

Chinese Policy Towards Judaism

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As China is the only country in the Far East world in which Jews have continually lived for over 1,000 years, "Chinese Judaism" -- referring to the religious belief and practices of those Jews who had lived or are now living in China -- is unique. Within this long history, a significant distinction must be made. Jews who came before modern times, before 1840, became part of Chinese society almost without distinct features; those who arrived since 1840 have remained aliens. Chinese policy, especially since 1950s, treats them separately. This paper attempts to address the issue from a historical perspective with a special consideration to the settlers in Kaifeng during the last 50 years.

Policy towards Jews and their religious practice in history

During their 1,000 year residency, what, if any, has been official policy of China towards the Jews and their religious practices? Examining historical sources before the 20th century -- although documents related directly to this issue are rare¹-- a liberal policy of "respecting their religion and changing not their customs and traditions" was carried out by Chinese governments in principle. This policy, applying towards all ethnic groups and their faiths, equally covers Jews and Judaism. Accordingly, the dynasties or the governments have instituted lenient policies towards the Jews, permitting them to live within the country and to practice normal religious activities, including erecting synagogues.

That policy was well reflected in the case of Kaifeng Jews. The Kaifeng Jewish stele records that the Song dynasty emperor gave permission for Jews to live in the then capital of China and to follow their own traditions and customs.²

Grants of land by officials of different dynasties for the building or rebuilding of the synagogue further illustrate the respect of the Chinese towards Jews and Judaism. There is a presumption that in 1163 special permission was requested and granted to construct a unique building for the synagogue in Kaifeng. Presumably, the same kind of permission was requested and granted each time the synagogue was destroyed, either by fire or by flood. The reconstruction of the synagogue in 1421 was under the direct sponsorship of the prince of Zhou, who was the younger brother of Ming emperor Chen Zu. The Imperial Cash Office subsidized the project. The 1489

¹ There exist a few documents in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) referring to the Mongols' policy towards Jews. For details, please refer to Donald D. Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews*, E. J. Brill, 1972, pp. 11-16.

² The 1489 stele records "the three-points covenants" made by the Chinese emperor with the Kaifeng Jews: "Become part of the Chinese [people], honor and preserve the customs of your ancestors, and remain and hand them down in Kaifeng."

inscription records confirm this. In 1461, a flood destroyed the synagogue completely except for its foundation. After the floodwaters subsided, the Jews of Kaifeng, headed by Ai Qin, petitioned the provincial commissioner, requesting a decree confirming the right of the community to rebuild the demolished synagogue on the original site of the ancient one. The permission was soon granted, and Kaifeng Jewry was able to reconstruct the house of worship which was dedicated in 1489.

The best expression of that policy is perhaps a horizontal inscribed plaque granted by a Qing emperor, as well as vertical plaques and scrolls with couplets given them by local officials for the dedication of the newly completed synagogue that replaced the one destroyed in the Yellow River flood of 1642.³

The local government once enacted a regulation that "strangers and carriers of pork cannot pass near the synagogue."⁴ This shows that the Jews of Kaifeng had absolute freedom of religion and that their customs were respected. No equivalent period in the entire history of the other historical Diasporas show Jews enjoying similar respect.

In the Republican period (1912-1949), the fact that a large number of Jews (more than 40,000 totally) from Europe arrived and lived in China indirectly proved that Chinese authorities carried out a very positive policy towards Jews and their religion. Jews received permissions to stay, to establish organizations, and to build synagogues. The Chinese government issued a number of statements to endorse Zionism, which should be viewed as Chinese policy towards Jews, as Judaism and Zionism are directly related. For instance, in 1920, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China, wrote a letter to N.E. B. Ezra, then secretary of the Shanghai Zionist Association, to express his support for the Jewish national cause. His letter says: " I have read your letter and copy of Israel's Messenger with much interest and wish to assure you of my sympathy for this movement which is one of the greatest movements of the present time. All lovers of democracy cannot help but support the movement to restore your wonderful and historic nation which has contributed so much to the civilization of the world and which rightly deserves an honorable place in the family of nations."⁵

During World War II, the Chinese government was particularly sympathetic to the plight of Jews in Europe and took an action to assist them by proposing a plan to set up a settlement in Southwest China to replace those who were suffering in German occupied countries in Europe in 1939. According to the plan, the Chinese government would offer Jewish refugees the same rights of residence, work and governmental protection as Chinese citizens.

The plan was proposed after a series of 1938 events spurred the victimization of helpless Jews: the annexation of Austria to the Reich in March, the fruitless Evian Conference on Jewish Refugees in July, Crystal Night in November, and the attempt on the life of Secretary of the

³ To read the full text of it, please refer to William C. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II.

⁴ White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. I, p.80.

⁵ Sun Yat-Sen, "To N.E.B. Ezra," *The Collected Works of Sun Yan-Sen*, Zhonghua Shujiu Publishing House, 1985, Vol. 5, pp. 256-57.

Legation von Rath in Paris, which resulted in massive persecution of German Jews, unleashing furies raged without bounds and restraint all over Germany and Austria.⁶

Although the program was never implemented, due to the complicated situation of WWII, the very idea shows that Chinese were sympathetic to the Jewish situation and tried to assist in time of need.

Under Communist Rule

After the Communists took over power of the country in 1949, the Chinese government, especially the local governments of the cities where Jews lived, instituted a very liberal policy toward the Jewish religion, permitting the Jews to maintain their synagogues and to carry on their regular activities. The Jewish religion was recognized at that time by the government as one of the approved religions in such cities as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Harbin. For instance, the Shanghai New Synagogue remained open, and Jewish rituals were continuously observed until it was closed in 1956 because the number of Jews had decreased. The Harbin Synagogue remained open until mid-1960s. Facts prove that Judaism practiced by those alien Jews before their departure was well respected by the Communist government though it was not on the list of officially recognized religions in contemporary China.

While there were almost no alien Jews living in China from mid-1960s to the end of 1970s, and the formal practice of Judaism ceased, the relationship does not end here. China, which underwent undergoing dramatic changes since 1979, thanks to her reform and "Open Door Policy," sought foreign investments and to establish ties with the rest of the World, especially with the Western countries. This revived the Jewish presence in China. Nowadays a significant number of Jews live in Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. With more and more Jews arriving to work, invest, study, and live in China, the practice of Judaism once again becomes visible in Chinese society.

For instance, in the 1980s, Jews who came to Beijing from North America to pursue careers in business, journalism, diplomacy, or for academic study, started to celebrate Jewish high holidays such as Passover. Twenty-five Jews showed up at the Seder of 1980. In the 1990's, the Beijing Jewish Community took shape as more Jews live, work, or study there. In 1995, Friday night services began to be held regularly every week at the Capital Club of Beijing. Sabbath prayer books and a Sefer Torah were donated to the community, which enabled them to celebrate all major holidays. On both the High Holy Days and the Passover Seder, the community can expect to have 200 present to share the joyous occasions. Other important landmarks for the community include it's first bar mitzah in 1996 and its first b'rit millah in 1997. This community is headed by Roberta Lipson and Elyse Silverberg, two Jewish businesswomen, and affiliated with the Progressive movement of Judaism.

⁶ "Chungking National Government Programme for the Placement on the Jews in China," *Republican Archives*, No. 3, 1993, pp. 17-21. Also refer to Xu Xin, "Sun Fo's Plan to Establish A Jewish Settlement in China During World War II Revealed," *Points East*, March, 2001, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 1, pp.7-8.

In 2001, a new development took place in the practice of Judaism in Beijing. Rabbi Shimon Freundlich from the Chabad-Lubavitch movement came and settled in the city. His mission is to build and lead the center of Chabad-Lubavitch of Beijing, an Orthodox congregation.

Jews also began to return to Shanghai in the 1980's, attracted by China's open-door policy. As Shanghai became more and more cosmopolitan, Jewish presence in the city became more visible. In the mid-1990s, they organized and established the contemporary Shanghai Jewish Community. Shortly after, Rabbi Shalom Greenberg from Chabad-Lubavitch in New York arrived in Shanghai to serve this community in August 1998. His commitment has infused new life into the growing Jewish community. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation from New York, donated a Sefer Torah to the community in 1998. Now the size of the community reaches a few hundreds. Regular Shabbat services and kosher meals have been implemented in Shanghai. Jewish education also started. Child and adult education classes, bar and bat mitzvah training and social brunches are conducted. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, in September 1999, a Jewish New Year service was held at the Ohel Rachel Synagogue for the first time since 1952 when the synagogue was closed. It is highly possible that the Ohel Rachel Synagogue may become a permanent house of worship for the Jews in Shanghai in the near future.

The Jewish experience in China merits its good reputation because China never persecuted them. The Chinese government realized that it is highly necessary to create a positive cultural environment for those foreigners if China wants to keep and attract them. This kind of cultural environment includes respect for religion.

Special consideration and respect have consistently been shown to Jewish religious requirements by the authorities. In 1993, to mark the historic visit of Israeli President Chaim Herzog to China after China and Israel established full diplomatic relations, the Shanghai government turned the original building of the Ohel Moses Synagogue (which had been used by Jewish refugees during World War II) into a museum. It is now open and receives visitors by the thousands annually.

In 1998, the Shanghai government spent over \$60,000 to restore the Ohel Rachel Synagogue, which was first constructed in 1920, as a historic site. Permission to use the building for Jewish holiday celebrations is frequently granted.

Many buildings that relate to Jewish life still exist in Shanghai. The political implications of choosing and renovating original synagogues are very clear: the Chinese government understands that a site for religious services is the core part of Jewish life.

In Harbin, the Jewish cemetery with 876 graves -- the best-preserved Jewish cemetery in Mainland China -- is well taken care of by Chinese authorities. In fall of 1996, at the expense of the Chinese government, a new fence and gate were completed to better protect the cemetery. Now the city government is taking additional steps to preserve the heritage handed down by the Harbin Jewish community since it began at the end of the 19th century.

Though foreign priests are not allowed to conduct religious services in China by Chinese law in general, permission has been granted to those Chabad Lubavitch rabbis to conduct the

practice of Judaism in China as the Chinese government understands the uniqueness of Judaism. This move can well be viewed as the respect for Judaism and the Jewish people, and may also exist because the Jews do not seek converts.

Issue of the Kaifeng Jews since 1950

When we discuss Chinese policy towards Judaism, the issue most people are concerned about, interested in, yet the most puzzling, and complicated, seem to be related to the Kaifeng Jews. History shows that these Jews, arriving 1,000 years ago, always lived according to their own way and at their own wishes, either as observant or as assimilated Jews. Although the relations between the Kaifeng Jewry and Chinese governments were good, as we discussed earlier, we have not found any policy specifically directed at them. Nobody interfered with them and no specific policy was implemented for a long time as they were so small in number when set against the vast number of Chinese and could easily be completely overlooked.⁷ Why, then, did things change during the last 50 years?

Moreover, the Chinese government took a very liberal policy towards Judaism as non-Chinese Jews practice it. Why did a different policy seem to exist towards Kaifeng Jews, their identity, and their religious activities during the last 50 years? Why did the government pay so much attention to them? A few available documents now seem to shed some light on the issue.

Over time, Jews in Kaifeng did not lose their sense of identity even when their community ceased to formally exist. Today, they are not very distinctive in customs and traditions from other Chinese. While not practicing traditional rites, they still remember their ancestry and insist on their Jewish roots when talking about their identity. For instance, during the 1952 census conducted by the government, many classified themselves as "Jew" when filling the census forms. As a result, their residence registration booklet and ID card (issued in 1980s) marked them as "Jew" in the catalog of nationality. The government, at least at the local level, accepted their claim and never challenged their Jewish identity when they recorded it.

The situation started to change and identity became an issue, because of political considerations more than anything else, after the 1952 census. A good intention developed into an unexpected problem.

After getting rid of most of the Kuomintang's remaining forces and with the end of the Korean War in sight, the Chinese government started to pay more attention to the stability of the country and the unity of all ethnic⁸ groups within Chinese territory. In August 1952, the Central

⁷ It is believed that the highest number of the Kaifeng Jewish community is about 5,000 before the Yellow River flood of 1642. The population dropped down to 1,000 or less in the 19th century at most.

⁸ Traditionally speaking, Chinese use the word "minority" to refer to all other non-Han ethnic groups as they are all small in number to compare with the majority--Han people. In fact, the word "Chinese" refers to "Han" originally. Another word which is very much used is "nationality" to refer to the ethnic group one belong to.

government of China issued three related resolutions to strengthen this unity by establishing autonomies and protecting the equal rights of all ethnic groups. One of these was the "Resolution on Ensuring That All Minority Groups That Live in China Enjoy Equal National Rights."⁹ The spirit of the resolution is to ensure that all minorities with the requisites for exercising regional national autonomy, irrespective of the size of their populations, are permitted to establish their own autonomous areas, and that in the case of those small nationalities lacking the requisites for establishing autonomous areas or living in mixed communities or in a scattered state across the country, enjoy national equality all the same. According to the resolution, any small (referring population) nationalities are given representation at the National People's Congress, each having at least one deputy.

In order to fulfill this goal, the Chinese government undertook the task of ethnic identification, as there had existed no document to determine and clarify which were individual nationalities and which were areas inhabited by a given nationality. Until all of this was clarified, it would be very difficult to ensure the rights of minorities involved in political equality by being given fair representation in the Chinese political structure.

Accordingly, the government put forward a set of traits requisite to constitute a separate ethnic group. These included a common language, an area of inhabitation, a unique set of customs, attitudes and beliefs, and traditional means of livelihood.¹⁰ Difficult as it turned out to be, the government organized special investigation groups made up of ethnologists, linguists, historians, and other specialists to assist the local government concerned. Any ethnic group had first to be judged by all those traits before it could be officially recognized. It is because of this set of criteria that the Kaifeng Jews were not qualified for the government recognition.

It might be argued that the Chinese government was doing something impossible: to identify each and every ethnic group by one set of criterion, as there are always exceptions. However, nobody could challenge the government's sincerity and good intentions.

The theme for that year's celebration of National Day, which was one of the biggest events in Chinese political life, was also the unity of all nationalities. Local governments across the country were asked to pick representatives from each and every ethnic group living in their region and send them to Beijing, the capital of the country, to participate in the National Day celebration and to show the whole world that China was giving equal rights to all.

Accordingly, the Bureau of Central South¹¹ and Kaifeng Municipal Government, when making their selection, chose two Jewish descendants in Kaifeng: Ai Fenming, who became a

⁹ The other two are "Implementing Programme for Regional National Autonomy" and "Resolution on Measures of Setting Up Local national Democratic United Government."

¹⁰ "Questions and Answers about China's National Minorities, New World Press," 1985, p.144.

¹¹ A power mechanism in Central China set up by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The whole country was then divided into several regions to be governed by the bureau that was higher in political structure in China than provincial government.

communist and worked in an Air force unit in Kaifeng, and Shi Fenying, who worked in the Foreign Affairs Office of Henan Province. The reason that those two Jewish descendants were chosen was that the local governments were aware of the existence of Jews in the city and wanted to ensure equal rights for any ethnic group living in their region, including Jews. Those two Jewish descendants were introduced as Jews while in Beijing and were well received during the celebration. They participated in all activities for the National Day celebrations, including the state banquet hosted by Premier Zhou Enlai on October 16. The People's Daily, the major newspaper run by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, cited Jews as one of 46 ethnic groups¹² that participated in the banquet,¹³ an indication that the Kaifeng Jews were considered as a separate ethnic group. Seeing this, one may feel that Jews in Kaifeng were lucky in New China. They were honored simply because they were Jews. In fact, the Kaifeng Jews had never before received such an honor, although they had been in China for nearly 1,000 years. As no Jews elsewhere had ever enjoyed the same honor, it seemed that their identity was not a problem at all.

In April 1953, the United Front¹⁴ of the Bureau of Central South sent a policy-seeking telegraph to the Central United Front in Beijing to ask if it was appropriate for them to recognize the Kaifeng Jews as an ethnic group.¹⁵ It is not clear why the issue arose at this time. Was it because of the claim by the Kaifeng Jews or simply because of the requirement of the process the local government took in ethnic identification in the region? However, one thing is clear: it would have been impossible to discuss the issue had there been no such movement of ethnic identification in the country.

In any case, this move actually raised the issue of the political status of the Kaifeng Jews for the first time, perhaps, in history and led to a far-reaching Chinese policy towards Kaifeng Jews. According to the policy relating to ethnic issues at the time, Kaifeng Jews would have had representation or held a seat in the political mechanism of the city as well as in the country automatically had they been recognized as a separate ethnic group. This was obviously a serious matter, and instructions from the Central government were necessary. The Central Unity Front of the Community Party of China sent an official written reply to the United Front of the Bureau of Central South on June 8, 1953, in a period of two months, which sets the tone for the issue until now and has had a profound impact.

This document, no doubt written in the spirit of ethnic identification, stated that Jews who scatter in Kaifeng "have no direct connections economic wise. They don't have a common language of their own and a common area of inhabitation. They have completely mixed and mingled with the majority Han population, in terms of their political, economical and cultural life, neither do they possess any distinctive traits in any other aspect." Therefore, "it is not an issue to treat them as one

¹² The number rose to 55 in 1960s and the standard number is 56 now.

¹³ *People's Daily*, Oct. 17, 1952, p.1.

¹⁴ An office set up by the Chinese government in charge of affairs of multi-party and multi-ethnic groups in general.

¹⁵ That telegraph is not available to this author but we can figure out the main point from the reply document, which repeats the request. The date of the telegraph is April 3, 1953.

distinctive ethnic group, as they are not a Jewish nation in themselves."

However, at the same time, the document admits that this is an intricate issue because aside from Kaifeng there are Jews in other Chinese cities too (it mentions specifically that there are stateless Jews in Shanghai¹⁶). It points out that the move "could cause other problems and put us in a passive position politically." We have no idea what "other problems" might be and why the Chinese government believes that they might be "put in a passive position politically" as nothing specific is mentioned in the document. However, the expression "in a passive position politically" means a very serious issue in political usage in China and it is used here to warn that the local government should do everything possible to avoid that consequence from happening by all means.

The conclusion is that "your request of acknowledging Kaifeng Jewry as a separate nationality is improper. Kaifeng Jewry should be treated as a part of the Han Nationality."

Nevertheless, the document stresses that the importance lays in that "we should take the initiative to be more caring to them in various activities, and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them. This will help gradually ease away the differences they might psychologically or emotionally feel exist between them and the Han."

The document is hand written with many corrections.¹⁷ For instance, originally, the document states that, in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and problems, it is better not to say anything if we recognize them or not, but to keep the above principle in the mind of leaders. However, those words were crossed out before the document was sent out. The document also showed that top Chinese leaders such as Chairman Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping read and approved it. It is highly possible that some of corrections were made by one of them. Because of that, it becomes something untouchable. The principle drawn up in it, though strictly dealing with the issue of ethnic identification originally, became the guideline in all issues concerning the Kaifeng Jews in years to come.

Clearly, this document is written strictly in the spirit of the policy set up for ethnic identification. No discrimination against the Kaifeng Jews whatsoever is found in it. It would have been a totally different story had the Kaifeng Jews then lived in the way their ancestry had lived before the 19th century, maintaining an observant Jewish kehillah, having a temple of their own, following Jewish calendar and kashrut, and using Hebrew prayer -- in other words, had they not assimilated.

This policy had no evident direct effect on the everyday life of the Kaifeng Jews though it put an end to the possibility that the Kaifeng Jewry could be acknowledged as a separate ethnic group for good. They lived the same way as before. Interestingly enough, the Chinese government still encouraged some arrangements for foreign people to go to Kaifeng to meet them, which

¹⁶ Obviously, this refers to Jewish refugees from Central Europe who still stayed in Shanghai, though the majority had left after World War II.

¹⁷ It should be pointed out that not every word, especially those corrections, is legible as far as the copy I have is concerned.

indicated that the government is still thinking that they were "Jews" even after their failure to grant them ethnic status. For instance, Timoteus Pokora, a Czech sinologist, and Rene Goldman, a Canadian, visited Kaifeng Jews in 1957.¹⁸ However, the issue seemed to die down in the following 20 years when China became a more and more isolated society from the rest of the world.

China underwent many changes in her policies both in domestic and international affairs after she adopted the open-door policy in late 1970s. In January 1980, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China arranged that four Canadians, an American Journalist by the name of Aline Mosby, and Chinese reporters made a special trip to Kaifeng with a sole goal of meeting Kaifeng Jews for the first time after the Culture Revolution.

What made them undertake such a visit? According to Mosby, she learned on good authority that not all vestiges of Judaism had yet disappeared from Kaifeng. Thus, she made a request to the Chinese government and permission was granted.¹⁹ After the visit, the westerners wrote and published articles about the current situation of the Kaifeng Jews, which re-raised the issue both internationally and domestically. When the local government learned about it, they predicted that more and more foreigners might visit Kaifeng Jews with this open-door policy, and that they should prepare themselves for this new situation. Therefore, the Unity Front of Henan Province, which was then in charge of such an affairs, raised the issue of the status of the Kaifeng Jews once again by sending a report to the office of the Central Unity Front in March 1980.²⁰ In the report, they asked two fundamental questions: 1) if the Kaifeng Jews should be treated as a minority group, and 2) what points need attention when they deal with the issue of the Kaifeng Jews and what kind of policy should be adopted in foreign affairs related to the Kaifeng Jews.

Why did they do this? Were they unaware of the previous policy? I do not think so. The 1953 document from Beijing should be there. Were they intentionally seeking for a new policy? This is highly possible, especially if we took into consideration the situation in China at the end of 1970's and beginning of 1980's, when people in every line tried to seek new policies in order to make changes. However, no one knows the definite answer.

The Central Unity Front responded to their questions on May 8, 1980.²¹ Obviously, the Central office was not ready for changes. First, the document quotes the policy made in the document of 1953 and says that, according to the information they had, Kaifeng Jews did not seek for the recognition as a minority people after 1953 and that, except for a few elderly, the majority of Kaifeng Jews did not have that desire. Moreover, most of the young and middle-aged people were indifferent. Therefore, based on this situation, the document says that "we believe, as it was not necessary in the past, it is not necessary now for us to recognize Kaifeng Jewry as an ethnic group. However, when we deal with them, we should give consideration to the customs they still keep,

¹⁸ Michael Pollak, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries*, pp. 248-49.

¹⁹ Michael Pollak, *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries*, p. xiv.

²⁰ This document is not available to this author but its purpose was repeated in the reply.

²¹ The document is entitled "Reply for the Issue on the Kaifeng Jews" and is marked as No. (2) 401.

help them to solve possible problems they may have, and more important, do not discriminate against them." The document suggests at the end that "some appropriate arrangements be made for representative figures among them," a typical method to deal with ethnic group or political issues in China.

We do not know the reaction of the local government. However, an increasing number of people from the West came and visited China. Many of them were Jewish and put Kaifeng on their itinerary in hope to meet some of the Kaifeng Jews.²²

As expected, the local authorities in charge of receiving those visitors needed a specific guideline to deal with the new situation. As a result, another document dealing directly with the policy towards the Kaifeng Jews was produced on July 2, 1984. This time, they set up a three points protocol as the guidelines and reported it to the top authorities in Beijing. The document is written by the Foreign Affairs Office of Henan provincial government, the office in charge of those issues. The following is the full text of the three points laid out in the document by the office:

1. Stick to the principle of denying Kaifeng Jewry as an ethnic group of its own. Various periodicals and newspapers should carry objective reports both domestically and internationally. Recognize the fact of historical migration, but put emphasis on the freedom and happiness that they have today. Use the terminology "descendants of Kaifeng Jews" when we address them without implying any country or ethnic group in order to avoid any unnecessary controversy.

Be lenient to foreign scholars and tourists with the request of visiting Kaifeng synagogue relics, stone tablets and meeting with Jewish descendants. The Kaifeng Foreign Affairs Office will be in charge of their visits politically.

2. From the standpoint of historical materialism, we may consider opening the original site of Kaifeng synagogue and stone tablets to the public. Kaifeng municipal museum could keep historical files of Kaifeng Jewry in one of its exhibit rooms for viewing. Related introduction could also be made in books and paintings for publicity abroad and in tourist brochures.

3. Regarding donations made to Kaifeng by Jewish persons from other countries, acceptance could be considered if the donor has no political intentions, and is only doing it out of kindness for renovating historical sites, museums or other welfare purposes. If the donor's purpose is religiously oriented or implying "a Jewish nation," the donation should be turned down with grace.

As we can see here, this document shifts its emphasis on issues other than ethnic identification though the principle is kept. It puts forward a set of guidelines for tourist issues: what can be done and what can't be done when receiving foreign visitors. From the function of the office

²² Pollak lists a number of such visits. For details, please refer to *Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries*, p. xix.

which drafted the document, those are their major concerns naturally.

Obviously, the document is highly politically oriented and raises two fundamental issues related to the Kaifeng Jews:

- 1) Addressing them as “descendants” in order to deny the Kaifeng Jews’ connection with the Jewish people and Israel as a Jewish state, because they believed this would be controversial;
- 2) Making the Jewish religion taboo and anything related to Judaism not acceptable, even donations.

We have no idea what the response from the top was. However, what was ascertained is that this document provided a guideline for dealing with foreign visitors to the city. Those who are familiar with the Kaifeng issue or have been to Kaifeng would feel the policy works even now.

For 1,000 years Jews lived and worked -- and thrived -- in China, but big changes have occurred during the last 50 years. After a hiatus when many Jews left following the end of World War II, the Jewish presence now increases. Western Jews, enjoying the new Open Door Policy settle in major cities bringing their customs and religious practices. Descendants of the Kaifeng Jews show a renewed interest in their heritage with the arrival of co-religionists as tourists, and new links are being established between them and Israel. On both fronts, all bodes well for a continued, mutually advantageous relationship between our peoples.

Appendix 1: The full text of the 1953 document

The United Front of the Bureau of Central South:

The telegraph dated Apr 3rd regarding the Kaifeng Jewry is received.

Judging from your telegraph, the Jews scattered in Kaifeng have no direct connections economic wise, they don't have a common language of their own and a common area of inhabitation. They have completely mixed and mingled with the majority Han population, in terms of their political, economical and cultural life, neither do they possess any distinctive traits in any other aspect. All this indicates that it is not an issue to treat them as one distinctive ethnic group, as they are not a Jewish nation in themselves.

Secondly, aside from the Kaifeng Jewry, there is stateless Jewish population in Shanghai. Jewish presence in some other large and mid-sized cities are also possible, however scarce it might be. It is an intricate issue. It could cause other problems and put us in a passive position politically if we acknowledge the Jews of Kaifeng. Therefore, your request of acknowledging Kaifeng Jewry as a separate nationality is improper based solely on the historical archival evidence you found. You have only seen the minor inessential differences between the Kaifeng Jews and their Han counterpart, and fail to see their commonality and the fact that they're essentially the same. (The publication found in *People's Daily* during National Day celebration time last year regarding "a Jewish nationality" was provided by the Central Ethnic Affairs Committee.) Kaifeng Jewry should be treated as a part of the Han Nationality.

The major issue is that we should take the initiative to be more caring to them in various activities, and educate the local Han population not to discriminate against or insult them. This will help gradually ease away the differences they might psychologically or emotionally feel exists between them and the Han.

The United Front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
June 8, 1953

About the author

Xu Xin, professor of History of Jewish Culture and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University, is also president of the China Judaic Studies Association and editor-in-chief and a major contributor of the Chinese edition *Encyclopedia Judaica*. He teaches courses such as Jewish history, Jewish culture and the world civilization, Holocaust studies, history of Jewish Diaspora. He has created graduate-level programs on Jewish history and culture at Nanjing University. He is the author of many books and articles about Judaism in China, and has been a visiting professor at numerous universities in the US. In 2003 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Bar Ilan University in recognition of the extremely important work he has done on research of the Jewish people in China.