanent solution as Ricci died of illness only five years later in Beijing.

Since that time there had been others from the Vatican sent to examine the Chinese Torah scrolls due to, as mentioned previously, a misguided belief that the Jews of Europe had removed any mentioning of Jesus in their versions. Yet again, there is no real major attention paid to these Kaifeng Jews until the early 1900s. Fortunately, we have pictures of the Jews of this period. As they appeared in Ricci’s account, they are indistinguishable from other Chinese (as opposed to Marco Polo’s reckoning).

Ironically, the original problem was that the Chinese could not tell the difference between the Jews and Muslims in China. Also, beginning in at least the 16th century, Westerners could no longer tell the difference between Jews and the Chinese either. This in turn leads to the question of what happened to cause this shift so quickly in the 300 years between the 1300s and 1605, when from as late as the 900s to the 1300s, they were so clearly visually different from the Chinese.

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Chapter Ten: Sinofication of Jews or Lack Thereof

Historically, Jews tend not to assimilate very willingly into their surrounding environments, with a few rare exceptions. China is definitely one of the more obvious, but another key example is the United States—as opposed to say Russia or in Arab nations. The question is really what caused this Sinofication in China, and how is it different or maybe similar to the situations of other Jews while in Diaspora?

First, I would examine the relationship that the Jews had with the natives of the lands in which they were living. The way it is recorded, there were few incidents of hostility between the Chinese and the Jews. In fact, the only major mention of any sort of altercation is in the letter by Abu Zaid. He wrote: “During the Huang Chao rebellion near the end of Tang, 120,000 Muslims, Jews, Christians and Parsees in Guangfu (Chen Yuan’s rendition of the French “Khanfu”) on business, were killed” (27 p. 29).  

Shapiro, however, is not convinced that this was the case. He comments that, “neither the New nor Old Tang History mention this event, though they do say that Huang Chao occupied Guangzhou in 879, and that he withdrew the following year, the reason for the pull-out being that ‘…a great plague destroyed four out of ten of the population.’ All of this is in the records. Whether the deaths were due to a massacre, or to a plague, or to a combination of both, we have no way of knowing.”

Aside from this claimed event, there were little to no hostilities or restrictions on these Jews or their religious practices. “Describing the arrival of the Jews in Kaifeng, the
tablet the Jews erected in 1489 to commemorate the rebuilding of their synagogue says:

Our Religion was transmitted to China from Tianzhu (India). We settled in Kaifeng by imperial command. More than seventy clans…arrived during the Song Dynasty bringing entry tribute of Western cloth. The emperor said: ‘You have come to our Central Plain. Preserve your ancestral customs and settle in Bianliang (Kaifeng).’ However, there is a clear translation error according to Tiberiu Weisz. “This translation was done by Bishop White, who had only basic abilities to speak Chinese…. If you read it closely and refer to the usage of hanzi from 1489, the quote is as follows, ‘The emperor said: “you returned to my China,” and not you have come to my China. This is clear because the Jewish representative clearly demonstrated a knowledge of Confucian values and sited many of their sources while with the emperor.” Regardless, this still does not change the fact that they were welcomed or, more accurately, welcomed back. Could this be the primary reason why these physical changes came so much more easily for these Jews versus those in other areas of the world? Was it because nobody was forcing them to assimilate or oppressing them?

This is quite a contentious issue, but the truth is it is a reasonable possibility. The first parallel that I would draw between these Jews, China, and their Sinofication is to that of the American Jews. America was, and still is, the only country that has yet to really have any sort of major, institutionalized oppression of Jews. Nor has it ever tried to forcefully convert or massacre us in large numbers via crusades or a holocaust or

44 Interview with Tiberiu Weisz 05-03-10.
similar event. The United States also never held Jews back, at least legally, from having jobs that Christians had. This cannot be said of European countries, where Jews were not permitted to own land or join a guild, the two major sources of work. Ironically, this pushed them into the stereotypical jobs that are still prevalent amongst Jews today: money lending (banking) and entertainment, both of which were prohibited by the Catholic Church back in those times. It is these factors—the ability to chose a profession openly and practice openly—that many have attributed to the greater assimilation of American Jews.

Some say that having the ability to choose a lifestyle and profession effectively allows a loss of part of the desire to maintain one’s identity and thereby makes assimilating easier. An earlier example of this can be seen during the late 18th century, when Napoleon aimed to conquer Russia. Czar Alexander I had always been extremely cruel, especially when persecuting the Jews. Yet despite this, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, also known as the Alter Rebbe, vehemently supported him over Napoleon. Yet Napoleon was said to have offered equality to all peoples, so why did Zalman see a problem with him? His answer was that, “Should Napoleon be victorious, wealth among the Jews will be abundant…but the hearts of Israel will be separated and distant from their father in heaven. But if our master Alexander will triumph, though poverty will be abundant…the heart of Israel will be bound and joined with their father in heaven…”

This has been interpreted various ways, with one view being that by freeing the Jews from the Czarist oppression, many might come to believe that Napoleon was in fact the Messiah despite not fulfilling any of the criteria set forth in the Torah for him to be such.

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45 *Napoleon u-Tekafato*, Mevorach, pp. 182–183
On the other hand, many posit that this is more emblematic of a greater equation in the human condition. Wu Zelin, in an article written in 1983, stated that, “As we all know, the more a religious faith is discriminated against, the more it resists and refuses to change. But in a generous, free environment, there is often mutual influence, mutual permeation, among religions. That is how it was with the Kaifeng Jews.”

Thus the reasoning for this seems to be pragmatic: Part of the desire to maintain one’s own identity is for his own reasons, and the other part being because others say that he cannot maintain his identity.

In America, this was no different. Having the option to choose created greater problems of maintaining identity within the Jewish community itself. Because there was now a choice in lifestyle, many amongst the Jewish community disagreed as to the level they wished to assimilate and maintain their identity. The real break occurred in the late 1800s. “In 1883, a banquet was planned to celebrate the first graduating class of rabbis from Hebrew Union College. According to a contemporary account, radical elements among the Reform leaders ordered shrimp for the dinner’s menu, which are forbidden according to the Jewish laws of kashrut, leading to guests walking out in disgust.” The so-called “Trefa Banquet” has taken on mythic status as a source of the conflict between the radical and conservative reformers, though modern accounts pin the blame on a combination of the eagerness and naivete of the catering and, as an account by Rabbi Isaac Meyer Wise stated, “the Cincinnati Banquet Committee allowed a few dishes to be served which are forbidden according to Jewish ritual law. The conflict further

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intensified in 1885 when a fierce debate broke out between Kaufmann Kohler and Alexander Kohut over the very nature of reform.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus, the breakdown of the Jewish identity as a single unified entity can in part be ascribed to this new ability to choose one’s own identity within the greater society. Accordingly, we have seen further fragmentation and integration of the Jewish identity within the United States macroculture. Despite the fact that both China and the U.S. have made it acceptable for Jews to practice freely, there is still the built-in difference between Judaism and Christianity, which is the religion of most people and government in America. Interestingly, we can even see this in point of fact with the Chinese Jews during the arrival of Matteo Ricci. Ai Tian believed he saw a picture of Rebecca with Jacob (which was actually Mary with Jesus) because the community had been isolated or at least departed since the time of Ezra, as that is where their scrolls end.\textsuperscript{48} When told by the missionary that the Messiah (Jesus) had already come, the rabbi and the people said it was impossible because none of the six criteria for being the Messiah had been fulfilled. Thus, it is not simply because of inquisitions and persecution that most Jews in China have not converted, but simply because there are different criteria, which is clearly stated in order to be the Messiah of the Torah, and these older Torahs had been around since before the time of Jesus.\textsuperscript{49, 50}

In China at the time of the migration, Confucianism was the main religion, which shared many similarities with Judaism, at least in a superficial sense. In the late 15th century, this was no longer believed to be superficial. “Kaifeng Jewish intellectuals found a rationalization for their waning interest in Judaism. They expressed it perfectly in the 1489 memorial tablet. It said that Judaism and Confucianism ‘…in mind and deed both respect Heaven’s Way, venerate ancestors, are loyal to sovereigns and ministers, and filial to parent. Both call for harmony with wives and children, respect for rank, and for making friends. In short, nothing less than the Five (Confucian) Relationships…. Our religion and Confucianism differ only in minor details.’ In the minds of Kaifeng Jewish intellectuals, the distinctions between Judaism and Confucianism, between Chinese and Jew, were dimmed.”

However, Weisz, though he agrees that the values of Confucianism and Judaism were always shown to be parallel to one another, disagrees with the purpose of the recording of the stone inscriptions. Fluent in a multitude of modern and classical languages, including Chinese, Hebrew, and English, Weisz retranslated the stones that had previously been reviewed by Cardinal White and later Donald Leslie. Neither White and Leslie were fluent in Hebrew nor well versed in the Jewish religions or prayers. “Our basic source for this period is the inscription of 1489. The 1512 inscription adds comparatively little, and it is not clear why it was written. I would hazard a guess that it was written and set up (in the Kaifeng synagogue) by a group of Jews not resident in

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What he and White clearly missed became evident to Weisz after he read it and translated it to both English and Hebrew; they were the 18 benedictions (prayers) of the Jewish faith. Thus, he feels that the primary purpose of the 1512 tablet was to preserve, maintain, and teach the descendants of the Kaifeng Jews how exactly to practice and worship and, contrary to White and Leslie’s beliefs, is not as much of a mystery, nor is it simply to reiterate the 1889; it was not meant simply to foreground the similarities between Judaism and Confucianism.

This still does not fully answer the question of how or why the Jews of Kaifeng assimilated when in most other surroundings they fought so vehemently to maintain their identity, even at the cost of their own lives. The Spanish Inquisition, Crusades, and even the Holocaust are all prime examples of Jewish unwillingness to integrate. However, to draw a different parallel from Asia, India also presents interesting commentary that might prove useful to understanding the Sinofication in China.

In order to get to China, Westerners had very little recourse but to go through India and either continue by land or by sea to travel on to China. The 1489 tablet says that the religion originated in India, no doubt indicating that they had resided there for a long period of time prior to moving further east to China. In fact, both routes are seen as potential paths in the migration of Jews to China. Thus, even prior to the earliest potential arrival of Jews in China, there were in fact Jews in India. In fact, the Jewish communities of India thrived nearly through the mid-20th century. They had maintained

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53 Interview with Weisz 05-03-10
their identities while living abroad for all of those centuries. Historically, in India, the Jews were also never forced to convert or assimilate, but unlike those Jews in China, their community lasted much longer.

The Jews of Calcutta and Kochin (modern-day Kochi) were recently written about in terms of their community disappearing. This article, written by Moni Basu, discussed other reasons for the population’s decline and communal disappearance. In “Twilight Comes for India’s Fading Jewish Community,” extra-national occurrences are attributed to the disappearance. After the Holocaust, many Jews from around the world made aliya (return to Israel) or left for the United States. The murder of six million Jews made an international impact on the community and fostered an increased sense of group identity. The result was that the communities in India began to dwindle. “Many Jews began leaving Kolkata, the city formerly known as Calcutta, after Indian independence in 1947; those who remained are slowly dying off…. Once a thriving community of 6,000, their numbers can be counted on fingers now. Zachariah says fewer than 30 Jews are left in this bustling eastern Indian metropolis.” Basu attributes Indian independence, a national issue, as a root cause of this but does neglect to mention the international effects that World War II and the Holocaust had on the numbers as well.

However, no such similar events happened with the Chinese Jews. This leads me to what I believe may be a compound issue that caused the Sinofication of the community.

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into mainstream Chinese society. In having the following multiple participators, I believe we can understand just why the Jews in China Sinofied in the way they did.
Chapter Eleven: Racial Identity in Marco Polo’s *The Travels*

In researching my thesis pertaining to the presence and arrival of Jews in China, I have come to the belief that between the time of Marco Polo’s arrival in the east and the per chance meeting of Mateo Ricci (1605) with the Sinofied-looking Jew Ai Tian, a physical/racial transformation of the Jews took place. Of course, these Jews had the appearance of those from the Middle East upon their arrival, but through intermarriage they became progressively more Chinese in their physical features over the generations. I believe this occurred during this pocket of time because Marco Polo makes no mention of the Jews looking anything out of what for him would have been the otherwise “ordinary,” whereas Ricci is shocked to find an entire congregation of Chinese-featured Jews. Thus, in order to prove that this is in fact true, or at least plausible, it is necessary to demonstrate that Marco Polo also had a sense of race as a way of identifying people.

Traditionally, academia has viewed Marco Polo and his writings to be a product of his times. This same view has examined his work within the very zeitgeist of that era as he predominantly describes and identifies people based on their religion. For example, he refers to the presence of Jews, Christians, Moslems (Saracens or worshipers of Mohammed), and Buddhists (idolaters). Still, this is clearly not the only method he employs when describing or classifying the people he encounters. It is therefore my goal to examine whether or not there is a sense of racial identity from Marco Polo’s perspective as depicted in *The Travels*.

The first question that needs to be tackled is why do so many people believe that Marco Polo predominantly identified people according to their religion and not their
race? There is evidence for this, as seen in his writings that, from a European’s perspective, religion was the primary form of identification. This, of course, does not mean that those of the same religion were thereby equal regardless of race, as was seen in the undermining of native peoples by their European colonizers/converters. On the contrary, I would say that religion was merely the most popular form of identifying a person during Polo’s times even though other methods existed. We will see proof of this via numerous examples from The Travels.

Ronald Latham, who translated The Travels and included his commentary on the subject matter in the introduction of the book, says that, “He [Polo] is true to his age in classifying the people he encounters primarily on the basis of religion rather than of culture or colour. He does not, however, go much beyond the rudimentary classification into Christians, Jews, Saracens, and idolaters. While well aware that Nestorians, Jacobites, and Armenians are ‘imperfect’ Christians, he betrays no interest in doctrinal differences… † He has no colour prejudice. **He may think the Africans ugly (p. 301), but he does not regard them as an inferior race.**”

I could not disagree with this statement enough. Even from simply noting that Latham believes Marco Polo feels that the Africans are ugly, it clearly negates his argument that Polo “has no colour prejudice” because he sees all blacks as being ugly, which in and of itself is prejudicial. Latham states that above all he does not regard them as an inferior race, but claiming them ugly is inferior, as is the way he describes their way of life in the actual quote.

Upon looking at page 301, the page cited, we can see that this is clearly the case. Regarding those in Zanzibar (Africa), “They are a big-built race, and though their height is not proportionate to their girth they are so stout and so large-limbed that they have the appearance of giants. I can assure you that they are also abnormally strong, for one of them can carry a load big enough for four normal men. And no wonder, when I tell you that they eat food enough for five. They are quite black and go entirely naked except that they cover their private parts. Their hair is so curly that it can scarcely be straightened out with the aid of water. They have big mouths and their noses are so flattened and their lips and eyes so big that they are horrible to look at. Anyone who saw them in another country would say that they were devils.”\(^{58}\)

How can this not be seen as racial prejudice and using race as an identifier? Latham saying that they are disproportionate and “horrible to look at” is clearly a dissenting view based on racial identity. For that matter, though some may say it is flattering that he says they are abnormally strong, he also claims they eat enough for five and walk around entirely naked with the exception of a loincloth. It is almost as if he is describing work oxen or other farm animals rather than humans. Clearly he views these people, their appearance, and lifestyle as primitive and inferior.

Another example is in reference to the people of the Erguiul Kingdom in the chapter titled “The Road to Cathay.” “The people here are idolaters. They are fat and have small noses and black hair. They are beardless, except for a few strong hairs on the chin. The women have no hair on any part of the body except the head. They are very fair-

complexioned with delicate flesh and all their limbs admirably proportioned.”\(^{59}\) Marco Polo describes these people first by their religion—likely Buddhism as he calls them idolaters—and then proceeds to compliment and describe their features.

The same formula—religion followed by description of racial features—also occurs in his description of the Bengalis of Toloman: “Here also the people are idolaters, speak a language of their own and are subject to the Great Khan. They are a very handsome race, not fair-complexioned but brown, and are good fighting men.”\(^{60}\) Notice how in this case, as opposed to his description of the people of Zanzibar, he says that they are handsome \textit{despite} being brown. I feel that this comparison provides ample proof of his classifying people based on physical features as he differentiates the blacks of Zanzibar from the browns of Toloman.

In the next case, religion is not even brought up in regards to the people he describes. “There is a province inhabited by Tartars who are called Kungurat, which is also the name of their city. They are a very good-looking race with fair complexions. Every two years or so, according to his pleasure, the Great Khan sends emissaries to this province to select for him out of the most beautiful maidens, according to the standard of beauty which he lays down for them, some four or five hundred, more or less as he may decide.”\(^{61}\) A counterargument for this would be that it is not the focal point of discussion to bring up the religion of these Tartars. Yet he recognizes a standard of beauty that is

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both physical and race-based. He identifies this group as having features that Kublai Khan views to be attractive. Yet I feel this is a flawed argument; if Marco Polo were to be writing from Kubilai Khan’s perspective, would he not still state the religion of these people in addition as that which his own culture would dictate? I believe that he would have done this at least for the sake of consistency with his other descriptions throughout the text as this is a form of record keeping.

However, the following sentences again conform to the religion first, race second structure of personal description. The problem is that this particular segment is extremely apocryphal and is only found in one translation:

“It was in the month of November that Kubilai returned to Khanbalik.* And there he stayed till February and March, the season of our Easter. Learning that this was one of our principal feasts, he sent for all the Christians and desired them to bring him the book containing the four Gospels. After treating the book to repeated applications of incense with great ceremony, he kissed it devoutly and desired all his barons and lords there present to do the same. This usage he regularly observes on the principal feasts of the Christians, such as Easter and Christmas. And he does likewise on the principal feasts of the Saracens, Jews, and idolaters. Being asked why he did so, he replied: ‘There are four prophets who are worshipped and to whom all the world does reverence. The Christians say that their God was Jesus Christ, the Saracens Mahomet, the Jews Moses, and the idolaters Sakyamuni Burkhan, who was the first to be represented as God in the form of an idol. And I do honour and reverence to all four, so that I may be sure of doing it to him who is greatest in heaven and truest; and to him I pray for aid.’”

*The remainder of this paragraph and all the next occur only in R.62

What makes this a questionable source for any purpose is the explanation that Latham gives in his introduction regarding the works of “R,” also known as the Ramusio’s Italian edition. “A far fuller text than any of these, however, is provided by Ramusio’s Italian edition (R), which includes lengthy passages not found in any known manuscript.

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Ramusio cites as his authority a Latin manuscript ‘of marvelous antiquity.’ Some critics have suspected that this manuscript was invented by Ramusio as a cloak for fabrications of his own; others have supposed that it contained additions made by Polo himself in later life, presumably without the aid of Rustichello.” Thus, this version is truly the outlier as it seems to cater more to the interests of the Catholic reader because it follows with an explanation, supposedly by Kublai Khan, that if he were to pick a religion (given that he would not lose any power and/or influence with his people and court) he would choose Christianity.

Picking up from “…and I pray to him for aid,” it continues on, making the following statement, which supports my belief that this was to appeal to Italian Catholic readers: “But on the Great Khan’s own showing he regards as truest and best the faith of the Christians, because he declares that it commands nothing that is not full of all goodness and holiness. He will not on any account allow the Christians to carry the cross before them, and this because on it suffered and died such a great man as Christ.” This effectively renders this entire section moot despite the description of Kublai Khan that followed: “Let me tell you next of the personal appearance of the Great Lord of Lords whose name is Kublai Khan. He is a man of good stature, neither short nor tall but of moderate height. His limbs are well fleshted out and modeled in due proportion. His complexion is fair and ruddy like a rose, the eyes black and handsome, the nose shapely

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and set squarely in place." Because of the controversy behind the validity of this passage, and the very real possibility that it was in fact added later, I do believe it is justified to be wary and asterisk this portion even though, in some ways, it supports my beliefs as the author does in fact also discuss race-based physical features.

Before continuing to the primary examples that I believe will settle any disagreements or doubts thus far, I want to present the other cases of race-based distinction in Marco Polo’s writing. Regarding the people in India: “To turn now to other matters, it is a fact that in this country when a child is born they anoint him once a week with oil of sesame, and this makes him grow much darker than when he was born. For I assure you that the darkest man is here the most highly esteemed and considered better than the others who are not so dark. Let me add that in very truth these people portray and depict their gods and their idols black and their devils white as snow.” Again, this is a simple, race-based description. However, the following two examples I feel are conclusive in the way they demonstrate that Polo had a sense of racial identity.

In the first relevant passage: “We shall begin with an island that is called Japan. Japan is an island far out at sea to the eastward, some 1,500 miles from the mainland. It is a very big island. The people are fair-complexioned, good-looking, and well-mannered. They are idolaters, wholly independent and exercising no authority over any nation but themselves.” Thus here we see a primary example of Marco Polo applying

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racial features first as the primary descriptor of a group of peoples. He also asserts that they are “good-looking” and of fair complexion as opposed to how he describes the disproportioned black people of Zanzibar, who were “so ugly they would be mistaken as devils in another country.” Thus he clearly has a sense of racial identity, and this is not solely because in this one instance he puts race as the primary descriptor before religion, but rather because he qualifies people based on the way they look in terms of their skin pigment and generalizations of their size and shape of their body features. The rest of his description has only to do with their wealth and abundance of gold and nothing to do with their idolatrous ways.

It is quite clear that despite the traditional view and Robert Latham’s opinion of Marco Polo’s lack of “colour prejudice,” the reality as presented by the prior examples from *The Travels* is that he in fact did have an understanding of racial identity; in the least he certainly had “coulor prejudice.” Given the establishing of this fact, I am confident that the Jews of China were likely to have physically assimilated the Chinese racial features via intermarriage between the time of Marco Polo and the arrival of Mateo Ricci. Polo would have described their features if they were Asian-looking as they would not have been the standard of what a Jew would have looked like to him. He consistently describes the “exotic” people and the way they look to allow the reader to imagine them, but he does not do this for the Jews he encounters as I believe he would assume that most of his readers knew what a Jew looked like in the European and Middle Eastern sense.

But in fact he does describe the Jews and their features at one point in the book. In the chapter “The Arabian Sea,” he clearly expounds on the features of the people of
Abyssinia, including those of the Jews because it was not commonplace due to the European understanding of how a Jew, Christian, or Saracen looked:

“And now let us turn to the great province Abyssinia, which is Middle India.” You must know that the chief king of all this province is a Christian. And the other kings of the province, who are subject to him, number six, of whom three are Christians and three Saracens. The Christians of this province are distinguished by three marks on their faces, one from the forehead to the middle of the nose and one on either cheek. These marks are made by branding with a hot iron. And this is their baptism; for after they have been baptized in water, they are branded with this sign, which is a token of rank and a completion of the baptism. This is done when they are small; and they regard the custom not only as a badge of dignity but as an aid to health. There are also Jews in this country; and they have two marks, one on either cheek. And the Saracens have one mark only, that is, from the forehead to the middle of the nose.”

I believe this clearly demonstrates that Marco Polo described the physical aspects of these peoples, including the Jews of this area, specifically because they did not conform to the norm of what he had previously understood them to look like.† Thus, we must also acknowledge that this book was also written for those who would never make it out of their local towns or villages. Therefore, this would explain why Polo would describe how foreigners looked different because the intended readers would likely never have the opportunity to actually see or experience this for themselves. There is no doubt in my mind that if the Jews in China looked anything out of the ordinary for Marco Polo, he surely would have noted this.† I therefore maintain my belief that it is likely the case: The physical assimilation of the Jews in China happened between the time of Marco Polo (late 13th c. C.E.) and Mateo Ricci (1605 C.E.).

** Abyssinia is modern day Ethiopia.

Conclusions

From my readings, I have seen that many former researchers have well established the presence of Jews being in China at various points in time, spanning from the Han through to Song dynasties as the earliest possible arrival points. However, the study of the Judaic Influenced Group of the sons of Abraham and Ketruah has been only discussed in terms of the local Middle Eastern perspective and has been approached from a Chinese perspective very minimally, if at all. For the most part, it seems to be purely commentary on the Biblical passages, of which the RaDaL went into the most detail. I still feel that to this extent this area is apocryphal at best, but I do believe that with further cross-departmental studies and discussions, there will be greater proof of cultural, religious, and other similarities that will be seen to have overlapped during this period.

From the best of my knowledge, the Kaifeng Jews were likely from many different migrations over time, but they certainly arrived no later than the Huang Chao Massacre, as reported in a letter by Ibn Zayd Al Hassan, who wrote a letter stating that the Jewish community there was also attacked (718 CE)\textsuperscript{69}. In conjunction with this, interviewee Nina Wang provided some valuable information from her friend, a B’nei Menasha girl (India), who was taught that her ancestors came from Kaifeng, China.\textsuperscript{70} This appears to contradict in terms of west-to-east travel, but if they were forced to flee during the Tang, it is not unlikely that they would return from the direction in which they came. It is also possible that they remained in the greater area of China since, according to the most up-

\textsuperscript{69} Gabriel Ferrand, ed (1922). Voyage du marchand arabe Sulaymân en Inde et en Chine, rédigé en 851, suivi de remarques par Abû Zayd Hasan (vers 916). pp. 76.
\textsuperscript{70} Wang, Nina. Personal INTERVIEW. 18 June 2010.
to-date translation of the 1489 stelae, the Sung emperor, Tai Zong, said, “you have returned to my China,” and not the previous mistranslation of, “you have come to my China.”

Professor Weisz feels that it is clear that these Jews must have been within an area where Confucian values were accessible, if not prevalent, because of these Jews’ in-depth knowledge of the subject matter.

I do believe the potential oldest point of migration remains towards the tail end of the Babylonian Exile, which began in 586 B.C.E. It ended in 348 B.C.E., when Ezra the Scribe led around 48,000 Jews back to Israel. However, this is a small number, and a vast majority either stayed in the region or continued on elsewhere. In fact, it was from this source that the main version of the oral law, the Babylonian Talmud (as opposed to the Jerusalem Talmud), comes from, though it was compiled by the local community in 500 CE. In addition, it is likely that many of the Jews did not want to return because Ezra said that they were required to give up their “foreign” wives and families should they want to return. Therefore, though there was a return by some Jews to Israel, we can see that not everyone decided to go back. What is interesting, however, is that the 1489 stelae claims that the Jewish religion originated in India. Of course this does not mean it actually came from there, but the more distant past was already forgotten by this time. However, it does show that the community was present in India also prior to the writing of the surviving Torah scrolls.

However, until this point, the origins seem more or less homogenous, though it at one point led to a potential splitting of the group. According to the acclaimed Sofer,

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71 Weisz, Tiberiu. Personal INTERVIEW. 03 May 2010
72 Ezra
Rabbi Yitzchok Reisman, the Torah scrolls of the community (which date as early as the 1600s) were not written in the style of those of the Babylonians—as was seen in India. Rather, they are of a northern Silk Road route, where we see a style of writing more similar to the ones in Kaifeng. Again, this does not mean that they are absolutely 100% from this route, but rather, it is likely that this was introduced much later because of the constant flooding in Kaifeng that destroyed the temple. Because Kaifeng ceased to function as a capital as late as 1279 CE, trade to the city was likely diminished and rerouted. I feel that likely this is the first turning point and potential time where the last group of influence asserted itself within the community until the presence of Father Matteo Ricci in 1605; there are no records from this point until then, with the exception of Marco Polo’s.

I concluded that the Jews Marco Polo met with, and those whom Father Matteo Ricci met, were one and the same, but because they had not intermarried just yet, they still looked foreign during Polo’s earlier meeting with them. I do still believe this to be a possibility, but now have seen other potentials due to new variables. First, were the people in each of these groups “Chinese Jews” or “Jews in China”? Both Professor Eber and I agree that the term “assimilate” is not the appropriate term so, if they were the former, then they most certainly had not Sinofied yet, as per my original conclusion. If they were simply “Jews in China,” then they could have been form two separate groups altogether. I am still leaning heavily towards the first premise because I do not believe

73 Reisman, Yitzchok. Personal INTERVIEW. 13 July 2010.
75 Eber, Irene. Personal INTERVIEW. 09 June 2010
that Marco Polo’s account of Kublai Khan taking part in all of his peoples’ religious 
ceremonies would be stated should they not have been a constant presence or community. 
What does trouble me, however, is information regarding A) the fall of the Yuan and new 
laws of the Ming, and B) the polygamy factor.

   During the Yuan period, the Han Chinese were placed at the bottom of the social 
totem pole. However, when the Yuan fell and the Ming began, such stratification was 
abolished. From what I have learned, this opened up the possibility of intermarriage 
since prior to this a man or a woman would be marrying “up or down” based on their 
class. Nina had actually been taught that the Ming forced all people to intermarry to get 
rid of such class distinction. I am not sure how convinced I am of this, though it is surely 
a possibility. Regardless, she did say that all people marrying in had to still convert. I 
am less concerned with this theory and am more drawn to the polygamy question. The 
Chinese Jews were, if not from the Babylonian Exile prior to the second exile that 
brought about different customs such as Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and Mizrahim, then 
they were likely of Sephardic or Mizrahi background, which were both still polygamous 
cultures. In fact, the decree against polygamy was an Ashkenazic rabbinic one, which the 
others never formerly even recognized despite the fact that today nearly all sects are 
monogamous. Thus the possibility of multiple wives is also likely. It was not 
uncommon for a man’s first wife to be of his own group and the others would be from 
outside the community. Again, I do believe that the standard of conversion would still 
have been held because of a new understanding of the translations as well.
Traditionally within this field of study, most believe that these Jews were simple merchants who made their way to China and then could not leave. However, a merchant or businessman of that time would be fairly similar to one now, possessing limited study or information about religious practices. Again, Professor Weisz offers a translation that would make more sense from the stelae. The quote that had been understood by Donald Leslie, Bishop White, Sydney Shapiro, and Chen Changqi as meaning, “Levi the Wusida” or “Levi Wusida” “was charged with leading the temple” has now come to be understood as, “Levi and Wusida were charged with leading the temple affairs.”

What is a Wusida? This had been questioned before, but it was not known precisely until Weisz found that it is a word of Persian origin meaning “spiritual leader.” In other words, “The Levites and Cohanim were in charge of leading the temple.”

Clearly this demonstrates with enough lucidity that the group was not simply that of simple merchants. It also adds to the understanding about how the 70 families reported about had maintained their identity: It is because they had educators with them.

A high degree of acceptance (or lack of proselytizing/forced conversions), cultural similarities, intermarriage, lack of funds, and lack of an educating successor are what I believe contributed to the Sinofication of the Jews of China. Starting with acceptance, as demonstrated from both a Chinese and Chasidic Jewish perspective, an integral part of maintaining one’s identity comes from the desire not to be forced to change. Wu Zelin also stated that, “Although class contradiction to a certain extent has weakened their

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ethnic entity, the still existing discrimination against them, however subtle, tends to strengthen a racial consciousness and feeling of kinship.”\textsuperscript{78} With the Alter Rebbe’s support of the Czar over Napoleon, we can see this put into practice.

Intermarriage in and of itself, I believe, also plays an interesting part due not necessarily to religious reasons exclusively, but physiological ones as well. For example, in the Jewish faith, a child is only born Jewish if the mother is herself Jewish. However, even if the mother converted to Judaism in the correct way, her children would still have mixed features. This is the same for a Chinese man if he married a Jewish woman. In both cases the children would still be Jewish but physically would not look the same as other Jews. Thus, given the small Jewish population, and the fact of their being amongst the billion Chinese around them, the physical changes that would naturally occur due to intermarriage over time automatically creates an assimilating factor that would not have otherwise been present, regardless of whether or not the children were then raised Jewish and practiced the religion.

This leads me to the cultural and religious/lifestyle similarities between the two peoples. As stated earlier, the Jews were welcomed in China, and many believe that this was in part due to the cultural similarities between the Jewish faith and Confucian values. Both heavily emphasized venerating the dead, studying a great deal, setting up and maintaining a strong family structure and other things. I believe that due to the physical changes that Sinofied the features of these Jews’ with those of the Chinese, it actually became easier for them to practice and blend in with the Confucian practices. Actually,

one of the first Jewish practices suspended was that of circumcision because that directly contradicts with the teachings of Confucius, who said you must not desecrate or tamper with your body. Without circumcision—debatably the original mark of being a Jewish male—I would argue that the process of further cultural Sinofication would become that much easier.

“We have no information about the Kaifeng Jews between 1512 and 1605, apart from the fact that Ai T'ien obtained the chii-ien degree in 1573 and was possibly appointed a district magistrate.”

Thus, there is a lot that could have happened again in that period. Yet the lack of an educator inherently is a problem when trying to maintain one’s identity. There were many times that the Jewish community found itself in this sort of leaderless position, and each time the link with the Jewish culture at large became weaker and weaker. One such time was during Matteo Ricci’s arrival in 1605. Since the Jews there had never even heard of “Christians,” Ricci was probably viewed as just a misguided Jew. The rabbi who welcomed him recognized that nobody would be able to take over his position, including his own son, so he thus officered Ricci the job with the stipulations discussed earlier, including the prohibition of eating pork. Ricci did not take the job, and Judaism in China went through yet another transformation. Though there were a few Jews left by the early 1900s, most by this time had been fully Sinofied into Han Chinese culture or, as some believe, became the “Blue hat Huis” amongst the “White hat Huis” (Muslims) of China.

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In the late 1800s, as mentioned, they also found themselves without a rabbi. To make things worse, their temple again had been flooded and destroyed.\textsuperscript{80} Without a teacher and without a “home,” the Jews of China should have been forgotten and faded from history into oblivion. But some still remained despite the fact that there was no money to rebuild and there was not one person able to continue the educating process. Yet for some reason, today there are still a handful of Chinese who still call themselves Jews. In terms of religious orthodoxy, of course, many are not technically Jewish any longer as intermarriage has occurred, and the lack of matrilineal proof no longer exists. Yet despite this, these Chinese are very proud of their heritage and the culture of their ancestors. Many now are making \textit{aliyah}, a return to Israel and going through the official conversion processes.\textsuperscript{81}

Thus I believe there is evidence enough to understand why the Jews of China Sinofied to such a great degree. But to end a conclusion with yet another question, what is yet to be understood is why there is still such an attachment to their history when many other minority groups have been assimilated to the point of complete non-existence. This perhaps lies beyond the scope of this particular study and comes down to the simple concept of body, mind, and soul. In Judaism, the belief is that what defines one as being Jewish is having a Jewish soul, and one has a Jewish soul most of the time due to one’s birth mother being Jewish (although this is not the only way).\textsuperscript{82} Thus, based on this

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\textsuperscript{81} Shavei Israel: http://www.shavei.org/en/CommArticles.aspx?CommName=The%20Kaifeng%20Jews&SecName=Activities
\textsuperscript{82} Nakon, Nachman. \textit{The Jewish Experience: 2,000 Years A Collection of Significant Events}. New York: Shaar Press, 2005
\end{flushright}
belief or even a simple spiritual belief that all peoples have souls, it is reasonable to assume that having this as part of one’s being could be what calls him or her back to their origins, be they Jewish in China or elsewhere.

The most novel and unique information that I have been able to bring to the table—aside from combining and connecting the dots between others’ research—comes back to the issue of origin and of cultural practices. I have already mentioned that the Torah scrolls were written in the style of the northern Silk Road. However, when I found a picture taken of the Kaifeng elders in 1920, I noticed that the rabbi in the picture (Wong, Hebrew name David Levi) wrapped his tefillin in the style of the Sephardim. However, upon further research, I discovered that Wong, though distinctively Chinese in terms of his features, was not a part of the Kaifeng community, but rather from Chinese Turkestan (formerly the Kingdom of Khotan) according to an article written by Professor George E. Sokolsky (yes, Professor Anne Sokolsky’s grandfather!)83. He was hired by the Society for the Rescue of the Chinese Jews in the 1920s, and that is why he was in the picture. What still makes him relevant is that Chinese Turkestan is along the route of the northern Silk Road, of which the styles are also the same as those of Kaifeng. Thus it follows that those styles are also found along the route in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and so on. So superficially, the style of tying is the same, but we do not know what the writing style of the parchment inside these tefillin is. Without that knowledge there is no way to know, really. I have since aimed to get ahold of them or a pair from that region, but it has been nearly impossible.

To fit all the information collected from a study into one single documentary is, of course, possible but not very effective as I have over 50 hours of interview footage alone; this is not including stock footage, on-location scenery, and photographic images. Thus, I have decided to make the interview footage accessible as well for viewing in its entirety. In addition, all of the articles and sections of books that I have cited along the way will be available made as well.

Most of my research has come to fruition due to three distinct elements. The first was breaking down the issue of a Jewish presence in China itself into three separate topics: 1: The Chinese Jews (those from the original migration that Sinofied over the years as a community); 2: Jews in China (those who simply spent time there but never settled, i.e. merchants and traders); and 3: Monotheism in China.

The second was defining what a presence constitutes. I have defined it as being either 1: physically being in a place for any purpose or period of time; and 2: settling in an area or, in other words, having an established community.

The third was simply an issue of how to treat the relationship between texts and interviews, or written tradition versus oral tradition. There is, however, a grey zone because most of the interviews conducted were with researchers who learned from texts and then went on to have their own conclusions and understanding of the material. However, mainly in regards to Nina Wang, a descendant of the Zhao family and returned Jew living in Israel, her information predominantly comes from what her parents and ancestors had taught her. I do not think it is fair to discount what the oral traditions have to offer as historically, oral traditions, though flexible and potentially changing over time,
traditionally outlast the written. Therefore, there are again three different sources: 1: from the text directly; 2: from an interviewer who has learned from the text and then produced his own findings; and 3: those who have lived and learned through their personal knowledge, surroundings, and families.

A critique that has been brought up is that many of my sources and texts did not come from China or a Chinese author/scholar. To better explain why, such study by the scholars and historians has now been formally instigated in the West, beginning in 1605 with Father Matteo Ricci, whereas the Chinese just started, so to speak, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with Chen Yuan (whose work was translated by Professor Allan Edward Ross), for example. The reason that the West is so far ahead in such study is because at the time Father Matteo Ricci met the Chinese Jew Ai Tian, a common belief in Europe was that the Jews had tampered with all of the copies of their own bible (Jewish Testament) in order to remove any mention of Jesus from it. Thus from this point on, many from the Vatican went to China hoping to find proof via “the unadulterated” true Torahs since this community had been isolated from the rest of the world’s Jews and thus would not have known to “get rid of” any mention of Jesus from the text. Of course, these scrolls were identical to the rest in the world’s. We know that they were isolated because Ricci told Ai Tian that Judaism had died and that there were no more Jews left in the world when asked about others. This also hints that at this time the community did in fact have older Torah scrolls than the ones we have in our possession today, of which only one dates back as far as the 1600s.
As can be seen, there are a lot of gaps of time and space in the available information, and that which is available truly requires a unique individual to put the pieces together. I do not believe that I fit all the criteria necessary to do this, but I am confident that my findings and the efforts I have taken will generate a more streamlined and efficient mechanism to study the work. One thing is for certain: The Kaifeng Jews are very much alive and still connected to their Jewish ancestry.

For more information, please visit the website at address below as it contains the interview footage as well as the recording of the lecture I gave on the subject to a live group of professors, colleagues, graduate students, undergraduates, and others who are simply interested in my research and what I’ve found.

(we.me.com/spencer.kassimir/Site/Thesis_Home.html)
Postscript: Kaifeng Jews: Interviews With Descriptions

By the end of December 2009, most of primary sources had already been read and their authors contacted, should they still be alive.

**Rabbi Dov Wagner:** Though the Rabbi of Chabad @ USC, Rabbi Wagner is a native of Ontario, Canada, and a biblical scholar fluent in English, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. Before beginning the research on the Kaifeng Jews, I wanted to find out what he knew in regards to the Jews in China.

After some research he found commentary by the RaDaL in the 1700s about the quote in *Genesis* regarding the sons of Abraham and Hagar going, “East to the land of the east.” The understanding being that the repetition of east indicates that they were to travel until they could go no further. This is also the opinion of other scholars, but it is the RaDaL that said this means China.

**Dan Sherer:** Dan is a friend who happens to have his MA in EALC focusing on the Tales of the Heike and is currently pursuing his PhD in History. The RaDaL had mentioned a large “iron” wall in his commentary, but the Great Wall of China was not built until much later. Dan overheard and mentioned to me that in the part of *Tales of the Heike* that expounds on the castle of Shihuangdi that it also discusses a large iron wall.

With his help and that of Dr. Bialock, we were able to pinpoint which versions of the *Heike* made this reference.
Sidney Shapiro: Mr. Shapiro, or Sha Boli in Chinese, is a graduate of St. John’s Law School and is currently 95 years of age. I began looking for him when I started reading his book *Jews in Old China*. He has lived permanently in China since 1947, when he became a citizen there and a member of the CCP.

Finding him was not easy despite the obviously standout characteristics he has being a White, Jewish, fluent speaker of Chinese. In order to get his contact information, however, I found a way to get his address. I advertised on www.elance.com, an internet-based outsourcing website, a job to have someone find his address for me. Ms. Du An Lai of Xi’an replied to my post and provided me with his mailing address.

I mailed him via Fed Ex on February 23, 2010. He e-mailed me back on February 26, showing his interesting and recommending some texts and paths I may want to pursue. However, due to his age, which has not deterred him from his passion for life and being extremely busy, I was thus unable to meet with him though I would have been willing to fly to Beijing to do so.

Allan Edward Ross: Mr. Ross grew up in Southern California and learned Chinese while in the military. After returning, he went to USC, where he received his MA in East Asian Languages and Cultures. His panel was composed of Professors Wills, Tiee, and Thompson. His thesis was to translate, in his own typing, “Ch’en Yuan. K'ai-feng I-T'se-Lo-Yeh Chiao K'ao. Shanghai, 1st ed., 1923; 3rd ed., 1925, Commercial Press.”

Finding Mr. Ross was extremely fortuitous. It is only because I followed the good advice of my parents when they said to always read the introduction that I came across
his name in Sidney Shapiro’s book, where he thanked and referenced him for his groundbreaking translation.

Being that he was a USC alumnus, I was easily able to find his home address and contact phone number. He had since moved twice, once to Texas (where he had met Professor Irene Eber and later Michael Pollak) and then once more to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

I flew to meet him April 10 and returned on the 11th. Though very modest and saying he remembers very little about the subject, his office is filled with books on the subject matter still. One such book he received without expecting it: Sidney Shapiro, in 1984, sent him a signed copy, and it was not until receiving the book that he knew that he was in it.

His general feelings were that the Jews were likely to have made it to China at the earliest times in the history of the Silk Road as being traders and merchants. It was likely that they too were part of this.

**Tiberiu Weisz:** Professor Weisz is an extremely unique and talented individual and published author. He was born in Transylvania and fluently speaks Hungarian, Romanian, English, Hebrew, and Chinese (both contemporary and Ming). I was able to get in contact with him via e-mail and then flew to meet with him at his home in Minneapolis on May 2-3, 2010.

In particular, his book *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions* is a huge breakthrough in the field as the stelae had not been translated or reviewed since Bishop White in the late
1800s, Donald Leslie (1972), and later Sidney Shapiro in 1988.

Because of his linguistic expertise in addition to his upbringing and in-depth knowledge of the Jewish scriptures, he was able to see things in the stones that the others could not due to their own limitations.

Two of his major points of disagreement are the following:

1. The word *Gui* had been translated each time as “come” whereas after further review, Weisz found that it would have meant “return to.” This changes the potential earliest arrival based on this account because it would mean that they had not just arrived during the Sung Dynasty but earlier. He followed up by saying that there would have been no way for these Jews to have such an in-depth knowledge of Confucianism if they had just arrived. It also clarifies why they knew about this because they could have been returning after being expelled during the Tang, as per Ibn Zeyd Al Hassan’s letter. He also asserts that the emperor to which these Jews had an Audience with was Sung Taizong.

2. The word Wusida Liwei comes up in the 1489 stelae. All four men, including Chen Changqi (1988), agree that Liwei is the Sinofied name of Levi. The word Wusida is rather confusing and has produced four different translations. However, his finding is that Wusida, a word of Persian origin, means spiritual leader. Thus, the phrase, “Liwei Wusida lead the religion,” is not saying the Levi the Wusida (priest) but rather the Levites and Cohanim (priests) lead the religion. The Chinese syntax of course gave many interpretations, but this seems very accurate. It also questions the long thought belief that the Jews here were simple
merchants. I have always thought that it seems unrealistic for a religious identity to maintain itself in a foreign land without people educated in its practices. Merchants alone would not have had this.

Another point that he clearly made was the question of intermarriage since China was a patrilineal society, though Judaism runs through the mother’s side. He felt that these Jews were likely of the Persian exile and that they opted to not return to Israel at the time of Ezra the Scribe. Only 48,000 or so returned, and he attributes this in part due to Ezra’s decree, saying that those who were to return had to give up their foreign wives and families.

**Irene Eber:** Dr. Eber lives in Jerusalem and is a faculty member of Hebrew University Jerusalem. Her book *Chinese and Jews: Encounters Between Cultures* provides a more widespread view of the topic as it spans into the modern era, including the Ashkenazi refugees of WWII. I was able to get in contact with her via e-mail and told her that I had met with both Ross and Weisz.

She is an academic in the truest sense and still attends and gives lectures on a frequent basis. It is because of her that I was also able to get in touch with and meet Nina Wang of the Zhao family, who are recorded to be one of the first 70 to go to China. In addition, she introduced me to other researchers there when we attended a lecture just north of the Old City at the Albright Institute.

Her belief is that it is likely that they arrived in the Sung because of the soon after establishment of the Synagogue there. This is not to say that Jews did not arrive there
earlier as we know from the letter Ibn Zeyd Al Hassan wrote about the expulsion of
Buddists and Jews during the Tang.

True to her craft, she has a great in-depth knowledge of the field but feels that there
are many missing pieces that must be put together and found. These include the
description of Judaic Biblical passages in the Dun Huang Caves and finding the graves
from the families of the Kaifeng Jews. Unfortunately, much of the records have been
either destroyed or nobody lives who knows where they are.

**Nina Wang:** Nina is a descendant of the Zhao family and a Kaifeng Jew. She lives in
Jerusalem and gives tours of the city to Chinese tourists, though she is currently visiting
her family back in Kaifeng. Dr. Eber had provided me with her e-mail address, and upon
hearing about my research she offered to meet with me before she left for China.

Nina presented information that research in and of itself could not provide. She is
extremely well versed and learned but also knows a great deal of personal information
that others could not have provided. For example, with regard to intermarriage, she was
taught by her family that there was no intermarriage until the Ming and this was only
because of the “flattening” of the former social hierarchy of the Yuan, which placed the
Han at the bottom. However, even then, the Chinese would still have to convert. I
believe that there is a lot of truth to this, but there is also another possibility. Should the
Jews be from the earliest of exiles, they would have been polygamous. This means that
their first wives may have been from the group, but their other wives were Chinese (again
likely converted).
What she also told me is beyond unique because she is also friends with a B’nei Menasha girl (Indian Jew) who told her that her family in India had said that they were from a city in China called Kaifeng. Geographically this makes no sense if there were a linear migration from west to east. However, taking into account not only the merchant aspects but also the Tang expulsion, it is a possibility that the group split, with some heading back west and others following the others south further into China until they “returned” during the Sung.

**The Eight Boys:** From the beginning of my research, I had tried by e-mail, phone, mail and any other way possible to get in contact with the eight Kaifeng boys that are currently studying in Israel to make aliyah. However, the sponsoring company, Shavei Israel, was less than helpful as they never got back to me and would essentially ignore my calls. However, the week I was supposed to leave Israel, I went to visit my friend Brett Bernstein, who was studying at the HaMevatar Yeshiva in Efrat (West Bank).

By pure chance, I had picked him up Sunday morning and when I dropped him off, there they were, his new neighbors. After searching for them, I found them by pure chance. He did not know they were there either as they arrived only a few hours after I had picked him up. I spent the day with them and then returned on Shabbat to talk more with them. Of course I was not permitted to film during Shabbat, but I did take pictures with them after. They were also able to tell me some unique things, but more had to do with familial relationships to people in the photos of the Kaifeng Jews from the 1920s.
**Rabbi/Sofer Yitzchok Reisman:** Rabbi Reisman is a Sofer (or Scribe) who specializes not only in repairing damaged Torahs, Tefillin, and Mezuzot but also is a brilliant researcher. He was raised in New York City and continues to work and live there to this day. He has analyzed many Torah scrolls such as the ones of the Kaifeng community and other lost groups, spanning from Yemen, Poland, and other parts of the world.

Upon arriving back in the U.S. on June 20, I felt that part of the puzzle was still missing. I wanted to know more about the Torah scrolls and prayer books that the Kaifeng community used. I do not speak Hebrew, and my Chinese is paltry at best. I just randomly started typing “Chinese,” “Torah,” “Bible,” “Kaifeng” and other words related to the subject into Google. Of course, Michael Pollak, Southern Methodist and Hebrew Union Universities (that both have different scrolls) came up, but then I found Sofer Yitzchok Reisman’s webpage. He was not able to meet with me while I was there, so after being back in Los Angeles for a week, I then flew back to New York again July 11-14, 2010, to meet with him on the 13th.

Because of his craft and creative way of thinking, he has been able to recognize and codify the different styles of writing of Jewish religious texts simply by viewing their subtleties in writing technique. The Torah is, to my knowledge, the only handwritten continuously produced work that is identical in all of its words. This does not mean, however, that the fashion in which they were written is the same.

For example, the Syrian, Babylonian, and B’nei Menasha (Indian) Torah scrolls are all written with very deliberate angles and markings. This is not the same as those in Kaifeng. Rather, they are extremely fluid and relaxed in nature; this is more similar to
those found in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. In short, the Torah’s that the Kaifeng Jews were using were not of the Babylonian style, which made it to India along the southern Silk Road, but rather of those that went along the northern route.

**Summed Up:** To break down the topic of these interviews into a more understandable format, I feel that there are three separate subjects and one definition that must be posited.

**Topics**

1. The Chinese Jews: those that went to China to stay and became Sinofied.
2. Jews in China: those who were in China for business or purposes other than settling there.
3. Monotheism in China: its potential relationship to Abrahamic monotheism

**Definition**

What defines a presence?

1. Simply being in a region for any time frame large or small or;
2. Having a continuing established community in an area.

With this in mind, my general feeling is that the Kaifeng Jews are not from a homogenous Diaspora, though I do believe that they are likely to have arrived sometime not so long after the end of the Babylonian Exile with respects to the establishing of a community. It is likely that Jews were simply there for the purpose of business and trade
prior to that.

This seems to contradict with Sofer Reisman’s finding that their Torah’s are not written in the Babylonian style. It does not, however, contradict because these scrolls are from as early as the 1600s; this is long after Kaifeng ceased to be a capital (dongjing) during the Northern Sung. Thus, it is also likely that the community, which suffered from numerous floods and damage over the years, had adopted the customs of those that came later on the northern route since we do know that at least some Jews went back to India (as sourced in the 1489 tablet about the religion originating there) after the Tang.

End: Each interview I conducted gave rise to new questions that I feel give greater depth to the later interviews. I would like to go back and meet again with these people and hopefully get them all in one room. In addition, I would like to again interview my old professor Zoe Wu and maybe make a trip to Germany to meet with Claudia von Collani, who wrote extensively about the connections between the 10 Sephirot and 5 Elements.
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