Chinese Jews and Jews in China

Kaifeng – Shanghai

Irene Eber

In both imperial and modern China, Jews were a small minority in comparison to the larger Moslem and Christian minorities. At most there may have been several thousand Jews in past ages and possibly around 30,000 by the mid-twentieth century. Yet these small communities have invited considerable scholarly attention over the years, and their histories of remoter periods and more recent times have raised a number of questions. One of these, and the one to be taken up in this paper, is how the Jews in Kaifeng 開封 and in Shanghai, each at a different time and a different place, accommodated themselves to the Chinese environment. By Chinese Jews, I mean primarily those who settled in Kaifeng in the twelfth century, the initial group being augmented by newcomers probably over the next two hundred years. By Jews in China, I have in mind the disparate groups who arrived in Shanghai after the Opium War (1839–1842) that consisted initially of mostly Sephardi Jews,[1] then Russian, and later Central European Jews.

Although we speak of Kaifeng Jews, it must be remembered that at least until the seventeenth century, Jewish communities existed in Ningbo 寧波, Yangzhou 揚州, and Ningxia 寧夏. The more recent Shanghai communities were similarly not the only ones. There were also organized communities in Harbin and Tianjin 天津, although they were

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[1] Sephardi communities were widespread throughout the Mediterranean countries, North Africa, the Balkans, but also in portions of Western and Central Europe. Sephardim have distinctive rituals, differences in liturgy and some traditions that differ from those of the Ashkenazim. Most of the Sephardim who came to Shanghai hailed originally from Iraq and are often also referred to as Baghdadis.

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smaller. In this paper I will discuss only the Kaifeng Jews, as data about the other communities is lacking, and the Shanghai communities.

Beginnings of the Kaifeng Jewish Community

Jewish merchants, having come overland, probably traded on the Chang'an 長安 market during the Tang dynasty.[2] They might also have reached China by sea, sailing together with Arab merchants to Guangzhou 廣州 (Canton), but there is little or no evidence to support this conclusively. Nor is there evidence for the presence of an actual Jewish community during the Tang dynasty. The existence of a later Jewish community in Kaifeng is, however, amply documented on five stelae inscriptions, dating from 1489, 1512, two from 1663, and 1679, although the information on these is fragmentary.[3] According to the 1489 stele, the first synagogue was built in Kaifeng in 1163, which indicates that by then a sufficient number of Jews had arrived to warrant a house of prayer. It can be assumed that they were merchants who came in small groups over a period of time together with other merchants headed for the capital of the empire. The 1489 inscription states that they were cotton merchants from India (*Tianzhu* 天竺). This seems plausible, as cotton began to be cultivated only during the Northern Song dynasty in the Yangzi (Changjiang 長江) delta and was not yet widely available throughout the empire. Where precisely they came from in India is not known, nor can we be certain that they were Indian Jews.[4] Quite likely they arrived in Kaifeng before the Jurchen (*Ruzhen* 女真) army laid

[2] A *selikhot* or penitential prayer written on paper and dating from the Tang dynasty was found in Dunhuang 敦煌. As paper was not in general use in Europe at that time, it must be assumed that it was written in China by someone who left by the overland route (Berger/Schwab 1913, pp. 139–175). Figurines of Persians and so-called Semitic merchants and musicians are well known. Among them are figurines in distinctive, non-Persian garb that could be of Jews from farther west, or even from Franco-German lands.

[3] The stelae were inscribed and erected to commemorate special events in communal life. The 1489 inscription commemorates the reconstruction of the synagogue buildings after the disastrous flood of 1461, and that of 1512, on the reverse side, provides supplementary information. The stone with the two 1663 inscriptions (now lost) was erected after the 1642 flood. The occasion for the 1679 inscription was the erection of the Zhao family archway. The Chinese texts can be found in White 1966/II, pp. 35–39, 51–54, 80–85, 94–95, and 104–107.

[4] Merchants from different places tended to band together for sea voyages, constituting a polyglot society that traded far and wide (Ghosh 1992). There is apparent-

siege to the city in the winter of 1126, capturing the capital in January 1127. It is doubtful that traders would have ventured into a war zone, which would have endangered their merchandise, either during the hostilities, or even shortly thereafter. It is nevertheless clear that they built their synagogue when Kaifeng was under foreign rule and when it was no longer the capital.

The attraction to merchants of Song Kaifeng was the city's flourishing commerce. With more than one million inhabitants within the city walls and its suburbs, Kaifeng was an "open" city, with none of the constraints that had characterized earlier Chinese cities. As argued persuasively by Heng Chye Kiang, Kaifeng boasted a flowering urban culture with commerce and consumerism a part of urban life.[5] In this new kind of city with its unrestrained commercial and entertainment establishments, a group of foreign merchants would have had no difficulty finding their place. What may have been considered a temporary residence at first, became, however, a permanent home due to the unsettled conditions – a peace treaty was signed only in 1141 – but also because trading relations between the Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234) and the Southern Song (1127–1279) were maintained.[6] The fact that they built a synagogue after Kaifeng had come under Jin control (together with the rest of North China) may very well indicate that trading conditions continued to be favorable and that they had settled permanently in Kaifeng.

No doubt, relations with other Jewish communities were maintained in the Jin period and especially during the subsequent Yuan dynasty. As a result of the flourishing caravan and sea trade in the Mongol period, Jews from other parts of the vast Mongol empire may have settled in Kaifeng and in other cities. However, we know nothing about them, how they perpetuated their Judaism, how precisely they made their living, or how they were accepted by their Chinese hosts. The first further information is not until three centuries later, from the Ming dynasty. Even then, the data that can be gleaned from the 1489 and 1512 inscriptions is very fragmentary. The information from these, useful to this topic, can be summarized as follows. The Jews had assumed, or were permitted to assume, Chinese surnames in the early years of the

ly a Kaifeng connection to both Persia and Yemen in the later liturgy of the Kaifeng Jews (Werblowsky 1994, pp. 587–595).

[5] Heng 1999.

[6] Shiba 1983, pp. 102–103.

Ming dynasty. Jews from other communities contributed to the reconstruction of the synagogue devastated by flood in 1461, indicative both of the prosperity of communities other than Kaifeng and of contacts between communities. Two scrolls of the Torah were provided by Ningbo Jews, which furthermore, supports the assumption that it, too, must have been a flourishing community at the time.[7]

From Communal to Family Identity

The Jesuits have provided more concrete information about the Kaifeng Jews in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A famous meeting took place in 1605 between the Jew Ai Tian 艾田, who had come to Beijing in search of an official appointment, and Matteo Ricci (1551–1610). This episode – Ricci assuming that Ai Tian was Christian and Ai Tian thinking that Ricci was Jewish – is well known and needs no further comment. More importantly, in the wake of this meeting a number of Jesuit fathers visited Kaifeng until the year 1723, when they were confined to Beijing and Guangzhou by order of the Yongzheng 雍正 emperor (r. 1723–1735). The Jesuit letters, together with the 1663 and the 1679 inscriptions, reveal a picture of a prosperous and successful community. Its members led rich Jewish lives in addition to being active in Chinese society, with a number of families reaching elite status when sons received official appointments in the imperial bureaucracy. A drawing of the synagogue, based on sketches prepared by Jean Domenge in 1722, shows a Chinese-style building of imposing size.[8] Unfortunately, nothing is known of the fate of the Jews between the last Jesuit visit in 1723 and the first Protestant visitor, W.A.P. Martin, in 1866, whose dramatic description of the visit still makes enjoyable reading.[9]

Clearly, however, by the mid-nineteenth century the Jewish community had been declining for quite some time. There was no longer a head (*zhangjiao* 長教) of the community, the last one having died in 1810. Circumcision was also no longer practiced and knowledge of Hebrew had ceased. Abstinence from pork was apparently still practiced, possibly under Moslem influence. The synagogue had, however disappeared.

[7] Leslie 1972, pp. 27–30.

[8] The drawing is of the synagogue that was rebuilt in 1663 after it had been destroyed by a flood in 1642 caused by Li Zicheng 李自成 (ca. 1605–1645) rebels cutting the Yellow River dykes in the waning days of the Ming dynasty.

[9] Martin 1866, p. 2.

It had been severely damaged by floods in 1849 and was dismantled some time thereafter.

This brief outline raises a number of questions. How had the Jews maintained their Jewish identity for seven centuries with minimal or no contacts with co-religionists outside of China? Considering that their numbers were not augmented from outside of China for something like three centuries, how were they able to maintain a numerically adequate population? Why were they not rapidly assimilated by the Chinese society, which had erected no barriers against them and apparently did not discriminate against Jews? Should we seek answers concerning the maintenance of Jewish identity in the strength of Jewish practices, or rather in those aspects of Chinese culture and society that were conducive to their continuing identification as Jews? In the following I shall argue that it was a unique combination of both.

The acquisition of Chinese surnames, mentioned earlier, may be considered a major step for Jewish integration into Chinese society. This occurred at more or less the same time that the Chinese family organization into lineages was adopted. Such a transition was not a major step for these Jews, since most or all were undoubtedly Sephardi, whose custom it was to organize into clans. Moreover, Sephardi Jews practiced polygamy, which, depending on their means, they continued to practice in Kaifeng. Their memorial or genealogy book of some centuries later lists the first wife as Jewish and other wives as Chinese.[10] Possibly they took Chinese wives due to the scarcity of Jewish women. Be that as it may, it suggests more importantly a more rapid population growth than if they had been monogamous.

But Chinese lineages differ in several ways from what is understood by the term clan. A lineage generally traces its origin to one ancestor, goes by one surname, is domiciled in one locality, and holds some property, including a burial ground, in common. Evidence for the assumption of such lineage organization by the Kaifeng Jews comes from two sources: inscriptions on the stelae and cemeteries. The 1663a inscription mentions "seven surnames" (*qixing* 七姓), clearly indicating that lineages are being referred to. The 1679 inscription states that seventy-three names consist of five hundred families (*jia* 家).[11] Secondly, family cemeteries

[10] Leslie 1984. The memorial book was closed ca. 1670. It is now held at the Library of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.

[11] White 1966, II, p. 94. For the Chinese texts of the inscriptions, I have used those reproduced in White.

came into use. Indeed, even if a Jewish cemetery had ever existed in Kaifeng, it has long disappeared. And precisely when this custom was adopted is uncertain. It may have been after the 1642 flood, but in any event, it occurred well after the lineage family organization was prevalent. Wang Yisha refers to several family cemeteries in Kaifeng's suburbs and adjoining hamlets, among which the Jin 金 and Li 李 cemeteries each have a "foremost" grave, marked "Old Ancestor's Grave".[12] Graves thus marked are meant to indicate symbolically agnatic affiliation and the original ancestor of the lineage.[13]

The transformation into lineages has significant implications for the question of identity. As a result of this transformation, identification with a larger and amorphous Jewish community beyond China's borders became less important than identification with the lineage and agnatic group. As long as lineages remained Jewish, individual Jews were unlikely to abandon their Jewish identity. Although Jewishness could be abandoned and forgotten by an entire family, especially if that family left Kaifeng, Jewishness continued within the lineage as long as a family remained intact and was domiciled in the same locality. There is, furthermore, no evidence that the Jews ever were a community in the sense in which we know other Jewish communities, with institutions and their designated functions. Indeed, these were not needed as the lineage performed such functions on behalf of its families. Therefore, instead of identifying with a Jewish people, Kaifeng Jewish identity became a family-centered identity.

This transformation was accompanied and reinforced by how they (or perhaps even more, their Chinese neighbors) came to regard their Jewish practices, namely as similar to those of a religious sect. Like Chinese sects, the Jews were called a *jiao* 教, which may be variously translated as religion, religious sect, or teaching, and this is how they referred to themselves in the inscriptions. When the word Israel (*Yiciluoye* 一賜樂業) occurs in the inscriptions, it is not used as the name of a people, but refers to the founding or establishment of the teaching.[14] The inscriptions, furthermore, refer to the Jews as "followers of the teaching," that is as a sect.[15] But their Chinese neighbors apparently

[12] Wang 1984, pp. 183–184.
[13] Cohen 1990, p. 513. Cohen points out that the Old Ancestor's grave was at the apex of a triangular arrangement of graves.
[14] White 1966, II, pp. 35, 52, 80.
[15] White 1966, II, pp. 83, 94, 104.

used more specific names: Tiaojin-jiao 挑筋教 (sinew-extracting sect), Jiaojing-jiao 教經教 (scripture teaching sect) and *lanmao huihui* 藍帽回回 (blue cap Muslims). None of these names appear on the stelae, and Jean-Paul Gozani's observation of 1704 that the name "sinew-extracting sect" was bestowed on the Jews by the "idolaters"[16] would confirm that these names were not of their own invention.

As admirably described by Daniel Overmyer popular sectarianism, specifically syncretic sectarianism, consisting of mixtures of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and folk elements, flourished in various parts of the Chinese empire, including the North China Plain.[17] It was a localized and highly fragmented phenomenon and the sects were known by a variety of names. Part of the rural as well as the urban scene, sectarians shared a number of characteristics that were not too dissimilar from those of the Jews. Sectarians had a meeting place; a set of sacred writings used only by those who participated in sectarian worship; a leader who kept the scriptures; and practices specific to the sect such as dietary customs.

Which practices the Jews kept can be learned from the inscriptions, the various Jesuit reports, and the few manuscripts that have been recovered from Kaifeng. The Jews observed the major festivals, including Rosh Hodesh (the first moon), Purim, and the 9th of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple. They prayed three times a day with a *minyan* (ten men), read the weekly Torah portion, and on special occasions as required, read the *haphtarah* (prophetic portion). They kept the Sabbath, lighting no fires and doing no work. Kosher slaughter was practiced (as reflected in the name the Chinese had given the Jews), although a *shokhet* (butcher) is not specifically mentioned. Circumcision was also practiced, but again a *mohel* (expert in circumcision) is not mentioned. According to Donald Leslie, it is doubtful that they managed to keep the Jewish calendar in order, as periodic adjustments have to be made. It is, therefore, also doubtful that they observed the festivals at their proper times.[18] They had, of course, prayer books and scrolls of the Torah, but whether they had books of the Talmud is uncertain.[19] They followed rabbinic practices while praying, and one might conjec-

[16] Leslie 1972, p. 108.
[17] Overmyer 1976.
[18] Leslie 1972, pp. 86–90.
[19] Leslie 1972, p. 154. Leslie doubts that they had Talmudic books, but writes that they were definitely rabbinates.

ture that they had some Talmudic books in the early days that were later lost. Jewish practices were in some instances (Passover in spring, Tabernacles in autumn) linked to Chinese practices and observances, reinforcing the sectarian identity. Gradually, therefore, the connection to a foreign and universal religion was severed and ties were established to native and local religions. Therefore, not only in appearance but also in their life-style, the Jews were neither strangers nor outsiders in Chinese society. The sinification of Judaism allowed Kaifeng Jews to retain a Jewish identity, and it allowed them to practice a kind of Judaism that assumed specifically Chinese features.

It is obviously easier to say something about the practices that continued to be in use for close to eight hundred years than it is to discuss matters of belief. The inscriptions do not yield sufficient evidence for describing the beliefs these Jews held. A book by Zhao Yingdou 趙映斗 – a Kaifeng Jew actively involved in community affairs – of ten chapters with the suggestive title *Mingdao xu* 明道序 (Preface to the Illustrious Way) might have furnished some clues, but it is unfortunately no longer extant.[20] However, the inscriptions indicate that the basis of their belief continued to be monotheism. There is no mention of Chinese deities in the inscriptions, and *Shangdi* 上帝 occurs only when quotations from the Chinese Classics are used, in particular on the horizontal and vertical tablets.[21] Heaven (*Tian* 天) is used generally when God is referred to, although *Di* 帝 does occur occasionally, as in the 1663b inscription.[22] Yet, there is also ample evidence in the inscriptions that monotheism was combined with Chinese moral precepts, such as the cardinal virtues of filial piety (*xiao* 孝), loyalty (*zhong* 忠), benevolence (*ren* 仁), and righteousness (*yi* 義).[23]

Aside from questions of belief, attempts to establish succession and transmission, as well as to provide Kaifeng Jewish history with a Chinese context are especially noteworthy. The succession always begins with Adam, moves on to Abraham, as the founder, and continues from Abraham to Moses. The 1663a inscription adds Noah after Adam,[24] and

[20] White 1966, II, pp. 66, 123–124; Leslie 1972, p. 47.
[21] White 1966, II, pp. 121–154.
[22] White 1966, II, p. 80. Apparently the men who composed the inscriptions were not troubled, as would be later Protestant missionaries, whether the term *Tian* truly reflected the monotheist concept. See Eber 1999.
[23] White 1966, II, p. 81.
[24] White 1966, I, p. 80.

the 1489 inscription ends the succession with Ezra.[25] In the earliest inscription, Adam is referred to as Adam-Pan Gu 盘古,[26] that is as one person, and Abraham is said to be of the nineteenth generation after Adam. The 1512 inscription adds that Adam came originally from India (Tianzhu 天竺).[27] The 1489 inscription places Abraham's establishment of the "true teaching" in the 146th year of the Zhou dynasty, or 977/6 BCE. Moses is said to have lived in the 613th year of the Zhou, or 510/09 BCE. These dates do not seem to have any special significance in the Chinese calendar, and one wonders why they were chosen. For Ezra no dates are supplied. Both the 1512 and the 1679 inscriptions date the arrival of the teaching to the Han dynasty.[28]

Time and space (even the mythic time of Pan Gu) are the significant ingredients that have helped move Jewish history into a Chinese historical context. The important personages now have dates that coincide with the early Chinese history of the Zhou dynasty. Adam, moreover, though he is a progenitor and not a founder, is given a recognizable origin in India instead of an unfamiliar place. Therefore, Abraham, as his descendant, can also be placed in a known geographical area. Finally, the arrival of the religion in the Han dynasty provides the necessary starting point for Jewish development in China. Were there other writings that developed these ideas more concretely, ideas that are stated only briefly in the inscriptions? Perhaps, but all that can be safely stated on the basis of the stelae is that the creation of a Jewish-Chinese history contributed to, and was part of the process of sinification.[29]

After W.A.P. Martin's 1866 visit, a number of other visitors went to Kaifeng, leaving accounts that Michael Pollak has appropriately called in a chapter heading "Outright Lies, Tall Tales, and a Few Truths."[30] But no matter what the shortcomings of these visitors' stories were, whether they spoke to few or many, those with whom they spoke continued to think of themselves as Jews. Since the 1970s memories of having been Jewish have been revived through outside contacts. Jewish visitors to

[25] White 1966, II, p. 35.
[26] According to one of the Chinese creation myths, Pan Gu is the giant from whose body the world was created.
[27] White 1966, II, p. 52.
[28] White 1966, II, pp. 52, 104.
[29] I am grateful to Max Deeg who, in his excellent conference lecture and essay in this volume, has helped me pinpoint the two aspects of time and space.
[30] Pollak 1980, p. 235.

Kaifeng have imported knowledge about Jewish practices, onto which some members of erstwhile Jewish families (especially the Shi 石, Jin 金, and Zhao 趙 families) graft half-remembered, half imagined recollections in an attempt to reinvent Judaism.[31] "Descendant of Jews" (*youtai houyi* 猶太後裔) is recorded in some registration cards.[32] But according to the legal (*halakhic*) Jewish definition, being a descendant does not necessarily establish the Jewishness of the person, as descent is determined by the status of the mother.[33] But, as Pollak, points out, it is unlikely that non-Jewish women who married Jewish men were converted after the last rabbi died around 1810.[34] Thus present-day Kaifeng individuals who identify themselves as Jews can be accepted as *halakhic*ally Jewish only if they were to formally convert, although it goes without saying that the *halakhic* definition has been challenged time and again, both in Israel and in the diaspora.

It is possible, however, that some might be considering conversion. In recent years, a few young Kaifeng men have been mentioned as studying at Jerusalem religious schools (*yeshivoth*), although whether their studies are for the purpose of conversion and/or returning to Kaifeng as teachers is not clear. During the 2001–2002 academic year, Shi Lei studied Hebrew and Jewish subjects at Bar Ilan University.[35] An Institute of Jewish Studies has been established at He'nan University 河南大学. Presumably it will attract Kaifeng descendants as students, who would like to study their heritage as an academic subject. It is difficult to say how widespread, how long lasting, or how genuine this interest in Judaism is. Can it lead to an actual revival of Kaifeng Judaism and what characteristics might such a revival have? Historically, being Jewish in Chinese Kaifeng meant as-

[31] Shi Zhongyu, for example, remembered that during the spring festival his father wrote Chinese characters with chicken blood on the door frame of his house "to guard against the devil." With minor variations this story is repeated by others. Some remember Japanese soldiers searching for Jews in Kaifeng (Wren 1982; Laytner 1982).

[32] A photocopy of a Shi family member's registration card is in the author's possession.

[33] *EJ* 1971/10, p. 23. The *Mishnah* tractate *Qidushin* (3:12) of the Talmud states succinctly that the offspring of a gentile woman (married to a Jewish man) receive her status, to which Maimonides (Moses Ben Maimon) (1135–1204) added that the status of the father is not considered in this case (Neusner 1984/26, 201–202; Rabinowitz/Grossman 1965/5, 98). The Talmudic injunction is based on the biblical pronouncement (Ex. 19:6 and Lev. 20:26).

[34] Pollak 1980, p. 235.

[35] Abraham 2001, pp. 1, 6.

serting particularity within a society consisting of particular groups. It did not mean religious separateness. In present-day Kaifeng, the formal assumption of Judaism would have different implications and could have different consequences.

The Shanghai Jewish Communities

Whereas the Kaifeng Jews were not truly a community, Judaism being family centered and sectarian, the case of Shanghai is different. From the mid-19th century three distinct communities developed in Shanghai, communities which, except for the fact that they were Jewish, had little else in common. Sephardi Jews (or Baghdadis) came to Shanghai in the 1840s together with the British. They came for the most part from Iraq via India, were English speakers, and established their homes and business enterprises in the International Settlement. Russian Jews came next, some by way of Harbin in the early 1900s, and the bulk after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. They settled in the French Concession, while the poorer among them went to live in Hongkou 虹口, which was part of the International Settlement north of Suzhou Creek 苏州河. The Central European refugees, mostly German and Austrian but also some Poles, Czechs, and others came after 1933, the greater part arriving between November 1938 and September 1939. Most of the Central Europeans settled in Hongkou, although some took up residence in the International Settlement. A fourth and distinctly different group arrived in 1941. It consisted of a number of secular Polish-Jewish writers and intellectuals, a number of Polish and Lithuanian rabbis, and several religious schools together with their rabbinic teachers.[36] This group of mostly ultra-Orthodox men (not many had brought wives and families) carved out a Shanghai existence for themselves vastly different from that of other refugees. Thus in 1941 there were English, Russian, and German-speaking Jews in Shanghai – aside from a small group of Yiddish speakers – each group culturally as well as religiously different from the other. Numerically, the Sephardi group remained the smallest with something over one thousand people. The Russian group was larger, numbering between five and six thousand persons. But, by the end of

[36] Most of them had fled Poland for Lithuania before August 1940. They were able to obtain Curacao visas that, in turn, enabled them to procure Russian and Japanese transit visas. They arrived in Kōbe and remained there until the Japanese shipped them to Shanghai.

1941, by far the largest group were the Central Europeans, with around twenty thousand Jews. In the treaty port Shanghai, the culturally and linguistically different groups of Jews found a congenial environment conducive to the maintenance of their differences.

Shanghai was a mosaic of districts, consisting of the Chinese areas, the International Settlement, and the French Concession. The International Settlement was similarly a mosaic of populations made up of many different kinds of Europeans, Asians, and Chinese. The Chinese population was by far the largest, and continued to grow as refugees poured into the metropolis in 1937. The number of foreigners was, in comparison, insignificant: there were White Russians, Japanese, Indians, Germans, French, Italians, and others, each forming a kind of enclave in the unique treaty port setting. But these were not, as Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot write, colonialist communities. The foreigners were rather a large collection of various kinds of people pursuing their "interests in the interstices of empire, adroitly operating on the margins of treaty legality, using extraterritoriality, and the grey areas offered by colonial citizenship and settler autonomy, to further their own end." The treaty system, the authors argue, enabled nationals to develop new identities,[37] allowing them at the same time to preserve earlier identities such as linguistic and religious. Foreigners, writes Betty Wei, and Chinese remained separate, even while working together and competing with one another.[38] The millions of Chinese were far from a homogenous population, whether they lived in the International Settlement or in the Chinese-administered city. Shanghai's Chinese population was largely made up of people who had left their native towns and villages in search of work and livelihood in the metropolis. Together with the masses of destitute refugees who arrived after the outbreak of hostilities in 1937, the Chinese population, too, was composed of disparate ethnic groups.[39]

Communication within each group, Chinese and foreign, was maintained by means of newspapers and radio broadcasts. In addition to Chinese newspapers, English dailies and an array of weeklies in Russian, Polish, German, and Yiddish were available. Among the Jewish papers, some weeklies served the non-Jewish population, others specifi-

[37] Bickers/Henriot 2000, pp. 4–5.

[38] Wei 1990, p. 104.

[39] Honig 1992 describes one such ethnic group, the much-maligned Subei people, who hailed originally from Jiangsu 江蘇 Province, north of the Yangzi.

cally addressed religious or secular Jews. The subject of publishing will be discussed in greater detail below.

Synagogues, Rabbis, and Observances

The Shanghai Jewish communities were not only culturally diverse, religious differences created additional fragmentation, especially within the Ashkenazi community, into secular, observant, and ultra-religious. This fragmentation duplicated, of course, the European Jewish religious scene (with the exception of the small, though highly influential Baghdadi presence). Together with the absence of a pronounced anti-Semitism (except among the White Russians), there was in the treaty port no political authority able or empowered to enforce uniformity and conformity, and thus variations and differences could be maintained and perpetuated.

The three Jewish groups, Baghdadi, Russian, and Central European, maintained separate synagogues. The earliest were those of the Sephardi Jews; Beth El was established in 1887 and its splinter group, She'erit Israel, in 1900. Their initially temporary prayer houses were later replaced by two splendid structures: Ohel Rachel in 1920, financed by Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon (1843–1916), and Beth Aharon in 1927, financed by Silas Aaron Hardoon.[40] By the early years of the twentieth century, enough Russian Jews had arrived in Shanghai to feel the need of a congregation of their own. They did not build a synagogue, but used the premises of the Sephardi She'erit Israel synagogue. Ohel Moshe (Oihel Moishe), as it was called, moved to its own building in 1927, and in 1941, the New Synagogue was constructed in the French Concession.[41] The approximately twenty thousand Central European refugees fully reflected the complexity of modern Judaism, now transplanted into the treaty port context. Aside from the Central European and Polish secularists, the refugees represented the entire spectrum of Reform, Liberal, and ultra-Orthodox Jewry. Due to their diversity and their sojourner status, building a synagogue was out of the question; for services on festivals and the high holy days they used various premises, while for

[40] Silas Hardoon (1851–1931) was a colorful Shanghai personality who, perhaps influenced by his Eurasian wife, played a considerable role in Chinese affairs. For an anecdotal biography, see Xu 1983.

[41] Kranzler 1976, pp. 60–61.

the ultra-Orthodox rabbis and their students Beth Aharon was made available.

During the nearly one hundred years of Jewish populations in Shanghai, rabbis, who were responsible for the communities' spiritual and everyday lives, were often hard to find. Obviously, they would have to speak the language of their congregants and they would have had to come from abroad in order to have received rabbinic training. For the Baghdadis, finding a rabbi presented special problems because, in addition to familiarity with Sephardi liturgy and customs, he had to be an English speaker in order to represent the status-conscious community in the International Settlement.[42] The Baghdadis eventually compromised on the first requirement in preference of the English language requirement. The Russian community was more fortunate. Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi (1891-1954), after serving in Vladivostok, came to Shanghai in 1926, remaining the Russian congregation's leader for the next twenty-one years.[43] More research is needed to better understand the religious diversity of the Central European refugees. Rabbis were certainly among them, but customs often differed within what may be broadly described as Reform Judaism,[44] and splinter groups tended to develop.

Except for the staunchest of secularists, the Jews celebrated the major festivals and observed the high holy days. Practices varied, depending on cultural background and religious fervor. Simhat Torah, for example, the conclusion of the yearly cycle of Torah reading, was celebrated as joyously with song and dance by the Hasidim of the Mir Yeshiva as if they had never left their homes.[45] Whereas the ultra-Orthodox continued to maintain strict Sabbath observance, most of the Jewish population did not, which was a constant irritant to the Orthodox community. Many of the Sephardi businessmen, who had been strictly observant at one time, had grown lax by the 1930s. Russians, most of whom were merchants and storekeepers, did not close for the Sabbath. Neither did the Central European refugees desist from trying to make a living.

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[42] Meyer 2000, p. 363. Meyer discusses this and other questions in greater detail elsewhere (Meyer 2003).

[43] Kranzler 1976, pp. 60, 79–80.

[44] Reform congregations, for example, might or might not have separate seating for men and women, head covering for men, a choir, an organ, and the like. The general term "reform" does not adequately describe these differences.

[45] Hertsman 1999, p. 27.

Kashruth (regulations concerning dietary laws) was maintained longest by the Sephardi Jews, even after other observances had been abandoned. This included ritual slaughter, abstaining from forbidden foods like shellfish or pork, and keeping meat and milk strictly separate. Both the Russian and the Central European communities were more lax. Yet, in the shelters (*Heime*), where many of the destitute refugees lived upon arrival, kosher kitchen facilities were maintained, and the organizations responsible for refugee welfare made every effort to adhere to dietary laws.[46] It is not clear how the problem of *matzoth* (unleavened bread) during the Passover week was handled, especially during the three years of war when wheat shortages developed. The ultra-Orthodox group would have been especially affected, as rituals concerning the grinding of the flour in addition to the manner of preparing the dough and baking had to be strictly observed.

Community Organizations

Prior to the large number of refugees arriving in 1938, both the Baghdadi and Russian communities had each established institutions and organizational structures dealing with financial support, welfare, charity, burial, and other communal matters. These were, however, not sufficient to manage the massive aid effort that was required to help settle the refugees. Some form of cooperation between the two established communities was necessary and both rose to the challenge, with the Sephardi community taking the lead, perhaps because they felt the pressure of the British more keenly than did the Russians. Even before ever larger shiploads of refugees landed in Shanghai, the Shanghai Municipal Council had indicated that it could not be responsible for the Jews' maintenance; the burden would have to be shouldered by local Jewry.[47] As a result, several new organizations for relief purposes were established. Here I shall discuss one community organization and two aid organizations only: burial societies, because of their importance in communal life, and two organizations responsible for refugees' aid, the Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai (CAEJR) and HICEM.[48]

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[46] Kranzler 1976, p. 410.

[47] YVA 1938/1939.

[48] HICEM stands for HIAS ICA-Emigdirect. The organization was supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Hebrew Sheltering and

The ritual preparation of the corpse and burial have an important place in Jewish observances, and burial societies occupy a central position in all Jewish communities. In Shanghai, the Sephardi burial society (*Hevra Kadisha*) was established in 1862, probably at about the same time as the founding of its first cemetery on Mohawk Road (now Huangpu 黃埔 Road). The Russian community organized its burial society in 1922, having interred its dead in the Sephardi cemetery in a separate section until they acquired their own cemetery on Baikal Road (now Weiming Road). The refugees initially used both the Ashkenazi burial society and cemetery, until finally they, too, organized their own burial society in 1940 and acquired land for their cemetery on Columbia Road. Due to the high mortality rate among the refugees, a fourth cemetery (on Point Road) was added in 1941.[49] In life as well as in death the three communities maintained their separateness. Unfortunately, the four cemeteries were moved between 1957 and 1959 to Qingpu 青浦 County, in the environs of Shanghai, and have since disappeared.[50]

The Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees was established in the fall of 1938 as an amalgamation of previous relief committees and brought together Baghdadis, Russians, and refugees.[51] Prominent businessmen active in Shanghai commerce assumed a major role, raising funds both locally and abroad. It is to the credit of men like Michelle Speelman (c. 1877–?) and Ellis Hayim (1894–1977) who, without experience in social welfare, nonetheless saw to it that the refugees were given shelter and were fed. The standing of these men in

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Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the London-based Jewish Colonization Association (ICA). The HICEM bureau was located in Harbin until September 1939, when it moved to Shanghai. The CAEJR was supported by the JDC and by funds raised in Shanghai.

[49] Kranzler 1976, p. 425. I thank Ralph B. Hirsch for making available to me a list of "Central European Jewish Refugees who Died in Shanghai, 1940–1945." The list, first published in the New York *Aufbau*, April 12, 19, 26, and May 3, 1946, consists of 1,433 names. I thank Itamar Livny for his preliminary examination of the list, which shows that nearly twice as many men died than women in Shanghai and that infant mortality was comparatively higher than that of older children. The higher male mortality reflects, no doubt, the larger number of Jewish men in Shanghai. A more detailed analysis of the list should reveal further useful data.

[50] JDC 1958, 1960. In July 1958, the Jewish community was notified by the Chinese authorities that 4,000 graves were to be moved. By January 6, 1960 three cemeteries had been moved. About current efforts to recover some of the gravestones, see Bar-Gal 2002.

[51] Kranzler 1976, pp. 93–96.

the business community enabled them, furthermore, to maintain contacts with the Shanghai Municipal Council and the Japanese authorities on behalf of the refugees.[52] The committee ceased to function after the start of the Pacific War, when British passport holders, like Ellis Hayim, were interned by the Japanese. Thus, in February 1943, when the Japanese authorities ordered the relocation of stateless refugees to the "designated area," or ghetto, in Hongkou, they also ordered the Russian communal association to assume the care of the refugees. The new committee was known as the Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association, or SACRA.[53]

The HICEM office, under the direction of Meyer Birman (1891–1955), engaged in an unprecedented rescue operation that was just short of heroic. First in Harbin and then in Shanghai from September 1939 until December 1941, when the office was closed by the Japanese, Birman disseminated information about China and helped move refugees in and out of Shanghai. He wrote thousands of letters to relief agencies throughout the world, trying to help locate and relocate refugees. Despite limited funds, his office paid fees for border crossings and for documents required by the Shanghai Municipal Police, ship passage for visa holders, and the like. Birman tirelessly explored every avenue, followed every lead, both of how to bring Jews to the safe haven of Shanghai and, as the clouds of war gathered, how to find other countries of refuge once routes from Shanghai increasingly closed down.[54]

Educational Institutions and Publishing

Schools for the young developed but slowly and in accordance with the needs and growth of the three communities. In the early years of the Baghdadi community, Jewish education for boys was taken care of at home. They were instructed in prayers and Bible by their fathers or the

[52] This sometimes backfired. For example, in 1940 Inuzuka Koreshige 犬塚惟重 (1890–1965) demanded that Ellis Hayim write a letter stating how grateful the Jews were for the way the Japanese treated them. Hayim refused (PRO 1940).

[53] Kranzler 1976, pp. 521–522.

[54] Altman/Eber 2000, pp. 51–86. Birman's letters often reveal the desperation that must have been felt in Shanghai as war seemed inevitable. For example, on November 6, 1941, Birman wrote that Shanghai is cut off from most countries, and one week later, on November 13, 1941, that "The situation is growing steadily worse, Shanghai is now also cut off from Central and South America"(CAHJP 1941a).

community's teacher (*melamed*), essentially a private tutor who taught the boys in their homes. But by 1902, a Hebrew school (*Talmud Torah*) for boys was established on the premises of the She'erit Israel synagogue. In time, this religious school developed into the Shanghai Jewish School with a British-based curriculum and instruction in English. Those who could afford it preferred, however, to send their children to British public schools, so that only pupils from less affluent Baghdadi families attended the Shanghai Jewish School.[55] Some Russian parents, particularly those who wanted their children educated in the British style, also sent their children to this school. Whereas socially the parents of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews remained distant, some of the younger generation interacted at least during school hours.

Despite the fact that few of the Central European refugees brought families with school age children and large families were quite the exception,[56] more school facilities were nevertheless required due to the influx. Sir Horace Kadoorie (1902–1995), well known for having endowed a number of educational institutions in China, Asia, and the Middle East, established in 1937 the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association (better known as the Kadoorie School). Instruction was also in English and the curriculum included Hebrew, Bible studies, as well as Chinese. The nominal fee charged attracted children from less well-off families.[57] As in the Shanghai Jewish School, the younger generation here too had an opportunity to interact.

The Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT) vocational school fulfilled a vital function for older teenagers and adults from 1941 on, by providing training in various skills and trades. Significantly, Russians cooperated with Sephardi Jews to make this vocational school a success.[58] William Deman, a refugee from Vienna, established on his own initiative a business school that offered training in office skills and languages. The Gregg School of Business (later Gregg College) also operated from 1941 on.[59] Finally, the Asia Seminar should be also mentioned. Creatively organized by W.Y. Tonn, who had pursued

[55] Meyer 2000, pp. 365–366.

[56] Large intact families were mostly found among the ultra-Orthodox from Poland. For example, according to Birman, in a group of ten rabbis only three were without families. The others had four or five children (CAHJP 1941b).

[57] Meyer 2000, p. 369; Kranzler 1976, pp. 390–391.

[58] Kranzler 1976, pp. 395–396.

[59] YVA 1988, pp. 124–126.

Chinese studies in Berlin, the Seminar offered instruction in languages as diverse as Hebrew, Urdu, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese from 1943 on. Its lecture series on Chinese thought and art added an intellectual dimension to the otherwise drab Hongkou existence.[60]

The rabbis and their students were part of the refugee community, yet they lived their lives separately from the others, as indeed they had done earlier in Kōbe, where they had first landed after leaving Lithuania, and still earlier, in Poland. Once they were settled, the yeshiva students, under the guidance of their rabbis, resumed rigorous study schedules. The distance that separated their way of life from that of the secular Jews did not prevent, however, a number of refugee teenage boys from joining them, and in the Mir Yeshiva they were apparently accepted by both teachers and students. It may have been the strictly regulated life of prayer and study that attracted the youngsters, or perhaps it was the better quality food available among the ultra-Orthodox.[61] There is no denying, however, that the yeshiva students' unflagging devotion to study as well as their maintenance of ritual purity in daily life was exemplary.

Study in the yeshiva is the study of texts. Concerned about the scarcity of Talmudic books for their students, the rabbis decided to reproduce the books they had by lithography. They succeeded in finding a Chinese printer, and over time most of the titles of the Talmud were reprinted,[62] an accomplishment that was hailed as a "historic event" in the Yiddish press.[63]

Aside from this undertaking, a considerable number of Jewish newspapers and journals flourished in Shanghai, printing in German, Yiddish, and Russian. Although some of the weeklies or monthlies were short-lived, publishing only a few issues before they folded, as a communication effort within each community this publishing activity was a remarkable feat. Here I will mention only some of the papers. The *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt* and *Gemeindeblatt der jüdischen Gemeinde* ad-

[60] YVA 1988, pp. 154–155.

[61] Tobias 1999, p. 79.

[62] Kranzler 1976, p. 434. According to Kranzler, nearly 100 titles were reprinted. Another list mentions 104 titles (Alboim 1999–2000, pp. 74–86). *Kontras* (*Kontras* 1960–1961) states that between 1941 and 1942, the Mir Yeshiva published 56 or 58 titles of 100–150 copies each. The titles included prayer books and complete Bibles with commentaries (*Mikra'ot gedolot*).

[63] *UL* 1942.

dressed the religiously observant German refugee population. For secular German speakers there was the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, which had the longest run among the various publications; *Die Gelbe Post* was intended for the more intellectually inclined reader.[64] Russian readers read *Nasha Zhizn* (Our Life), which included a Yiddish page, later replaced by an English page. The religious party, Agudat Yisrael, published two Yiddish papers, *Di Yiddishe Shtime fun vaytn Mizrakh* (The Jewish Voice from the Far East) and *Dos Vort* (The Word). Last but not least was the English language monthly, *Israel's Messenger*, which served almost exclusively the Sephardi community and was the official organ of the Shanghai Zionist Association. More research is necessary to do full justice to this impressive publishing activity, of which the above is only the barest outline.[65] Nevertheless, from it we can safely conclude that the intellectual level of the three Jewish communities was remarkably high, consisting not only of readers but boasting also a considerable number of writers, whose contributions were featured in the papers.

The exodus from China after World War II was gradual, lasting well into the 1950s. A few Baghdadis, like members of the Kadoorie family, who had been pillars of the Shanghai community, resettled in Hong Kong, eventually finding their last resting place in the Hong Kong Jewish cemetery.[66] Undoubtedly, many Baghdadis might have considered remaining in Shanghai after the end of war, yet the treaty port days were clearly over and Shanghai would never be the same. Nor would they ever again be able to lead the kind of Jewish lives that they and their forbears had created in the treaty port. The Sephardi-Shanghai past was transformed into a time and place remembered.

Some of the Central European refugees returned to their countries of origin, but most opted for America or Israel, as did the majority of the Russian community, while others made their homes in Australia. The Judaism they had brought with them from Germany, Austria, or Russia had not essentially changed in Shanghai. Wherever they went thereaf-

[64] For more about the paper and its editor, see Kreissler 2000, pp. 511–524.

[65] The unpublished "Di Yiddishe Presse in Chine, 1937–1947," prepared by Asher Rozenboim and held by the Institute for Jewish Research Archive (YIVO/Yidisher Vissenshaftlikher Institut), lists 46 Jewish publications in all of China. Unfortunately, only single issues of most of these papers are available. Some have disappeared altogether.

[66] This is an unusually beautiful and interesting cemetery with its many styles of gravestones and varieties of inscriptions, representing the different cultural backgrounds of Hong Kong Jewry. Eber/Hsia 2003 (in Hebrew).

ter, they would again be part of Jewish communities and congregations similarly observant or secular. Shanghai seems to have been no more than a passing episode of hardship in the lives of the ultra-Orthodox and *yeshivoth*, and they continued a life of study and prayer in their new environment, whether in Israel or the diaspora.

The erstwhile Shanghai-landers, as some like to refer to themselves, remember their China days with great fondness. If some had felt regrets over years lost,[67] such feelings vanished in time and are not perpetuated by the younger generation. In the last two decades, reunions have taken place and tours undertaken to Shanghai to revisit the homes where they once lived and where they were children or teenagers. Memories are kept alive (or undergo change) in documentaries about Shanghai-landers– in particular the refugees among them – and in memoirs about their Jewish-Shanghai past.

Judaism in China Today

Except for Hong Kong and an incipient Shanghai community, today there are no organized Jewish communities with synagogues and Jewish institutions in China. Those individuals who identify themselves as Jewish in Kaifeng today are not Jewish in accordance with *halakha*. They are the descendants of Jews. Can we say that by following the reintroduced religious practices they are now "Jewish"?[68] But perhaps whether Kaifeng Jews are, or are not, *halakhic*ally Jews does not matter to those who are interested in the revitalization of Kaifeng Judaism. Anson Laytner, for example, speaks of "reviving Jewish culture," and Len Hew, a descendant of the Zhao family, wants to revive the community. I would question the term "revival," however, for it is surely not Qing dynasty Kaifeng Judaism that they wish to see revived. Nor is it obvious what is meant by "Jewish culture," and where to draw the line between culture and observing religious commandments (*mitzvoth*). Well meaning, no doubt, as these efforts at revival are, they raise a number of questions, including those of faith and belief.

[67] Fein 1945, pp. 27–30.

[68] This and other problems are also raised in a 1998 documentary "Minyan in Kaifeng," in which a group of young Western Jews questions the many complex aspects of Jewish identity.

Today Jews from Western countries and Israel work in China – about 150 are said to reside in Beijing – as transient businessmen and professionals. The largest number is in Shanghai, estimated at three hundred, and in 2002 the Shanghai Jewish Community Center was inaugurated.[69] But these Jews are only temporarily in China, remaining there for longer or shorter periods of time. They do not have synagogues, although services take place in Beijing and at several locations in Shanghai. The Ohel Rachel synagogue is not used for daily prayer.

Matters are different in Hong Kong. A small but vital Jewish community was reconstituted after World War II that has flourished ever since and has, in fact, grown larger than it was between the wars. Consisting of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, this community represents the entire spectrum of Judaism, from orthodox observance of the Habad movement to Reform Judaism. The Jewish Club, donated by Sir Eli Kadoorie (1867–1944) in 1909 to the community, is now the Jewish Community Center, and Ohel Leah, the synagogue built by Sir Jacob Sassoon in 1902, is still in use. Even though a large number of Hong Kong's Jews live there only temporarily, its nearly three thousand Jews are an interesting mix of descendants of old Sephardi families, Australians, South Africans, Americans, Israelis, and British, and their common language is English. Thus in this small corner of China, Judaism continues to flourish, not of Chinese Jews but of Jews in China, many of whom, nonetheless, consider China their home.

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[69] *BIYS* 2002, 1.

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