

Covenant

Jewish Identity in China: A Chinese View

By An Tifa*

Translated from Chinese by Tiberiu Weisz**

Abstract: This article under its original title “A Group of Jewish Descendents from Kaifeng Want to Immigrate to Israel, but Their Identity Is in Doubt” was published in *21st Century World* in Chinese and on the internet at: <http://www.sina.com.cn/c/2002-08-06>.

As the Chinese title indicates, this article is written for Chinese audiences, and the text follows Chinese reporting practices that differ considerably from reporting style in the West. To make the article more reader friendly for Western readers, the translator has made some structural changes and eliminated many repetitions, duplications and redundancies, while remaining true to the original article. Background information on the story of Chinese Jews may be found in the endnotes and suggested readings.

Among a group of people studying Hebrew at the Foreign Language Institute at Nanjing University was Zhang Xingwang¹ a teacher from Kaifeng with a small black cap called a *kipa* covering his head. Zhang said that he does not have a great knowledge of the Jewish tradition, but he wears the *kipa* in search of spiritual sustenance. Because of this search, he is very attentive when he follows the instruction of the Hebrew teachers.

At the invitation of Professor Xuxin, Director of the Jewish Cultural Studies Department at Nanjing University, Chinese students, historians, teachers, scholars and other interested parties came from all over China to attend a summer program of Israel cultural studies. He also invited several descendents of the Jews from Kaifeng and a Jewish professor and his wife to teach Hebrew and Jewish culture.

Zhang Xingwang introduced straightforwardly the long history of the Jews in Kaifeng. “One thousands years ago,” he said, “[Jewish] ancestors came on the Silk Route from Israel to Kaifeng, capital of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). After the court received them the emperor said; ‘[You] returned to my China. Honor and observe the custom of your ancestors. Bianliang was abandoned.’² These Jews decided to settle down. At the beginning, there were 17 families³ but only 7 exist today: Shi, Gao, Ai, Li, Zhang, Zhao and Jin. All these names were transliterations from Hebrew with the exception of Zhao, whose name was bestowed by the emperor. Thus, Li sounded like Levi while Shi [Stone] and Jin [Gold] were translations.”⁴ According to Zhang Xingwang there were 618 descendents of the Kaifeng Jews, some of them had left, scattered in Uruguchi, Lanzhou,⁵ Xian, Chengdu, Shanghai, Nanjing, Shenzhen and other cities.

In the past, these Jews marked “Jews” as their nationality in the census. In 1952, two Jewish delegates from Kaifeng went to Beijing to represent the community at the celebration of the National Day⁶ and were received by the leadership of the Central Committee. A few years ago at the time of the census most of the people changed [nationality] to “Muslim” or “Han.”⁷ Zhang Xingwang was obviously not pleased. He said [that the Jews] were obviously not Muslims or Han Chinese, so why ask them to change their nationality? It is

unreasonable that they cannot get such recognition.

Zhang Xingwang also maintains that the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews had forgotten the Jewish culture. The original Kaifeng descendents had congregated near the teaching alley (*hutong*) but after 1958, they moved out. Only the Zhao family remained there. Looking at this from a daily life perspective, they were no longer observing the Jewish tradition. This year is the first time that [the Jews] have celebrated Passover. Although most of the [Jews] are still in the habit of not eating pork, there is no Jewish person who is true to the image of “the sect that extracts the sinew”⁸ of the sheep. They forgot the traditional customs and therefore came here [to Nanjing] to study Hebrew hoping to return and search for their historical Jewish memories.

[Meanwhile, in the class] these Jewish descendents repeated after the teacher a Hebrew prayer: “In front of the Lord we sing a new song—Hallelujah!” Everybody made great effort to have the correct pronunciation as each one hoped to announce every single word of the hard-to-study Hebrew sentence.

With Illegal Emigration the Family Stretches the Boundaries

When the reporter asked Zhang Xingwang about the family who had already immigrated to Israel, he responded without hesitation: “They are different from us, we are patriots.” He also admitted that there were Kaifeng Jews who ran away illegally but this was a matter of purely individual behavior. He also said that just because this family name was Jin, it does not mean that we study Hebrew for the pleasure of the Jin family. “First we are Chinese, but because we have Jewish bloodlines, we are Chinese with Jewish characteristics. We teach this to our children: that first of all we love our country.”

Outsiders need to understand that this is a sensitive issue. Zhang Xingwang illustrated this point: “We were the little birds in the

forest, without worries and concerns. Later as the cats [hunters] became numerous, we saw the guns’ fowling pieces and ran. Now, many people are looking for us both from China and abroad.” He repeatedly stated that the majority of the Kaifeng Jewish descendents are patriots.

According to Zhang Qianhong,⁹ the head of the Institute of Jewish Studies at Henan University, in addition to the *Jin*’s [who already emigrated] there were the *Zhang*’s and the *Li*’s who had wanted to immigrate to Israel in the 1990s. However, only the three members of the Jin family were successful; they moved to Finland and their uncle Jin Guanzhong remained in Kaifeng.

Zhang Xingwang expressed his disappointment that the Kaifeng descendents cannot immigrate to Israel legally: “We would like to go to see Jerusalem, too.” He explained that intermarriage between Jews [in Kaifeng] and Han Chinese was quite common. The descendents of the Kaifeng Jews followed the patrilineal descent in China, and therefore could not immigrate because in Israel the matrilineal descent is followed. “Had the Kaifeng community followed the matrilineal descent, then they would have not encountered any problems. The Jewish community in Spain had a 300 year-old history; they also celebrated Passover, but were not even aware that they were Jews. Only after scholars realized that they were of matrilineal descent, they could immigrate. Jewish blood cannot be forgotten.”¹⁰

Zhang Xingwang explained the value of the Jewish presence in China: “The Kaifeng Jewish community has an impact on the world. They often receive Jews from foreign countries and from Israel. The Israelis consider the Jews of Kaifeng especially important, because it serves a testimony to the friendship between China and Israel. We are saying that the Chinese people are good toward the Jews; they do not discriminate against the Jews. Living circumstances in Kaifeng are favorable, and the Jews can survive and flourish for another thousand

years.” In conclusion, he said, “it is not important whether or not the government recognizes us as Jews, nor is it important that the census cannot be changed, what is important is that we feel that we are Jews in our hearts. Neither this nor the next generation will forget that we are Jews.”

But the Young Generation of Jews Has a Different View of Their Jewish Identity

At the Hebrew school [in Nanjing] was another female student, majoring in International Relations at the Elousi Mosque.¹¹ Her name is Shi Han, a second year student who used the summer vacation to go to Nanjing University to study Jewish culture. Although her [maternal] grandfather was a representative of the Jewish descendents at the Beijing [festivities] in 1952,¹² she has no deep historical affiliation to Judaism and her interest in this class is mostly curiosity. “I rarely mention that I am Jewish; only when classmates come over to my house and ask about the few books and the pictures in the house, I tell them that I am a descendent of Jews.” When the government allowed [the Jews] to test for their DNA in the 1980s, the proof came back that she had the same DNA traces as an Iraqi Jew. She has no understanding of Judaism and even less of the Bible. But when she was asked about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, she said: “Of course we are on the side of Israel.”

The Jin family obviously went one step further [in their quest] of their ancestors’ tradition. According to reports, when Jin Xiaojin, who worked at the Institute for Minority Research, found out in the 1980s that he was of Jewish descent, he sent his daughter Qu Yian, who at the time was a reporter in Beijing, to Los Angeles to study Judaism.

The Latest Jewish Records

Kaifeng is an old city; its economy naturally cannot be compared to the coastal area. Song Nushi, who works for the city Migration Assistance Bureau, said that, because of the

high unemployment rate, many people considered going to work abroad, and last year a number of people asked about Israel.

Zhang Xingwang directed the reporter to the Teaching Alley (*jiao hutong*). That place is marked on the map as the “remnants of the Jewish Synagogue” but the original synagogue site has been replaced by the Peoples’ Number Four Hospital and the only historical marker is an ancient well in the hospital boiler room.

Cui Shuping, a widower of a Jewish descendent, lives on the southern side of the Teaching Alley. She is a Han Chinese but her late husband Zhao Pingyu was of Jewish descent. Every day she sees local and foreign visitors. On the table in the house, there is a candleholder and a “Great Six Star” (Magen David) paper-cut window decoration that her daughter had cut out and put in the framed mirror. She told the reporter that the paper cut is both a decoration and a reminder. On the sides of the door are hung two traditional Chinese scrolls designated for peace. Apart for these reminders, her house is no different from that of her neighbors.

On the fourth floor of the Kaifeng Museum is the Jewish Department, and to gain admission one needs to apply in advance. Fortunately, the gatekeeper was there and asked the guide to take the reporter to the fourth floor, on condition that she take no pictures nor make any recording. On display in the museum is an extremely important memorial engraving, the original stone stele of “The Record of the Rebuilding of the Pure and Truth Temple” and “The Record in Honor of the Daojing Temple.”¹³ The floor was very dark and very humid and the mood was somber. Due to the declining number of visitors, Zeng Guangqing, the head of the department, told the *21-Century World* reporter that the Kaifeng Jews were a historical phenomenon and that there is no Jewish minority among the 56 national minorities in China. But of course the reporter does know this.

The local Kaifeng Jewish descendents, however, welcomed the publicity. Li Suisheng's wife bought a watermelon to serve the reporter while she showed her two sets of original census documents as proof of their nationality. The nationality of Li Suisheng was clearly marked "Jew" in the old the Red Book.¹⁴ The new census is handwritten and has the word "Jew" for Li Suisheng and his daughter, but a closer look at the census record of Li Suisheng shows that there is a trace of change. His wife explained that the census official wrote it wrong and he immediately corrected it.

Officially, Neither Country Recognizes Them as Jews

The reporter followed up with the census registration office. The People's Police pulled up the record of Li Suisheng on the computer and the reporter could see on the screen that the nationality of the three members of the Li clan is Han Chinese. The deputy director explained that most of the new census is computerized but the transfer [to computerized system] occurred while the census was taken. At the time, the software was not secure and therefore Li Suisheng's registry was handwritten. But he added that the computerized system has only two nationalities Han or Muslims. China has 56 nationalities and Jews are not among them.

Not only the local government did not recognize them as Jews, but when the reporter went to the Office of Migration of the Foreign Ministry [in Beijing] inquiring about the application of the Jin family to Israel, an official at the Public Documentation Office admitted that in 1996 the local government made an error issuing those certificates. At the time, the Public Notary Office issued individual IDs that did not constitute legal recognition of the Jews.¹⁵ Later the Public Notary Office revoked the Jewish certificates and since then IDs with "Jew" on them were illegal. According to the official, China has only 56 minorities, and the Jewish minority is not among them.

[The reporter went] to the Israeli Consulate in Beijing located on the 4th floor of the West Trade Center building.

The response from the Israeli Consulate was the same. The Public Relations Officer told *21st Century World* that the Israeli Consulate recognizes only the legal procedure of the Foreign Ministry and does not regard the Jewish certificates as legal. He also said that the Consulate had not issued immigration certificates to any Jewish descendents.

Though neither country admits officially that they are Jews, a few organizations assist the Kaifeng descendents to return to their traditional culture. Chou Cailian, a Chinese Canadian, helped many Chinese minority poor children with education. Since he [Chou] suspects that his great-grandmother was of Jewish descent, he had helped several Jewish descendents of Kaifeng. He financed the education of fourteen Kaifeng Jewish descendents; among them was Lijing, Li Suisheng's daughter, who just recently had received a scholarship. In March of this year, Chou Cailian invited the families of the descendents to a restaurant to celebrate Passover. At the same time, other organizations also assist the Kaifeng Jewish descendents to immigrate to Israel. The Jin family only recently immigrated to Israel with the help of such an organization.

The Jewish teacher at the Israel Cultural Training Center of Nanjing University offered some private thoughts to the hopeful few who want to immigrate to Israel: "If one wants to become a Jew, of course you can become Jew. But, this is a very long and slow process. Besides, I want them to think about three things: Is it worth becoming a Jew? Jews have many enemies, a long and sad history of bitterness and strict laws.... But no matter what we say, if they want, we welcome them with open arms.

Are the Kaifeng Jewish Descendents Jews?

To clarify this question, the reporter interviewed Professor Xuxin from the Nanjing Jewish Cultural Center.

21st Century World: The Jews of Kaifeng are a historical incident. But, from an Israeli standpoint, after some descendents of the Jews of Kaifeng immigrated to Israel it suddenly became reality. Could you put the issue of the Kaifeng Jews in simple terms for us?

Xuxin: The issue of the Kaifeng Jews as was talked about in China in the past actually referred to the remnant of the historical Kaifeng Jews. Some maintain that the Jews settled in Kaifeng in the Northern Song Dynasty [1162 CE] and some of them formed a community conforming to the Jewish customs. At the end of the 19th century, Chinese scholars started to pay attention to the question of Kaifeng Jews, and in the 1920s, they documented their historical existence.

In the beginning of the 17th century, the story of the Kaifeng Jews was extensively reported in the West. It attracted the attention of the intelligentsia in Europe creating controversy and debates. During the reign of Yong Zheng [1723- 1735] of the Qing Dynasty [1644-1911], China expelled foreign religions from China, and the outside world lost its connection with the Kaifeng Jews. After the Opium War in 1850, two Chinese missionaries from Shanghai were sent to Kaifeng and they wrote a report that was widely publicized in the West. According to that report, there was no longer a rabbi in Kaifeng and they estimated that [the community had been without a rabbi] or a successor since the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, they [Jews] ceased to observe the traditional customs because the role of the rabbi was very important in Judaism.

The Kaifeng Temple had been in disrepair for a long time, and it was evident that the Jews stopped going to the synagogue. Since the synagogue belonged to the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews, the descendents sold the building in 1914. This attracted the attention

of the Shanghai Jews.¹⁶ Jews have a tradition of helping each other, and when they learned that the Kaifeng descendents sold the Torah scrolls, they were very sad. They established an “Association for the Aid of the Kaifeng Jews” and wrote letters to the world Jewish communities calling for saving the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews. But the outbreak of World War II shelved the issue; they [the Jews] faced other disasters in the world. At the time there were several Kaifeng Jews who went to Shanghai and were well received by the Shanghai Jewish community, they also underwent circumcision, but afterward there were no more attempts to restore the tradition.

21st Century World: The descendents of the Kaifeng Jews called themselves Jews in the past, what is your view about this question?

Xuxin: After the end of the 19th century, there were no Jewish descendents in Kaifeng, but some people followed the tradition and called themselves Jews. The Kaifeng Jews followed the patrilineal tradition, that is, if the father was Jewish, the offspring were Jewish, too, and they used the father’s surname. In the 1920 census, during the Republican Period [1911-1949] a few Kaifeng descendents wrote “Jew” as their nationality affiliation. They did so out of conviction of historical loyalty and not due to political or economic aspirations. Even on the 1952 census [form], some Kaifeng Jewish descendents wrote “Jew” [as their nationality] even though there were not many [who observed] Jewish tradition at the time, but in that generation, people were permitted to determine their own religious affiliation. The census did not require any proof of ancestry or nationality; descendents knew the origin of their ancestors. This kind of “Jew” was actually [a Jew] in a cultural sense. Interestingly, the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews based their being Jews on the tradition, but other people claim that they are not [Jewish]. This is strange because no other minority, not the Han Chinese nor the Muslims are required to prove their [affiliation], so why are the Kaifeng Jews?

21st Century World: But according to the Law of Return, they are not Jews.

Xuxin: That is correct. I was talking about Jews in a cultural sense. Strictly speaking, I do not regard them as Jews, and that refers to the “Jewish descendents”, too.

I think that it is ludicrous that they want to immigrate to Israel. According to the Law of Return, only if the mother is Jewish, or the individual is converted to Judaism, he or she is a Jew. Based on these standards, they are obviously not Jews, because the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews follow the father’s lineage. But this is a legal definition, and one cannot suppress these peoples’ traditional right to call themselves Jews. We should not forget that during biblical times the Jewish lineage was patrilineal and only after the exile [586 BCE], the standard changed to matrilineal.

When China examined its definition of national minorities, the status of the Jewish minority was also considered. In 1952, two delegates from Kaifeng represented the Jews in the National Minority Day Celebration. But in 1953 the Central Committee reaffirmed the article [of the basic laws] that maintained that there are only 56 minorities in China, and Jews were not among them, yet the [same article] also protected their rights to preserve their traditional customs.

21st Century World: Now it appears that the Kaifeng Jewish descendents want to immigrate to Israel, how do you look at this?

Xuxin: In the 1990s, the Kaifeng descendents became interested in immigration. Among the Seven Surnames of the Kaifeng Jews, the Jin family went to Beijing and asked to immigrate. The Consulate of Israel, however, refused to consider their application because of the Law of Return. Then they [the *Jin*’s] went to Israel from a third country (from Russia to Finland and to Israel). My understanding is that a Christian organization helped them. But, I doubt that they can become eligible to be

Israelis according to the Law of Return unless they convert. Conversion is not easy. If one wants to convert, the Jews will be the first to tell you that becoming a Jew is not fun. If you insist on converting, you need to study, and be under close observation for [at least] a year. Most of the conversions occur because of marriage. Most Chinese do not understand Israel; they think that immigration is good. But, I tell them straightforwardly that immigration is a difficult affair. I do not approve of immigration, they do not speak the language, they have no skills and life in Israel is very difficult.

Special Correspondent An Tifa Reports from Jerusalem

Since 1986, many foreign and Chinese visitors have come to Kaifeng to interview L. (I use the name L. because the interviewee did not agree to use the real name), and the descendents of the Kaifeng Jews. After the establishment of relations between China and Israel in 1992, these kinds of interviews increased daily. And L.’s name started to appear in a few places both in China and abroad. An unexpected opportunity in 1999 changed the fate of L. At the beginning of that year, L. received assistance from an organization that in the 1920s started to help overseas Jews to immigrate to Israel, and they expressed their willingness to assist L. to be the first Kaifeng Jew to immigrate to Israel.

Once the Reporter Met L. She Asked: Why Do You Want to Immigrate to Israel?

L. said, “Since I was little, I have known that I was Jewish. When I was little, my mother told me that one branch of [the family] is Chinese and one branch is Israelite. Reaching out to the other branch has been one of my dreams since childhood.”

After 1999, L. sought the path of immigration, but that path was not successful. It can be said that behind each emigration from China, there is a complicated story. But in the end they achieved their goal. By the year 2000, they

obtained the various permits, spent four months in Finland, and went to live in Israel.

L. explained the process of immigrating to Israel as a Jew. "First, I needed to prove that I was a Jew. Though I wrote 'Jew' as my nationality in the 1996 census, officials told me that I had to write either Han or Muslim and could not continue to write 'Jew' as nationality because there was no such name among the 56 names. Then I had to produce an official notarized letter. I went to the Foreign Ministry in Beijing where I was told that [such] a notarized letter needed to be approved by higher levels at the Ministry. After two weeks, I received the approval of the higher officials in the ministry, and in addition, it was also stamped by the Israeli Consulate." L. continued: "If one wants to maintain Jewish identity one needs also to obtain a notarized [letter] from one's rabbi. But there are no rabbis in China. The few Jewish descendents 'perhaps several thousand people altogether' are widely scattered throughout China and very few of them are observant Jews."

Once the identity is recognized, traveling becomes a question of expenses. According to the records, the aid society who helped them immigrate, had already taken into account the expenses and successfully provided them enough financing. Thus in the fall of 1999, L. [and wife] embarked for Finland, where they stayed for four months and in the end they arrived in Jerusalem.

They Lived in Jerusalem for Two Years

"Because of the sensitivity of the immigration issue, the government hoped that we would not come to Jerusalem directly from Beijing, therefore we adopted a two stage plan. First we went to Finland and then to Israel. Our expenses in Finland and in Jerusalem were covered by the aid society. For two years after we left Kaifeng we had received about ten thousand US dollars in aid." They lived in Jerusalem for two years, and received a monthly stipend of US \$ 600 (5000 Chinese yuan) that covered the rent. In addition, they

received 6000-yuan (\$700) a month for living expenses and medical insurance equal to the [standard of living of a] middle-income family. They were also provided with furniture and appliances. L. did not work. He spent half days, three times a week, at an *ulpan*, the rest of the time he had free time. He went for walks, watched TV, read books, surfed the internet and cooked. At least three times a week, he went to the synagogue and used Hebrew to read the prayers. L. said that once he felt he could communicate, he was able to look for a job. Gradually the aid society decreased the amount of aid and eventually stopped it altogether. No matter to what standards one compares L.'s living conditions, his two-room apartment is not considered small. On the snow white painted walls, hangs a Chinese scroll. Also displayed in the living room are seven or eight picture frames depicting the old Kaifeng synagogue and the scenery around it.

Observing Jewish Rituals

During the interview the reporter asked L., "To what extent did you observe the Jewish tradition in Kaifeng?"

L. said, "In the old days, there was a saying that 'seven surnames and eight families'¹⁷ of Jews lived in Kaifeng. These surnames were bestowed in antiquity by the emperor. Our surname was historic and our ancestors held a fourth grade official rank in the court. The household was rather prosperous. There were also rather many Jews in old Kaifeng who observed the tradition. We had our own family tree, which also was a proof that we were Jewish. Before the Cultural Revolution [1966-1969], our family still kept the imperial tablet¹⁸ but later we lent it to a display in Beijing. It was never returned to us, and we lost its trace. There are also stone inscriptions left in Kaifeng that had recorded the deeds of our ancestors.¹⁹ The graves of our Jewish ancestors near Kaifeng are still in good conditions. There are approximately 30 tombs. Buried among the bodies of nine generations

is [the grave] of my elder brother who recently passed away.

On the door of our house, we had a special Jewish sign that we touched when we entered or left the house. It was a sign of ‘to go and come in peace’. Our family observed the Sabbath from Friday sunset until sunset on Saturday. That time we did no work. Our family had also read the Chinese version of the Jewish prayers.”

L.’s wife is not of Jewish descent but she said that [since her marriage] she had understood and respected [her husband’s] national identity and traditional customs. L. said, “During the ninety years of living in Kaifeng, our family had not eaten pork or shrimp and these customs had been preserved until today.” Before immigrating to Israel, L. ran a rather small factory and his wife used a room in the house to run a barbershop. L. has an elder sister and a younger brother who live near the community housing in Kaifeng. They also follow the same customs as the L. household.

The interview is nearing an end and the reporter asked L: “Do your sister and brother hope to immigrate to Israel? Why did they not come yet?”

L. said: “Of course, they would like to immigrate; they also sent in their application. But two main obstacles are in the way: One, there is no organization that is willing to give them the documentation that they are Jews. Two, financing is also a problem. You know, immigrating requires a lot of money and the organization that helped and financed us is helping other people.”

In conclusion, it must be added that L’s family are not the sole Chinese Jews living in Israel. During World War I, many Jews sought refuge in Shanghai and other places in China; some of them married to local Chinese. The children of these mixed marriages have Jewish blood. After the liberation, some of them went to Israel with their Jewish mother or father; others came to Israel after the opening of

relations between the two countries, in search of their mother or father. In every town or city in Israel, one can find such examples.

About the Author

**An Tifa is special correspondent for the 21st Century World, a Chinese periodical.*

About the Translator

***Tiberiu Weisz sits on the Board of the Sino-Judaic Institute, and is the author of two books about China and the Jews: The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China (iUniverse, 2006), and The Covenant and the Mandate of Heaven: An In-depth Comparative Cultural Study of Judaism and China (iUniverse, 2008).*

Suggested Reading

Many books and articles have been written about the Jews in China, and below is a very short list that provides interested readers a wide range of views on this fascinating topic.

Eber, Irene. *Chinese Jews Encounters Between Cultures*. Valentine Mitchell Press, 2008 (A view from an Israeli scholar).

Goldstein, Jonathan. *The Jews of China: A Sourcebook and Research Guide*. 2 Volumes. M.E. Sharpe, 2000 (A comprehensive collection of scholarly articles).

Krasno, Rena, *Strangers Always: A Jewish Family in Wartime Shanghai*. Pacific View Press, 2000 (An account of a young Jewish girl growing up in Shanghai in the 1920s).

Pan Guang, *The Jews in China*. China Intercultural Press, 2003 (A view from a Chinese scholar).

Pollack, Michael. *Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980 (A history of the

Jewish presence in China for both laymen and scholars).

Schwarcz, Vera. *Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory*. Yale University Press, 1999 (Cross cultural observations of a Jewish student in China in the 1970s).

Weisz, Tiberiu, *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China*. iUniverse, 2006 (Full translation and annotation of the stone inscriptions and their meaning).

Weisz, Tiberiu, *The Covenant and the Mandate of Heaven: An In-Depth Comparative Cultural Study of Judaism and China*. iUniverse 2008.

Xu Xin, *The Jews of Kaifeng, China, History Culture and Religion*. Ktav Publishing House, 2003 (A view from a Chinese scholar).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

¹ Zhang Xingwang is the spokesman for the Jewish community in Kaifeng and also goes by the Hebrew name of Moshe. He is very outspoken about Judaism in China and, here, he expressed his views to a Chinese reporter. He is a physical education teacher and a Wushu (martial arts) coach at a high school in Kaifeng. He is also member of the Chinese Communist Party and a former city council member. I met him several times but had never had a chance to talk with him. At one of the dinners, I sat next to his daughter, at the time a high school student, with whom I exchanged a few words. She was very surprised that I could talk in fluent Chinese, and once she realized that we could converse freely, she was very talkative. Unfortunately she was called away to give us a “demonstration of her knowledge of a Hebrew song.”

² Zhang's remarks referred to a sentence in the 1489 stone inscriptions that was believed to say that the Jews came to China during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) at the invitation of

the emperor. It is evident that Zhang quoted Bishop White's translation. Bishop White, a Chinese missionary who resided in China from 1897 to 1934 and brought the case of the Kaifeng Jews to our attention, translated this sentence to say: “You have come to our China; Reverence and preserve the custom of your ancestors and hand them down at Pien-Liang (Kaifeng).” Donald Leslie, an Australian scholar, merely rephrased this: “Come to our China, honor and preserve the custom of your ancestors. Remain and hand them down in Pianliang” (*The Survival of the Chinese Jews* (T'ong Pao 1972), p. 23). Xu Xin, who is mentioned in this article and is the author of *The Jews of Kaifeng*, recreated the story of the Chinese Jews based on Bishop White's translation without checking it for accuracy. However, a closer look at the original Chinese text reveals that the English translation contained two critical errors. First, Bishop White mistranslated the word “*gui*,” which in Chinese means “return” (and not “come”), implying that the Jews were not newcomers to China. Second, he also mistranslated the word “*liuyi*,” which in the fifteenth century referred to the moving of the capital from one city to another and meant “to abandon, to leave behind [the capital city].” Based on these distinctions, the first sentence was a direct speech by emperor while the second sentence referred to the fleeing of the Song court in 1127. For a full translation and explanation of the original Chinese text, see Tiberiu Weisz, *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions: The Legacy of the Jewish Community in Ancient China* (iUniverse, 2006).

³ The 1489 inscription mentioned seventy families, which was not incidental. It indicated that the Chinese Jews knew their roots. The reference was used to identify them in a Jewish historical context: “all the offspring of Jacob were seventy persons” (Exodus 1:5).

⁴ Some researchers advanced the theory that these names were of Hebrew origin, but as I showed in *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions*, these names were *bona fide* Chinese surnames and not transliterations.

⁵ A very good Chinese friend of mine, who was assigned to a “working brigade” in Lanzhou (Xinjiang/Gansu Province) during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) and spent 19 years there, said he knew people of Jewish descent in Lanzhou.

⁶ What he is referring to was the celebration of the National Minority Day in 1952 when the Kaifeng Municipal Government and Bureau of Central South chose two Jewish descendents from Kaifeng, Ai Fenming and Shi Fenying, to represent the Jewish minority at the national celebration. Both members became ardent Communists and later worked for the government. According to Xuxin, the reason that these two Jews were chosen was “that the local government was aware of the existence of Jews in the city and wanted to ensure equal rights for any ethnic group living in their region. These two Jewish descendants were introduced as Jews while in Beijing and were well received during the celebration.” (For details see: Xu Xin, “Chinese Policy Towards Judaism,” *Points East*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (March, 2004), pp. 3-4, and Gustavo D. Perednik, “The Chinese of Jewish Descent at Kaifeng,” *Points East*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (March 2008), p. 4).

⁷ Han is the Chinese term for Chinese.

⁸ This is what the Jews were called in the eighteenth century when the missionaries visited them. For details, see Michael Pollack, *Mandarin Jews and Missionaries: The Jewish Experience in the Chinese Empire* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980).

⁹ I have met Qianhong on several occasions in China, and we are currently collaborating on a joint project.

¹⁰ This is Moshe Zhang’s interpretation of the Maranos in Spain.

¹¹ I am not clear about the meaning of this sentence nor certain of its exact location. Elousi is a Russian minority that lives between the Uyigur Autonomous Region and Heilongjiang.

¹² See Note 5 above.

¹³ This is the original stele of 1489; the other side is the engraving of the 1512 inscriptions.

For a full translation of the Chinese text see *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions*.

¹⁴ An official document.

¹⁵ For a more detailed explanation of these events, see Xu Xin, “Chinese Policy Towards Judaism.”

¹⁶ There was a small but wealthy Jewish merchant community in Shanghai, e.g. the Sasoons, Kadooris, Hardouns, etc. See Jonathan Goldstein, *The Jews of China: A Sourcebook and Research Guide* (M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

¹⁷ This is another name for the Jews in Kaifeng.

¹⁸ This tablet was displayed at the entrance of the Kaifeng synagogue.

¹⁹ For a new annotated translation of these inscriptions in the Jewish context, see *The Kaifeng Stone Inscriptions*.