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Articles, "A Rabbi in China," Journal of Reform Judaism,  
manuscript, reprint, and newspaper clipping, 1980-1981.

## A Rabbi In China

Daniel Jeremy Silver

The synagogue of Kaifeng called its rabbi wu-ssu-tu. The term appears to be a transliteration into Chinese of a Persian word, ustad, which means master or teacher. When I found that the immigration officer of the People's Republic of China who was handling our papers at the Canton railway depot did not understand my occupation as listed on my passport, I trotted out this newly-learned, old Chinese term. His eyes remained blank.

In China there are advantages to a title which no one understands. The Chinese need to know who you are or, rather, how important you are. The bureaucracy would lose face if a person was not given proper due. If Confucius had written, "Know before whom you stand," he would have been presenting a political caution rather than a theological statement. Since China's officials are afraid to admit ignorance (such an admission would diminish their face), they tend not to do the natural thing and ask. So a title not properly understood is inevitably magnified (better to do more than less), and we were treated with a deference to which this rabbi could easily become accustomed.

My wife and I spent a little over three weeks in China while I was on sabbatical leave. I came armed with the familiar set of romantic notions about Jews entering China centuries ago as members of the long caravans which traversed the Great Silk Road from Persia to Cathay bringing the wine, cotton and coin of the West to trade for the paper, silk and tea of the East. Once, in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, I had felt myself face to face with just such an ancestor when I paused before a Tang Dynasty figurine of a foreign merchant dressed in a long traveling coat and bearing on his face unmistakable semitic features. Actually, as I learned later, this merchant had probably been modeled after a Parsee or Muslim or Armenian Nestorian trader rather than a Jew. In dress and general look these men were not distinguishable, and Jews were a decided minority among the traders

who banded together to form those slow-moving caravans which, a thousand and more years ago, crossed and recrossed the southern steppes of Russia between Samarkand and Tashkent and the cities east of the Great Wall.

On our way to the Far East we had stopped in Delhi to visit India's National Museum. This museum displays among its treasures a trove of artifacts discovered around the turn of the century in the wastelands of Chinese Turkestan by Sir Mark Aurel Stein: Buddhist banners of intricate weave, naive wooden tomb figures modeled after life, and fragments of fresco painting which feature the full-fleshed beauty admired in Tang China. Stein's finds, which included a sizeable manuscript collection, enabled scholars for the first time to gain some intimate knowledge of the people who had lived on the Asian steppes and of the traders, including Jews, who passed through on the caravan routes.

Our guide-curator described Sir Mark as a British civil servant, one-time Commissioner of Education in the Punjab, who had gained academic immortality by spending his vacations unearthing Asia's hidden history rather than hunting tigers or playing polo. This information was both true and misleading. Actually, Stein was not an Eaton graduate but a Hungarian Jew who, like so many of his generation (he was born in 1862), abandoned the culture and ostracism of his childhood for opportunity in the larger world, a journey which ultimately led him from Budapest to Vienna to London and then, surprisingly, to India. There, while his colleagues in the Raj bureaucracy drank themselves into early graves, Stein went out into the steppes and uncovered the history of its people, the Tartars and Mongols, who periodically fell upon China, the Near East and Europe, pillaging, conquering and changing the course of history.

On one of his periodic expeditions into the high Asian wilderness, Stein had discovered in an oasis in Chinese Turkestan, Dadan-Uiliq, a cache of manuscripts which included a letter, dated 718, written in Judeo-Persian, using Hebrew characters, in which a trader in China asks a co-religionist back home for help in disposing of



an unwanted acquisition - a flock of rather mangy sheep. Later, at a site known as the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-Huang, Stein discovered another sizeable manuscript deposit which included a parchment on which a selihah or Hebrew penitential prayer consisting of alternate lines from the Prophets and Psalms and asking God's forgiveness for the bearer's sins. Such small scrolls were routinely carried as amulets to protect the trader against the dangers of the journey. It was written in a script which can be dated to the eighth or ninth century. Here was proof that Jews had been among the traders.

In preparation for our trip, I had read the more recent literature and discovered that contrary to my early impressions, though some Jews may have taken the overland route to China, the largest number of them came, as did most Westerners, by sea from Persia and Yemen via India and Sumatra. Reaching one or another of China's ports, they sailed up her extensive river system to the important inland trading centers of Peking, Nanking, Hangchow and Kaifeng. A fifteenth century dedicatory stele in Kaifeng, which once stood in the court of the city's synagogue, describes the Jews as originating in Tien-Chu, which is one of the many Chinese designations for India, and describes them as cloth merchants, thus suggesting that the local community specialized in weaving and dyeing.

Jews traded with China and there were settled Jewish communities in the Middle Kingdom. A delightful tenth-century wanderer-fraud, Eldad Ha-Dani, claimed to have been ransomed from Chinese captivity by one of the leaders of the Lost Ten Tribes. The River Sambatyon, like Eden, was believed to be to the East, and the identification of China's Jews with the Lost Tribes was a popular theme of medieval folklore. Marco Polo met Jews in China on his first voyage (1286). The stele mentioned above gives the date of 1163 for the dedication of the synagogue in Kaifeng which was then the capital of the Northern Sung Kingdom. The Arab journalist, Ibn Khurdadhbih (mid-ninth century) describes the sea and land routes which Jewish



merchants, whom he calls Radanites, followed from Gaul to the Great Wall. Another Arab journal of the tenth century (Abu Zaid) reports a massacre of Muslims, Parsees, Christians, and Jews in Khan-Fu (Canton?) during a dynastic rebellion.

China's Jews were practicing Jews. In 1722 a French Jesuit, Jean Domenge, visited the synagogue at Kaifeng, then the capital of Honan Province, and drew a sketch of a man leading services, dressed in typical mandarin fashion, complete with Chinese style skull cap and pigtail, reading from a Torah encased in Yemenite fashion. The Jesuits who had visited Kaifeng described a community where males were circumcised; the Sabbath was observed; the liturgy was chanted in Hebrew; Biblical holidays were followed; and various dietary laws observed. Among the names by which these Jews were known to their neighbors was "those who pluck the sinew."

The annual cycle of Torah reading was divided into fifty-three sections, as was the custom in Yemen and Egypt. Little is yet known with certainty about the sources of Kaifeng's special religious practices. The Torah (there were at least twelve in Kaifeng during the seventeenth century) was regularly read from an encased scroll and apparently many could fulfill this role. Textual commentaries and colophon notes, many of which miraculously survive, were written in Judeo-Persian which was the lingua franca of the Jewish medieval trader in the East.

Settlement in China followed on trade. The community of Kaifeng and its synagogue became an object of intense interest after it became known in Europe when the reports of various Jesuit visitors came to the attention of Rome. The reason for this Christian interest is worth noting. In 1605 a Kaifeng Jew, who had passed the provincial level examinations, traveled to Peking to lobby for a post for which his degree qualified him. While in the capital, this man, Ai Tien, heard of the arrival of Westerners who professed a scriptural faith and he assumed that these westerners must be fellow Jews. His government business complete, Ai Tien visited the newly established Jesuit mission where he innocently identified an altar piece

representation of a person or personified in the veneration of the Father. They sought to allow such converts to adopt Catholicism without any forced renunciation of

depicting a Madonna holding the infant Jesus and John the Baptist as a picture showing Rebecca, her twins, Jacob and Esau. Matteo Ricci, the senior priest, disabused Ai Tien of the Jewishness of the Jesuits, but quickly sent a subordinate to Kaifeng to learn more about Ai Tien's community.

During the Middle Ages the faithful believed in the Second Coming and various apocalyptic scenarios held that the world-wide dispersion of the Jews and their subsequent conversion to Christianity was a necessary prelude to the return of the Messiah. If the Jews were in China they had reached the antipodes - the dispersion was complete - and if China's Jews were to be converted, the millenium could begin.

Ricci had other reasons to be interested in these Jews. His Church had long held that Jesus' mission had been prophesied in the Torah and that the lack of proof texts to this effect was the result of a conspiracy by the rabbis who, after the emergence of Christianity, changed the Torah text so as to remove all references to the Christ-Messiah. The Jews of China were reputed, erroneously, to be the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel and to have come as early as the eighth pre-Christian century. It was possible then that the Torah scrolls of Kaifeng's synagogue might contain the original, uncensored text and, once and for all, prove the Christian claim. Needless to say, when Kaifeng's scrolls were examined, they were in all respects identical to a received text.

News of the Jews of China came at a time of bitter doctrinal dispute between the Jesuit and Franciscan orders over the question whether a formal religious renunciation was to be demanded of Confucian converts, and their practice became an issue in that quarrel. The Jesuits, first on the scene and realists always, argued that Confucius was a philosopher, not a prophet; that Confucianism was a moral philosophy, not a religion; and that there was nothing idolatrous in the veneration of ancestors or pantheist in the veneration of the Heavens. They sought to allow such converts to adopt Catholicism without any formal renunciation of

their familiar habits. The Franciscans, on the other hand, defined Confucian thought and ritual as idolatrous and polytheist; hence, they required the convert to separate himself completely from these forms. In their view, the Jesuits' practice was lax and threatened the integrity of Catholic teaching.

Kaifeng's Jews got involved in the so-called "Rites Controversy" because the Jesuits tried to reinforce their case by citing synagogue practice. Jews were known to follow faithfully the Torah's strict rules against idolatry (avodah zarah); yet, in Kaifeng the synagogue included an ancestor's hall where incense was offered before memorial tablets, dedicated to Confucius as well as the community's own dead. If Jews, known for their strictness in such matters, considered Confucian practice a philosophy rather than a pagan religion, surely, so the Jesuits claimed, the Church could take a similar position.

Our itinerary did not include Kaifeng, ~~but~~ I had made little effort to secure permission to visit. Reading the original study on Chinese Jews (1942) by the one-time Anglican Bishop of Honan, William Charles White, I had learned that Kaifeng no longer contained a self-conscious community of Jews and that there was hardly a trace of the synagogue whose sizeable precincts are known from drawings rendered by the Jesuit priest-visitor, Jean Domenge, in 1722. In the mid-nineteenth century the impoverished remnants of this community had dismantled the synagogue and sold its pillars and bricks for scrap. China's Jews have a past but no present. Their only present is represented by a few faded photographs of obviously impoverished folk, taken by travelers early in this century and regularly republished in encyclopedias and monographs, apparently to prove that, yes, China's Jews really looked Chinese.

One day while we were in Kunming, a city best known to the West as the Chinese terminus of the Burma Road of World War II fame, I passed up lunch to stroll through the city. About a half hour's walk from the hotel I noticed a red cloth embroidered with a star and crescent hanging from a courtyard balcony, and

practically. Unfortunately, there are no records of the synagogue in Kaifeng. For

Chinese Jews Kaifeng is both type-site and the only known example.



found that I had stumbled on one of the city's several mosques. A crowd, as always, soon gathered, and in gracious sign language I was invited into a modest yard which was bounded in the rear by a wooden lecture hall. From ground level three steps led onto a columned porch closed in at both ends by a plaster wall on which someone had painted picture postal card scenes of Mecca and Medina. Just inside the door there was a low table with flowers and vases. The interior space was a single, two-story room. To the rear of the open hall there was a mithrab and a preacher's seat. The floor was covered with prayer rugs. This simple hall with its plain wood ceiling, undecorated columns and low table with vases and flowers so Chinese in character, suggested the feeling of a Chinese synagogue. There would have been an ark recessed into the center of the west wall suggesting the direction of Jerusalem. The Shema would have been engraved on the wall plaque. Originally, both mosque and synagogue would have included an imperial memorial tablet hung under the scriptural text. Imperial China required that all faiths kowtow to the emperor. Jews satisfied the emperor and the Second Commandment by "bowing the head and bending the knee" in honor of both the king and the King of Kings. The royal inscription was placed on the same wall as the Shema.

Jews had lived in Kuming. Marvin Tokayer, one-time rabbi of the Jewish Center in Tokyo, interviewed in 1974 a minor Kuomintang bureaucrat, one Shih Hung-mo, an interview recorded in Michael Pollak's Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries, who told him simply: "My name in Chinese is. . . I was born in 1924 in Kuming city, Yunnan Province, into the leading family among the Jewish communities in Yunnan Province who belong to the first batch (of Jews) that came to China in A.D. 620 (p. 260)," Pollak's book, incidentally, is the most recent summing of the literature and is particularly useful for its analysis of the role of China's Jews in Western, particularly Christian, imagination. Shih Hung-mo may have been born into a family of Jewish ancestry, but it was certainly no longer involved in Jewish practice. Unfortunately, there are no records of the synagogue in Kuming. For Chinese Jewry Kaifeng is both type-site and the only known example.

The synagogue building of Kaifeng disappeared around 1850. The few remaining Jews, or some of them, sold its beams and bricks for a few taels of silver. But before we fault these people too severely let us remember that survival is the first law of nature. The Jewish religious enterprise in Kaifeng had long since faltered and weakened. The last rabbi had died around 1800. A letter from Kaifeng's community, written within a year or two of the synagogue's dismantling, indicates that no one could any longer read Hebrew and that only one old lady remembered anything of the religious tradition. Those Jews were impoverished and could not afford to concern themselves with the needs of historians and tourists a hundred years hence, ~~who would want to visit the ruins of the synagogue.~~

China's Jews did not escape the pressures of cultural assimilation. Chinese, probably Mandarin, was their everyday tongue. The honoring of parents, mandated by the fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, was interpreted so as to identify Jewish family practice with the Confucian requirement of filial piety. In a novel, but thoroughly Chinese, expression of these attitudes, Kaifeng's Jews burned incense to the Patriarchs and other ancestors in a separate hall of their synagogue. In the good years when their elders were still rabbinically learned and their religious schools effective, these Jews may have used Hebrew value terms among themselves; but inevitably, traditional norms were translated into the terms the Chinese language made available so as to explain Judaism to neighbors and to their own children - and transformed by such translation. ~~When Adonai became Tien, the name in the Greek would be the same, but the meaning would be different.~~

~~to be translated.~~ Adonai, the Biblical term for God, lost some of its ability to express personality as well as life force when it became Tien, the Chinese name for Heaven. The faith of China's Jews certainly had a philosophical caste. Halachah, of course, literally means the way. When halachah was translated as Tao, the Chinese way, it takes on ~~new~~ new mystical and speculative levels of meaning. A dedicatory stele (1489) which once stood in the synagogue court, suggests the process

of cultural assimilation. It quotes from the Analects, The Doctrine of the Means, and the Book of Changes; identifies Abraham's search as one for Cheng Chiao, "correct religion", that is, truth, and clearly indicates that correct religion is based on the way (Tao), purity (Ching), truth (Chang), ritual (Li), and worship (Pai), all terms heavy with Confucian overtones. The stele stood in an open public space and was intended to identify the synagogue to non-Jews, it may actually have been written by a hired non-Jewish scholar; but one senses, nevertheless, the inescapable mood which must have been felt by Kaifeng's Jewish leaders to find common terms to explain their "way", terms which would be understood and approved by the majority.

The Confucian religion and this religion, although they agree on essential points and differ in secondary ones, yet, the principles of establishing the mind and restraining the conduct are nothing more than establishing the Way of Heaven, venerating ancestors, giving high regard to the relations between the Prince and his ministers, being filial to parents, living in harmony with wife and children, preserving the distinction between superiors and inferiors and among neighborly relations with friends. In short, these principles do not go beyond the Five Relationships (White, II 14-15).

That day I could have walked every street in the city of Kunming and not found a Jew. So the question I faced that noon hour was why Islam had survived in China and Judaism had not. The answer I came to gives great weight to population size. In all probability there were never more than ten thousand Jews in all of China. Kaifeng's community never exceeded twenty-five hundred. The Muslim community of China certainly numbered well into the hundreds of thousands. There are forty thousand Muslims in modern Kunming. ~~At the time of the Kaifeng Stele, the Jewish community in China was very small and the Muslim community was very large.~~

Other factors were also at work. Islam came to China as an imperialist faith and in China continued to reach out for converts. China's Jews came from Muslim lands where they had long experience with the cruel joys of toleration and the necessity of enduring economic, political and social discrimination. In China their small numbers and the arbitrariness of governmental authority would have sug-



gested the wisdom of continuing to keep a low profile. Whatever missionary ambitions Jews may once have cherished had been whipped out of them by the tragic defeats of the first and second centuries. Geography also played a role. There were large Muslim populations close by in Southeast Asia and India from which China could be easily reached. Jews had to come all the way from the Middle East. Centuries passed in Kaifeng without a visitor from the outside Jewish world. Faith may be a private matter, but, from time to time even the most loyal need confirmation that they are not alone.

Incidentally, the medieval Hebrew term for China, Sin, suggests great distance. Chapter 49 of the book of Isaiah contains a prophecy of return to Zion which includes the promise, "Look these are coming from afar; these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinnin" (v. 12). The Sinnin to which Deutero-Isaiah referred probably is Seyene, a place on the Nile in distant Nubia, but many commentators simply identified Sinnin with whatever place they felt was the most distant: China fit the bill.

Besides the su-ssu-tu, the Kaifeng community had a synagogue personality known as man-la. The man-las of Kaifeng filled various roles necessary to communal Jewish life including sexton, ritual, slaughter and scribe (shamash, shochet, and sofer). The term, man-la, incidentally, seems to derive from the same root as mullah. The Chinese seem always to have had a problem separating out the western unitarian faiths and often called the Jews simply "the blue-turbanned Muslims." The Muslims wore white turbans.

I did not identify myself to the folk who opened the mosque for my inspection. After my experience at the immigration counter in Canton, I doubt whether they would have understood my interest; but that was not the whole explanation. Though the Jews had come to China in the same junks and over the same silk route as the Arabs, and lived cheek by jowl in the same communities, their re-

lationship was rarely an easy one. Muslims brought to China that sense of superiority over Jews which had been bred into them back home in Dar-al-Islam and which continues to plague Arab-Israel relationships to this day. Muslims, too, were alien to China's mainstream culture and consequently insecure despite their large numbers; and it's satisfying to have someone to kick after you have taken your licks. Kaifeng's records tell of many indignities and attacks inflicted by the white-turbanned on the blue-turbanned. In the late nineteenth century an English traveler, inquiring about the synagogue, reported that he was mobbed and nearly killed in Kaifeng when a group of Muslims mistook him for a Jew.

That anxieties of this type should lurk beneath the surface of my mind I found on examination to be surprising and requiring some reflection. China was not a frightening place. The atmosphere is quite unlike that of the U.S.S.R. People on the street are helpful rather than surly. They are eager to talk rather than to create distance, but throughout Asia the Muslim population has been infected with a new sense of power. Israel is the enemy and, by extension, all Jews. I had sensed this particularly in India and Malaysia and I guess I had carried these shadows into China. Whatever the cause of my insecurity, I remember wondering how much China's hard-line, anti-Israel stance in the international arena had to do with her national interest, how much with the Third World's and Communist World's predictable espousal of the Arab cause, and how much with the existence of a large Muslim minority within her borders. It is estimated that Muslims make up five percent of China's present population. China is not a racially homogeneous society and the central government has problems not only holding a vast and disparate community together (provincialism always has been a fact of life in China), but with the task of imposing Communist ways, which are doctrinally affirmed only by a minority, upon everyone. The central government may have good reason to be cautious about creating unnecessary unhappiness among its minorities.

There is a sense in which China is not yet a nation. In the papers and

in private conversation people are identified by their province of origin. Regionalism is particularly strong in the south where the dominant Han racial and ethnic types live side by side with sizeable communities of so-called minority peoples - mostly mountain and steppe folk - who, since time immemorial, have lived on their own in the mountains which separate China proper from the lush ricelands of southern Asia and the nearly empty lands on the eastern fringe of central Asia. In the south the national government is still wrestling with the elemental task of teaching Chinese to many of the minority peoples. One night in Kunming we were shown a propaganda film of happy students from the minority peoples dancing the day away in ethnic costume to the accompaniment of traditional rhythms. The fact that such a film was felt to be necessary suggests the extent of the problem. China, like the U.S.S.R., must struggle with centrifugal forces. On the map China is a single country and we, in our innocence, tend to think of China as a distinct culture. In reality China is an agglomeration of various peoples and cultures on the way to becoming unified.

One of those who opened the doors of Kunming's mosque to me had indicated that daily services were held though the government did not permit any broadcast of the call of the muezzin. Here was another instance of a fact which, frankly, surprised me: shrines, particularly in southern China, were crowded with worshippers as well as tourists. The first two of the three weeks we spent in China were the days of the Chinese New Year. In Nanning, Kunming and Cheng-du we found young and old genuflecting before images of the Buddha, lighting candles before Taoist Lohans and burning joss sticks in the large bronze lavers which are placed in the forecourt of most temples. Many Chinese temples, particularly the one-time central Confucian compounds, are in disrepair. The forecourt of the most famous Confucian pagoda in Kunming is a metal fabricating shop, and the buildings themselves are shattered and crumbling ruins. Other shrines have been turned into parks and libraries, but the pieties of China have not been obliterated by two generations of Communist indoctrination or the Cultural Revolution.



On another day we visited a Buddhist temple in the hills west of Kuming. A sweeping circular wall enclosed the shrine and its park. The sanctuary was in the eastern quadrant. An open meeting hall, probably originally a lecture hall, lay against the west wall. The shrine was full of people lighting incense sticks and carrying branches of fruit blossoms as offerings. The meeting hall was filled with members of the Young Communist League boisterously engaged in the type of contests I organize at the annual Temple picnic. The worshippers were not looking over their shoulders at the picnickers nor were the young Communists taking the names of the worshippers. There was simply no tension in the air.

As a theologian I found that I had an insight into China which was useful as a complement to that of the political scientist. Communist Chinese policy is based on a messianic ideology which insists that certain irresistible economic laws determine the course of history. Maoism is no more or less than a modern apocalypse which purports to know what the course of history will be. Deng sees Mao's mistake as one of impatience. He was not misguided; rather, unfortunately, Mao became what the Jewish tradition calls a mekafetz baketz, one who forces the end, the classic error of the fervent messianist. Mao became so caught up in his dream that he tried to use the force of the state to hasten the coming of the messiah and history cannot be rushed.

Mao was troubled by the contradictions evident in Chinese life. Despite years of egalitarian indoctrination, mind work is still prized more highly than manual labor. China was to be a worker's paradise, but the children of the old privileged classes earned a disproportionate number of places in each university class. In every city sleek, black, nine-passenger limousines with curtained windows and Turkish rugs on the floor criss-cross the town from the compounds of luxury apartments to government offices. The old scholar nobility has disappeared, but the elite of the Communist Party sought the familiar privileges of power and moved heaven and earth to get their children into the university. As the free market shows, the capitalistic spirit has not been lost. The Cultural Revolution was de-

signed to resolve these contradictions and so hasten the consummation of history. But, as Jesus or Shabbatai Zvi could have told Mao, you cannot force the messianic age. If it comes, it will come in its own good time.

Today a breed of more patient, but not less doctrinaire, messianists govern China. They have not abandoned the certainties of apocalyptic Marxist messianism for a vague and uncertain vision of a perhaps never to be achieved messianic age. They are still orthodox. Relaxation is a tactic, not a conclusion. The screws of authority are being tightened. On the day we left the one English language paper in Peking reported a speech by Hua in which he spoke of the importance to China of trade with the West, but repeated forcibly the party line of the inevitability of the West's decline and communization.

While there I found myself applying to China the title, the Zionist pioneer, Theodor Herzl gave his utopian novel, Old-New Land. The past is visible and the present is being made to serve the future. I often found myself comparing the recent history of the Jewish people and the Chinese. We and they represent the world's two oldest scholarship-prizing cultures, and in the course of the last century both of us have had to face the challenges of modernity. I find it striking that though Jews have been submerged within contemporary society, we have managed to preserve our sense of the value of the past while China, a world unto herself, has abandoned her past and consciously adopted an alien Western ideology as the national commitment. Were Jews saved by our scattering which created a situation where no small group could gain the authority to enforce their will upon all of us? China never voted for Mao. Were they saved by long experience adjusting our traditions to changes in the cultural environment? We had adjusted to Greece, Islam and Christendom while China had remained China. It is one of history's more poignant ironies that the Jew who wanted so badly to be let into Europe managed to retain feelings for the continuity of his tradition while the Chinese, who wanted only to be left alone, now are led by those who damn the old ways as re-

actionary and seek to uproot the old culture, root and branch.

Preparing for the trip, I read a good bit of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese intellectual history and found there many a fascinating analogue to the Jewish experience. Nineteenth-century China, too, had its circles of the newly enlightened; men who were so taken by the new and its manifest power that they dressed in western clothes, sent their sons to western universities and worked to replace old teachings with new truths. Towards the close of the last century, China's first ambassador to Great Britain, Kuo Sung Tao, was so taken by what he saw and by the power of the European countries that he urged his fellow countrymen to adopt western style political, juridical and educational forms and institutions. Like some "Enlightenment" educators in Eastern Europe a century ago, Kuo called for the replacement of ~~the~~ traditional educational with a European curriculum and for the displacement of educational authority from the traditional scholar class to academics trained in modern universities. A new type of Chinese man had to emerge before China could recover her dominant role in the world.

There was a Chinese Enlightenment like the Jewish, Haskalah, called, in fact, "the New Learning" and led, at first, by those who had been fortunate enough to have combined a traditional education with study abroad. These men produced journals like Ha-Me'assef in which they wrote of their hopes and doubts and published the results of an active translation program which made the works of Huxley, Mill, Spencer, John Dewey and Shakespeare available in China. A movement of language reform soon followed, aimed at replacing the elitist and esoteric academic languages with pai-hua, plain speech. History came again to occupy a central place in Chinese thought and youth fought many an emotional and philosophic battle to free themselves from the age-old veneration of age and authority. Change the speaker and you have the rhetoric of many a meeting of radical young Jewish workers in Warsaw or Cracow at the turn of the century.



The Chinese compliment others by saying, "He acts like an old man although still young." Englishmen and Americans encourage one another by saying, "Keep young while growing old." Such is one respect in which the different ways of thought of the East and West are manifested. Youth is like early spring, like the rising sun, like the trees and grass in bud, like a newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life. . . I do not wish to waste my fleeting time in arguing with them (the old generation) on this and that and hoping for them to be reborn and thoroughly remodeled. Tearfully, I merely place my plea before the fresh and vital youth, in the hope that they will achieve self-awareness, and begin to struggle. What is this self-awareness? It is to be conscious of the value and responsibility of one's young life and vitality, to maintain one's self-respect, which should not be lowered. What is the struggle? It is to exert one's intellect, discard resolutely the old and the rotten, regard them as enemies and as a flood of savage beasts, keep away from their neighborhood and refuse to be contaminated by their poisonous germs (Tse-Tung Chow).

If too much is made of them, parallels are dangerous, but the fact remains that China had its reformers, yet, went with the radicals, and let go of the past. In China the direction of modernization was settled on the battlefield rather than in the classroom and study. What the West had that China lacked was power, and those who finally gave China a countervailing power were able to impose their vision. ~~Instead of the domination of the individual nations, the first~~  
~~time the world was united by a common power, and the old world of~~  
~~fragmented nations was replaced by a new world of a single power.~~

Jews and Judaism were saved, to a degree, by powerlessness. God sometimes becomes most real to me in life's paradoxes.

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## A RABBI IN CHINA

Daniel Jeremy Silver

The kehillah of Kaifeng called its rabbi, wu-ssu-tu. The term appears to be a transliteration into Chinese of a Persian word, ustad, which means master or teacher. When I found that the Immigration Officer of the People's Republic of China, who was handling our papers at the Canton railway depot, did not understand my occupation as listed on my passport, I trotted out this newly-learned, old Chinese term; and his eyes remained blank.

In China there are advantages to a title which no one understands. The Chinese need to know who you are or, rather, how important you are. The bureaucracy would lose face if a person was not given proper due. "Know before whom you stand", as a Chinese proverb, would represent a political warning rather than a theological statement; and since China's officials are afraid to admit ignorance such an admission would diminish their face, they tend not to do the natural thing and ask. So a title not properly understood inevitably is magnified, better to do more than less, and we were treated with a deference to which this rabbi could easily become accustomed.

In the early spring of 1980 my wife and I spent a little over three weeks in China while I was on sabbatical leave. I came armed with the familiar set of romantic notions about Jews entering China centuries ago as members of the long caravans which traversed the Great Silk Road from Persia to Cathay bringing the wine, cotton and coin of the West to trade for the paper, silk and tea of the East. Once I had felt myself face to face with such an ancestor trader when I paused before the clay figure of a wine merchant dressed in a long traveling coat and bearing on his face unmistakable semitic features, shelved in the exhibition halls of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, among the figurines which had been found in a Tang Dynasty tomb. Actually, as I learned later, this figurine probably had been modeled after a Parsee or Muslim or Armenian Nestorian rather than a Jew. In dress and general look these men were not distinguishable and Jews were a decided minority among the traders who banded together to form these slow-moving caravans which, a thousand and more years ago, crossed and

recrossed the southern steppes of Russia between Samarkend and Tashkent and the cities east of the Great Wall.

On our way to the Far East we had stopped in Delhi where our first visit was at India's National Museum. Among its treasures this museum displays a trove of artifacts discovered around the turn of the century in the wastelands of Chinese Turkestan by Sir Mark Aurel Stein: Buddhist banners of intricate weave, naive wooden tomb figures modeled after life, and fragments of fresco painting which feature the full-fleshed beauty admired in Tang China. Stein's finds, which included a sizeable manuscript collection, enabled scholars for the first time to gain some intimate knowledge of the people who had lived on the Asian steppes and of the traders, including Jews, who took to the open road.

Our guide-curator described Sir Mark as a British civil servant, one-time Commissioner of Education in the Punjab, who had spent his vacations traveling to the far places and unearthing Asia's hidden history rather than hunting tiger or playing polo with colleagues. This is both true and misleading. Actually, Stein was a Hungarian yeshivah bocher afflicted with brilliance and the wanderlust who, like so many of his generation, he was born in 1862, abandoned the culture of his childhood for opportunity in the larger world, a hejira which ultimately led him from Budapest to Vienna to London and then, surprisingly, to India. There, while his colleagues in the Raj drank themselves into early graves, Stein gained immortality as the westerner who uncovered the history of the horse people, the Tartars and Mongols, who periodically fell upon China, the Near East and Europe, pillaging, conquering and changing the course of history.

Stein had gone into the high Asian wilderness and at an oasis in Chinese Turkestan, Dadan-Uiliq, he had located a cache of manuscripts which included a letter dated 718, written in Judeo-Persian, using Hebrew characters, in which a trader in China asks a co-religionist back home for help in disposing of an unwanted acquisition - a flock of rather mangy sheep. On a later expedition, at a site known as the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-Huang, Stein discovered another sizeable manuscript deposit



which included a parchment on which a selihah prayer had been set forth. This Hebrew prayer, which can be dated to the eighth or ninth century, consists of alternate lines from the Prophets and Psalms, asks God's forgiveness for the bearer's sins and was, in all probability, carried as an amulet to protect the trader against the dangers of the journey. Here was proof that Jews had been among the traders.

In preparation for our trip I read up on the more recent literature and discovered that contrary to my early impressions, though some Jews who settled in China may have taken the overland route, it is more likely that the medieval Jewish settlers who are reported in China by various travelers, primarily Arab, came by sea from Persia or Yemen via India and Sumatra. Once they reached the ports of China they followed China's extensive river system to the important trading centers like Peking, Nanking, Hangchow and Kaifeng. This was the route taken by most Near Eastern and Indian traders and settlers, and there is every reason to believe the Jews followed the familiar patterns of trade and migration. A fifteenth century dedicatory stele in Kaifeng, which once stood in the court of the city's synagogue, describes the Jews as originating in Tien-Chu, which is one of the many Chinese designations for India, and calls them cloth merchants which suggests that they specialized in weaving and dyeing.

If their way East is uncertain there is no doubt that Jews lived in the Middle Kingdom for many centuries. That incomparable teller of tall tales, the tenth century wanderer-fraud, Eldad ha-Dani, claimed to have been ransomed from Chinese captivity by one of the leaders of the Lost Ten Tribes. The River Sambatyon, like Eden was believed to be to the East, and the identification of China's Jews with the Lost Tribes was a popular medieval concept, particularly among Sephardic Jews, as can be seen in such works as Moses b. Isaac Edrehi's Ma'aseh Nissim (1818). Marco Polo met Jews in China on his first voyage (1286). The stele mentioned above dates the dedication of the synagogue in Kaifeng, then the capital of the Northern Sung Kingdom, to 1163. The Arab journalist, Ibn Khurdadhbih (mid-ninth century) describes the sea and land routes which Jewish merchants, whom he calls Radanites, followed from Gaul to the Great Wall.

Another Arab journal of the tenth century (abu Zaid) reports a massacre of Muslims, Parsees, Christians and Jews in Khar-Fu (Canton?) during a dynastic rebellion.

Nine hundred years later, in 1722, a French Jesuit, Jean Domenge, visited the synagogue at Kaifeng, then the capital of Honan Province, and drew a sketch of a ba'al kore, dressed in typical mandarin fashion, complete with Chinese style kippah and pig-tails, reading from a Torah encased in Yemenite fashion. China's Jews were practicing Jews.

Settlement in China followed on trade. The history of the kehillah of Kaifeng and its synagogue, the only community of whose history more than a passing reference or two survives, has been known in the West since the sixteenth century when Jesuit missionaries first made contact with these folk and sent a record of the mission to their superiors in Rome. It happened this way. In the sixteenth century the Ming emperors welcomed to China a group of Jesuit priests because the country needed to master the new sciences of the West, particularly astronomy and mathematics, in which these priests were also trained. In 1605 a Kaifeng Jew, who had passed the provincial level examinations, traveled to Peking to lobby for a magistracy for which his degree qualified him. Ai Tien had heard of the arrival in Peking of Westerners of a scriptural faith and had mistaken these westerners, the Jesuits, for Jews. His government business completed, he visited the mission where he mistook a triptych which displayed a Madonna holding the infant Jesus and John the Baptist as a child for Rebecca and her twins. Matteo Ricci, the senior priest, disabused Ai Tien of his mistaken identification, but followed up this chance meeting by sending a subordinate to Kaifeng. Ten years later when Ricci's journal was published in Europe it included the report of this priest and the Western world gained knowledge of China's Jewish community.

The news caused ~~some~~ considerable excitement. In many Christian notions of the Second Coming, the world-wide spread of Jews and their subsequent conversion was held to be a messianic prerequisite, and information of the Jews of China suggested that if only they were soon converted the millenium might dawn. Beyond this there was a

special theological interest among Christian Bible commentators. The Church had long held that after the emergence of Christianity the rabbis had edited and made erasures in the Torah so as to excise all of God's promises about the Christ messiah. If Kaifeng's Torah scrolls were truly ancient, and all of the community's records suggested that the Jewish migration to China had taken place in the centuries before the Crucifixion, its scrolls might prove to be originals, uncensored, and provide the long-sought original text. Over the succeeding decades the Jesuits of the China Mission tried to beg, borrow or steal one of the Kaifeng scrolls in order to have it examined as proof of Christian claims. They were not successful.

There were other reasons for the high degree of interest in China's few thousand Jews which Christian Europe evidenced, including, of all things, a long-running dispute between the Jesuit and Franciscan orders over the question whether a formal religious renunciation should be demanded of Confucian converts. The Jesuits, first on the scene and realists always, sought to allow such converts to add Catholicism to their familiar habits without any formal renunciation. They argued that Confucius was a philosopher, not a prophet; that Confucianism was a moral philosophy, not a religion; and that there was nothing idolatrous in the veneration of ancestors or pantheist in the veneration of the Heavens. They saw no reason to make the Chinese give up these practices. The Franciscans, on the other hand, defined Confucian thought and ritual as idolatrous and polytheist; hence, they required the convert to separate himself completely from these forms. They held that the Jesuits' practice represented an attack on the integrity of Catholic teaching and asked Rome to rule that the Jesuits be more demanding.

What had Kaifeng's Jews to do with the so-called Rites Controversy? The Jesuits tried to reinforce their case by citing the practice of this synagogue. Jews were known to follow faithfully the Torah's strict rules against Avodah Zarah: yet, the synagogue included an ancestor's hall where incense was offered before memorial tablets, not only to the patriarchs and the community's own dead, but even to Confucius.



If Jews, known for their strictness in such matters, did not define Confucian practice as a pagan religion but considered it a philosophy rather than a salvific doctrine could not the Church take a similar position?

After the news spread many tried to visit Kaifeng. Sadly, there is no indication that Jews were among those who sought to come. I prefer to think that medieval Jewry lacked the opportunity to make the trip, though there are indications that the Jews of Cochin and the B'nai Israel of India knew of their co-religionists across the Himalayas.

Our itinerary did not include Kaifeng. The city has not ~~really~~ been opened to tourism, but I confess I made little effort in that direction. Reading the extended work on Chinese Jews (1942) by the one-time Anglican Bishop of Honan, William Charles White, I learned that there no longer existed in Kaifeng a self-conscious community of Jews, or even any physical trace of their synagogue, whose sizeable precincts are known from drawings rendered by the Jesuit priest-visitor, Jean Domenge, in 1722. I also had read the more recent articles by Donald David Leslie and Rudolf Lowenthal which revise and correct White's enthusiasts' errors. Here was a past I would have liked to visit, but the impoverished remnants of this kehillah had dismantled the synagogue and sold its pillars and bricks for scrap in the mid-nineteenth century and nothing remained to be seen. China's Jews have a past but no present. Their only present is represented by a few woebegone photographs taken by travelers early in this century and regularly republished in encyclopedias and monographs, apparently to prove that yes, China's Jews really looked Chinese.

An aside. A rabbi in Asia senses that he is never in a place where Jews have not been before; but in Asia shelilat ha-golah is not a debatable Zionism thesis but a statement of recent history. There are today fewer than ten thousand Jews among the two billion citizens of Asia, a statistic which not only indicates an absolute reduction in numbers but suggests a reality which should give pause to our more fervent mission-of-Israel apologetes who tout Jews and Judaism as the necessary leaven in

the development of civilization. In Asia we cannot claim to be one part in sixty.

One day while we were in Kuming, a city best known to the West as the Chinese terminus of the Burma Road of World War II fame, I passed up lunch to stroll through the city. About a half hour's walk from the hotel I noticed a red cloth embroidered with a star and crescent hanging from a courtyard balcony, and found that I had stumbled on one of the several mosques of Kuming. A crowd, as always, soon gathered; and in gracious sign language I was invited into a modest yard which was bounded in the rear by a wooden lecture hall. From ground level three steps led onto a columned porch whose two ends were formed by a plaster wall. Someone had painted picture postal card scenes of Mecca and Medina on these walls. Just inside the door there was a low table with flowers and vases. The interior space was a single, two-story room. To the rear of the open hall there was a mithrab and a preacher's seat. A tiled motto, decorated with ornate Arabic calligraphy, was recessed into the wall which faced Mecca. The floor was covered with prayer rugs. The painted scenes apart, a Chinese synagogue might have had much the same look. There would have been an ark recessed into the center of the west wall suggesting the direction of Jerusalem. The Shema would have been engraved on the wall plaque. Originally, both mosque and synagogue would have included an imperial memorial tablet hung under the scriptural text. Imperial China required that all faiths kowtow to the emperor. Jews escaped, violating the command, "you shall not bow down to them or serve them" by "bowing the head and bending the knee" in honor of the King of Kings. The royal inscription just happened to be on the same wall as the Shema.

This simple hall with its plain wood ceiling, undecorated columns and low table with vases and flowers so Chinese in character, suggests the feeling of a Chinese synagogue. To the left there was even a mehitzah - a draw curtain on a bare wire which allowed women to sit in a space at the extreme far right of the room.

Jews had lived in Kuming. Marvin Tokayer, one-time rabbi of the Jewish Center in Tokyo, interviewed in 1974 a minor Kuomintang bureaucrat, one Shih Hung-mo, an interview recorded in Michael Pollak's Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries, who told him

simply: "My name in Chinese is. . . I was born in 1924 in Kuming city, Yunnan Province, into the leading family among the Jewish communities in Yunnan Province who belong to the first batch (of Jews) that came to China in A.D. 620 (p. 260). Pollak's book, incidentally, is the most recent summing of the literature and is particularly useful for its analysis of the role of China's Jews in Western, particularly Christian, imagination. Shih Hung-mo may have been born into a family of Jewish ancestry, but it was certainly no longer involved in Jewish practice. The records, unfortunately, tell us nothing of any synagogue in Kuming or about that community's makeup or history. For Chinese Jewry Kaifeng is both type-site and the only known example.

The synagogue building of Kaifeng disappeared around 1850. The few remaining Jews, or some of them, sold its beams and bricks for a few taels of silver. But before we fault these folk too severely let us remember that survival is the first law of nature. By this time Kaifeng's Jews were impoverished and could not afford to concern themselves with the needs of historians and tourists who might want to visit their synagogue a hundred years hence. A letter from Kaifeng's community, written within a year or two of the synagogue's dismantling, indicates that only one old lady remembered anything of the religious tradition. No one can any longer read Hebrew. The last rabbi had died around 1800. The Jewish religious enterprise in Kaifeng had long since faltered and weakened.

Twentieth century travelers occasionally met and photographed a Chinese person from Kaifeng or elsewhere who, like Shih, knew that their families had been Jews; but nothing about the practice of Judaism, and it was rabbinic Judaism which had been practiced. The Jewish way had disappeared in the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from the Middle Kingdom. By contrast, the Jesuits who had visited Kaifeng in the early seventeenth century described a community where males were circumcised; the Sabbath was observed; the liturgy was Hebraic; the familiar holidays were followed; the Torah chanted according to the cycle with which we are accustomed and dietary laws observed. Among the names by which these Jews were known to their



neighbors was "those who pluck the sinew."

The annual cycle of Torah reading was divided into fifty-three sections as was the custom in Yemen, but this is also the form Maimonides prescribes in Mishneh Torah, and little is yet known with certainty about the sources of Kaifeng's minhag. The Torah, there were at least twelve in Kaifeng during the Middle Ages, was read by a bare-footed ba'al kore from an encased scroll; and, apparently, many could act in this role. Textual commentaries and colophon notes were written in Judeo-Persian, which was the lingua franca of the medieval trading centers of the East.

China's Jews, of course, did not escape the pressures of cultural assimilation. Chinese, probably Mandarin, became their everyday tongue. The honoring of parents mandated by the fourth Commandment of the Decalogue was interpreted as identifying Jewish family norms with the Confucian requirement of filial piety, a commingling of ideas which was ritualized when Kaifeng's Jews began to burn incense to the Patriarchs and other ancestors in a separate hall of their synagogue. In the good years when their elders were still rabbinically learned and their religious schools effective, these Jews may have used Hebrew value terms among themselves; but inevitably, traditional norms were transformed and translated into the nouns the Chinese language made available, the practice made necessary in order to explain Judaism to neighbors and to their own children. When Adonai became Theos, God's name in the Greek world and a less intimate name, theology began to replace history as the way to talk about God; similarly. Adonai lost some of its implicit force as a personal god when it became Tien, the Chinese name for Heaven. The faith of China's Jews certainly had a philosophical caste. Halacha, of course, literally means the way, but when halacha becomes Tao, the way, it takes on distinct and unexpected speculative levels of meaning. Tien and Tao appear on a dedicatory stele (1489) which once stood in the synagogue court. This inscription, incidentally, quotes from the Analects, The Doctrine of the Means, and the Book of Changes, but not from the Torah itself; identifies Abraham's

search as one for Cheng Chiao, "correct religion", that is truth, and clearly indicates that correct religion is based on the way (Tao), purity (Ching), truth (Chang), ritual (Li), and worship (Pai), all terms heavy with Confucian overtones. The stele stood in an open public space and was intended for outsiders, it may actually have been written by a hired non-Jewish scholar; but one senses that Kaifeng's Jewish leaders would have accepted Moses Mendelsohn's emphasis on Judaism as a distinct ritual which nevertheless shares common convictions with all high-minded, read-dominant, traditions.

The Confucian religion and this religion, although they agree on essential points and differ in secondary ones, yet the principles of establishing the mind and restraining the conduct are nothing more than establishing the Way of Heaven, venerating ancestors, giving high regard to the relations between the Prince and his ministers, being filial to parents, living in harmony with wife and children, preserving the distinction between superiors and inferiors and among neighborly relations with friends. In short, these principles do not go beyond the Five Relationships (White II 14-15).

That day I could have walked every street in the city of Kurling and not found a Jew. No one of us should go to China to find employment as a wu-ssu-tu. So the question I faced, so unexpectedly, that noon hour was why Islam had survived in China and not our people. The answer would seem to rest on numbers. Kaifeng's community never exceeded twenty-five hundred. In all probability there were never more than ten thousand Jews in all of China. In the Middle Ages the Muslim community of China certainly numbered well into the hundreds of thousands. Today there are forty thousand Muslims in Kurling alone. Then, too, Islam came to China as an imperialist faith while Judaism came as a faith accustomed to sufferance. Whatever missionary ambitions Jews may once have cherished had been whipped out of them by the tragic defeats of the first and second centuries.

China's Jews came from Muslim lands where they had long experience with the <sup>carel</sup> ~~ent-~~ ~~lating~~ joys of toleration and the necessity of enduring economic, political and social discrimination. In China their small numbers and the arbitrariness of governmental authority would have suggested ~~a continuation of the habit of keeping~~ <sup>The wisdom of continuing to</sup> a low profile. Geography also played a role. Jews had to come from months away in the Middle East. There were large Muslim populations close by in Southeast Asia and India from where China could far more readily be reached. Centuries passed in Kaifeng without a word or visitor from the outside Jewish world. Faith may be a private matter, but, from time to time, even the most loyal need confirmation that they are not alone.

Incidentally, the medieval Hebrew term for China, Sin, suggests great distance. Chapter 49 of the book of Isaiah contains a prophecy of return to Zion which includes the promise, "Look these are coming from afar; these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinnin" (Is. 12). The Sinnin to which Deutero-Isaiah referred probably is Seyene, a place on the Nile in distant Nubia, at least the text of a Dead Sea scroll provides this reading; but the traditional commentators, for the most part, simply identified Sinnin with whatever place was at the greatest remove and when medieval Jews needed a term for the furthest place, China, they simply appropriated this name.

Those who still falter before programs of Jewish outreach or who preach Zero Population Growth with non-discriminating zeal should remember not only Amalek but Kaifeng. There is such a phenomenon as critical mass in religious sociology as well as physics. Numbers are consequential. The Memorial Book of the Kaifeng Synagogue which, incidentally, is to be found in the Rare Book Room of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, lists a large number of women who bore Chinese or Muslim names. This suggests that in Kaifeng Jewish men took non-Jewish wives with fair regularity. In a traditional community intermarriage becomes an accepted norm only when necessity overmasters inherited taboos. There was no alternative, and since these Jews came from a Muslim environment and in China tended to live in the same cities as Muslim traders, as numbers



dropped many seem to have moved over. Islam was always the larger element and its ariconism was ~~clearly~~ more congenial to Jews than the florid iconography and inescapable idolatry of the Buddhist and Taoist shrines. In their turn, the Chinese seem always to have had a problem separating out the western unitarian faiths and often called the Jews simply "the blue-turbanned Muslims." The Muslims wore white turbans.

Besides the wu-ssu-tu, the Kaifeng community had synagogue personalities known as man-la. The man-las of Kaifeng filled various roles necessary to communal Jewish life including shamas, sochet and sofer. The term, which is not Chinese, seems to derive from the same root as mullah. Jews, too, it would appear, took over Muslim forms, otherwise how explain how the title of a minor Islamic functionary came to be applied to those who served Kaifeng Jewry in similar roles.

I did not identify myself to the folk who opened the mosque for my inspection. After my experience at the immigration counter in Canton, I doubt whether they would have understood my interest; but that was not the whole explanation. Though the Jews had come to China in the same junks and over the same silk route as the Arabs, and lived cheek by jowl in the same communities, their relationship was rarely an easy one. Muslims brought to China a sense of superiority over Jews which had been bred into them back home in dar-al-Islam. Muslims, too, were alien to China's mainstream culture and consequently insecure; and there always must be someone to kick after you have taken your licks. Kaifeng's records tell of many indignities and attacks inflicted by the white-turbanned on the blue-turbanned. In the late nineteenth century an English traveler, inquiring about the synagogue, reported that he was mobbed and nearly killed in Kaifeng when a group of Muslims mistook him for a Jew.

That anxieties of this type should lurk beneath the surface of my mind I found on examination to be surprising. China was not a frightening place. The atmosphere is quite unlike that of the U.S.S.R. People on the street are helpful rather than surly. They are eager to talk rather than to create distance; but throughout Asia the Muslim population has been infected with a new sense of power. Israel is the enemy and, by

extension, all Jews. I had sensed this particularly in India and Malaysia and I guess I had carried these shadows into China. Whatever the cause of my insecurity, I remember wondering how much China's hard-line, anti-Israel stance in the international arena had to do with her national interest, how much with the Third World's and Communist World's predictable espousal of the Arab cause, and how much with the existence of a large Muslim minority within her borders. It is estimated that Muslims make up five percent of China's present population. China is not a racially homogenous society and the central government has problems not only holding a vast and disparate community together, provincialism always has been a fact of life in China, but with the ~~difficult~~ task of imposing Communist ways, which are <sup>doctrinally</sup> affirmed only by a minority, upon everyone. The central government may have good reason to be cautious about creating unnecessary unhappiness among its minorities.

There is a sense in which China is not yet a nation. In the papers and in private conversation people are identified by their province of origin. Regionalism is particularly strong in the south where the dominant Han racial and ethnic type lives side by side with sizeable communities of so-called minority peoples - mostly mountain and steppe folk - who, since time immemorial, have lived on their own in the mountains which separate China proper from the lush ricelands of southern Asia and the nearly empty lands on the eastern fringe of central Asia. In the south the national government is still wrestling with the elemental task of teaching Chinese to many of the minority peoples. One night in Kunming we were shown a propaganda film of happy minority peoples before the gate of the Yunnan Minorities University, dancing the day away in ethnic costume to the accompaniment of traditional rhythms. The very need for the film suggests the extent of the problem. China, like the U.S.S.R., must struggle with centrifugal forces. On the map China is a country. In our thought we tend to think of China as a distinct culture. In reality China is an agglomeration of various peoples and cultures on the way to becoming unified.

In Asia Shelihut ha-golah is an existential reality rather than a debatable Zionist proposition. With the exception of a racially tight island like Japan where few,

if any, foreigners were allowed to enter and where there is no evidence of early Jewish settlement, Jews long since established communities in most of the cities of Asia; but the older centers are no longer there. In Bangkok, Singapore, Taiwan and Tokyo resident aliens have organized minyanim and sometimes even built Jewish centers, but those are communities without roots. When there is no more business or employment they will move on. Most educate their children in the land of their passport which is rarely the land they now live in.

The practice of these marginal communities did help me understand what life must have been like for the early traders and something about the mix of Judaism and policy in their communities. When we arrived in Bangkok I found that the Jewish Center would be closed for Shabbat. The previous week an under-Secretary of the Israeli Embassy had celebrated his son's bar mitzvah. In my week there was no special occasion, hence no service.

My calls elicited the information that alongside the Center's erratic schedule of worship there was a regular downtown minyan. I called and identified myself, and after my credentials were checked, itself an interesting process, I was invited to present myself at six o'clock at a jewelry wholesale office on the fifth floor of an office building not far from the Oriental Hotel. On arrival I found myself among a group of men associated with the international jewelry trade: resident merchants, factors, messengers and messengers. Most had been born in Iran, Afghanistan and India, though to a man they held Israeli or American passports. Their ties were with Manhattan's Diamond Mart, Antwerp and Netanyah. Sephardim all, they came together each week for worship, followed by a Sabbath meal at which the trade's elder presided. Here talk was of general and business interest, and besides the information that was shared, it was at this table that business disputes were resolved. Admission to the table represented admission to the trade. Since contracts were unenforceable in the courts of the Third World, inclusion or excommunication from the group enforced honesty and cooperation. Here, in real life, was a traditional community in which the strands of commerce and religion were entwined inextricably and the religious ties



clearly are primary.

I had identified myself as a rabbi, and though some of their welcome dissolved when they discovered I was not orthodox, it returned once I had a kippah on my head and had shown that I could davan. In the event we had a rip-roaring discussion of the heresies of reform and I came to appreciate the practical force of their orthodoxy. Tradition was the bond of this community and any deviation would have weakened it. Moreover, halachic norms provided them with at least the feeling of having a legal code. I came to understand that political emancipation was not the only prerequisite for the emergence of the reform movement. Before the authority of the halacha could be challenged Jews had to develop sufficient trust in a country's courts to enable them to let loose of their pragmatic reliance on traditional legal forms.

One of those who opened the doors of Kurming's mosque to me had indicated that daily services were held though the government did not permit any broadcast of the call of the muezzin. Here was another instance of a fact which, frankly, surprised me: shrines, particularly in southern China, were crowded with worshippers as well as tourists. The first two of the three weeks we spent in China were the days of the Chinese New Year. In Nanning, Kurming and Cheng-du we found young and old genuflecting before images of the Buddha, lighting candles before Taoist Lohans and burning joss sticks in the large bronze lavers which are placed in the forecourt of most temples. Many Chinese temples, particularly the one-time central Confucian <sup>temples</sup> centers, are in disrepair. The forecourt of the most famous Confucian pagoda in Kurming is a metal fabricating shop, and the buildings themselves are shattered and crumbling ruins. Other shrines have been turned into parks and libraries, but the pieties of China have not been obliterated by two generations of Communist indoctrination or the Cultural Revolution.

On another day we visited a Buddhist temple in the hills west of Kurming. A sweeping circular wall enclosed the shrine and its park. The sanctuary was in the eastern quadrant. An open meeting hall, probably originally a lecture hall, lay

against the west wall. The shrine was full of people lighting incense sticks and carrying branches of fruit blossoms as offerings. The meeting hall was filled with members of the Young Communist League boisterously engaged in the type of contests I organize at the annual Temple picnic. The worshippers were not looking over their shoulders at the picnickers nor were the young Communists taking the names of the worshippers. There was simply no tension in the air.

It was a relaxed scene and those we talked to emphasized that the Cultural Revolution was over and that relaxation was a hallmark of a new era. At no time did party cadres march past us shouting slogans and waving Mao's little Red Book. A professor friend told us that entrance to the universities is again by competitive examination and studies are being pursued by the able. The side streets are lined with grocery stalls where farmers offer what they have grown on their private plots.

How different is post-Mao China? Over lunch in Cheng-du an American, teaching English in the provincial university, insisted that a fundamental change had taken place and that <sup>the</sup> ~~a~~ period of the ruthless enforcement of Communism had ended. People had suffered too much ever to allow the government again to convulse their lives. Wherever we went we heard the Gang of Four branded as the junta which had caused all of China's troubles, though no one took the time to explain how three men and one woman could bring a society of a billion people to a standstill. At one point a student made the tentative suggestion that the Chinese are conditioned to obey. When I suggested that the Cultural Revolution must then be seen as of Mao's devising, the thought died in the conversational air.

The Cultural Revolution brought China's economy and administration to a near standstill and the errors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are admitted rather freely. Peasants who can barely add two and two are not prime candidates for degrees in advanced physics, and Party loyalty does not guarantee that a person possesses the technical or administrative skills required to run a modern industry. The administration of Hua and Teng had no alternative but to return the talented

to their responsibilities, bright minds to their studies, and to allow farmers and workers a bit of income on the side. There has been relaxation, but. . .the Freedom Wall with its posters can no longer be found in Peking or, indeed, in any China city. Last fall China held show trials of several men who had spoken too freely with foreigners and had televised their confessions and severe punishment as a national warning. The week we left China a new Espionage Act was published which defined as spying telling a foreigner almost anything one is not authorized specifically to tell him.

China needs trade with the West and the hard dollars with which to trade; hence, tourism. But there is evident concern that the tourist meet those the authorities want him to meet and hear what they want to be heard. In China you visit where you are allowed to visit and talk to those who are assigned to talk to you or with those whom some authority wishes you to meet. You may have other names; but, somehow, you will not make contact. We had the name of an American who taught journalism, of all things, at the university in Peking. We knew the department of the university where he worked. The hotel operator told us that she could not reach his office. When we pressed her she connected us with the Chinese Tourist Bureau. We had heard that he lived in the Friendship Hotel, a vast compound of buildings where we ourselves stayed. When we asked for his room number, we were told the hotel kept no record of its guests.

Concern over contacts has grown as the number of tourists has increased. We were allowed to exchange dollars for yuan, the national currency. Two weeks after we left China the government ordered that henceforth foreigners shall use a special script which can be spent only in authorized hotels, shops and restaurants. I wandered quite freely through the cities we visited and had many an interesting conversation in out of the way stores and simple restaurants. It will no longer be possible to go in where the fancy strikes you, sit down, order tea and talk, for the tourist will not be able to pay.

China is not replacing authoritarian communism with a less arbitrary democratic



socialism. Relaxation must be seen as a tactical maneuver, designed to accomplish a few practical goals - revive the economy, upgrade China's technology - rather than a shift of political goals. Ideologues may change their means but never their ends.

As a theologian I found that I had an insight into China which was useful as a complement to that of the political scientist. Communist Chinese policy is based on a messianic ideology which insists that certain irresistible economic laws determine the course of history. Maoism is no more or less than a modern apocalypse which purports to know what the course of history will be. Deng sees Mao's mistake as one of impatience. He was not misguided; rather, ~~but~~ unfortunately, Mao became a mekafetz ba-ketz, one who forces the end, the classic error of the fervent messianist. Mao became so caught up in his dream that he tried to use the force of the State to hasten the coming of the messiah and history cannot be rushed.

Mao was troubled by the contradictions evident in Chinese life. Despite years of egalitarian indoctrination, mind work is still prized more highly than manual labor. China was to be a worker's paradise, but the children of the old privileged classes earned a disproportionate number of places in each university class. In every city sleek, black, nine-passenger limousines with curtained windows and Turkish rugs on the floor criss-cross the town from the compounds of luxury apartments to government offices. The old scholar nobility has disappeared, but the elite of the Communist Party sought the familiar privileges of power and moved heaven and earth to get their children into the university. As the free market shows, the capitalistic spirit had not been lost. The Cultural Revolution was designed to resolve these contradictions and so hasten the consummation of history. But, as Jesus or Shabbatai Zvi could have told Mao, you cannot force the messianic age. If it comes, it will come in its own good time.

Today a breed of more patient, but not less doctrinaire, messianists govern

China. They have not abandoned the certainties of apocalyptic Marxist messianism for a vague and uncertain vision of a perhaps never to be achieved messianic age. They are still orthodox. Relaxation is a tactic, not a conclusion. The screws of authority are being tightened. The day we left the one English language paper in Peking reported a speech by Hua in which he spoke of the importance to China of trade with the West, but repeated forceably the party line of the inevitability of the West's decline and communization.

While there I found myself applying to China the title Theodor Herzl gave his utopian novel, Old-New Land. The past is visible and the present is being made to serve the future. Herzl did not come into my mind out of the blue. I often found myself comparing the recent history of our people and the Chinese. We and they represent the world's two traditional scholarship-prizing cultures which, in the course of the last century, had to face the challenges of modernity. I find it striking that though we were submerged within an alien modernity we managed to preserve our ties with the past; while China, a world unto herself, far removed from the West, abandoned her past and adopted an alien Western ideology as the national commitment. Were we saved by our scattering which created a situation where no small group could gain the authority to enforce their will upon all of us? China never voted for Mao. Were we saved by long experience adjusting our traditions to changes in the cultural environment? We had adjusted to Greece, Islam and Christendom while China had remained China. It is one of history's more poignant ironies that the Jew who wanted so badly to be let into Europe managed to retain feelings for the continuity of his tradition while the Chinese, who wanted only to be left alone, now are led by those who damn the old ways as reactionary and seek to uproot the old culture, root and branch. China's failure to hold on to her past made me more sensitive to the miracle of our partial success.

Preparing for the trip, I read a good bit of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese intellectual history and found there many a fascinating analog to the Jewish

experience. Nineteenth century China, too, had its circles of the enlightened; men who were so taken by the new and its manifest power that they dressed in western clothes, sent their sons to western universities and worked to replace old-fashioned categories with modern terms. Towards the close of the last century China's first ambassador to Great Britain, Kuo Sung Tao, was so taken by what he saw that he urged his fellow countrymen to adopt western style political, juridical and educational forms and institutions. He argued that the ability of Russia and the European nations to impose treaty ports and custom rates testified to their superior power. Power is not simply a matter of military potential. Ultimately, power refracts a people's mental attitude and level of education. The West simply was more active, pragmatic and determined than the East. Like the Lilienthals of the Pale, Kuo called for the replacement of the yeshivah system and with a system of European style schools and for the displacement of educational authority from traditional rabbis to academics trained in modern universities.

There was a Chinese Haskalah called in fact, "the New Learning" and led, at first, by those who had been fortunate enough to have combined a traditional education with study abroad. These men produced journals like *ha-Meassef* in which they wrote of their hopes and doubts and published the results of an active translation program which made the works of Huxley, Mill, Spencer, John Dewey and Shakespeare available in China. A movement of language reform soon followed, aimed at replacing the elitist and esoteric academic languages with *pai-hua*, plain speech. History came again to occupy a central place in Chinese thought and youth fought many an emotional and philosophic battle to free themselves from the age-old veneration of age and authority. Change the speaker and you have the rhetoric of many a Bund meeting.

The Chinese compliment others by saying, "He acts like an old man although still young." Englishmen and Americans encourage one another by saying, "Keep young while growing old." Such is one respect in which the different ways of thought



of the East and West are manifested. Youth is like early spring, like the rising sun, like the trees and grass in bud, like a newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life. . . I do not wish to waste my fleeting time in arguing with them (the old generation) on this and that and hoping for them to be reborn and thoroughly remodeled. Tearfully, I merely place my plea before the fresh and vital youth, in the hope that they will achieve self-awareness, and begin to struggle. What is this self-awareness? It is to be conscious of the value and responsibility of one's young life and vitality, to maintain one's self-respect, which should not be lowered. What is the struggle? It is to exert one's intellect, discard resolutely the old and the rotten, regard them as enemies and as a flood of savage beasts, keep away from their neighborhood and refuse to be contaminated by their poisonous germs (Tse-Tung Chow).

If too much is made of them parallels are dangerous, but the fact remains that China had its Geigers and Hirschs, yet, let go of the past. Was it because China's adjustment to modernity could not escape being political? In China the direction of modernization was settled on the battlefield rather than in the classroom and study. What the West had that China lacked was power, and those who finally gave China a counterveiling power were able to impose their vision. Instead of the emancipation of the individual citizen, the first imperative was the overthrow of the moribund Manchu Dynasty and the achievement of effective territorial sovereignty.

We were saved, to a degree, by powerlessness. God sometimes becomes most real to me in life's paradoxes.

Jewish World

Feb 27 '81

## M E D I A • M O N I T O R

By Donald Altschiller

While a brouhaha surrounds the blockbuster movie, "Fort Apache, the Bronx"—blacks and Puerto Ricans are attacking the movie for perpetuating vile racial stereotypes—a surprising fact about the ethnic makeup of this devastated community is totally ignored. In his extraordinary article appearing in a winter issue of *Natural History*, anthropologist Jack M. Kugelmann describes the plight of the small white community in the South Bronx, mostly aged and almost entirely Jewish. He poignantly portrays the remnants of this once thriving Jewish area that housed a quarter of a million residents. All that remains now are a few impoverished elderly Jews, a bakery and a shul.

Located in the heart of the South Bronx, the Intervale Jewish Center barely stands with its rotting wood floors, peeling plaster and sinking roof. Despite the dilapidated structure and even more inhospitable environs, the congregants still assemble a minyan week after week, year after year. Most remarkable of all is the unflagging optimism of these people. "When one person leaves or dies," remarks Mr. Sacks, the unofficial rabbi, acting president and caterer, "someone else seems to come along to his place. This is the miracle of Intervale Avenue."

Whether you term it a miracle or not, the concern for this community's welfare is indeed inspiring: some Jews commute from New York suburbs to attend Saturday services and volunteer groups regularly distribute food and other necessities to the community's needy. Still, a fierce pride possesses the elderly residents, who refuse handouts and subsist on meager savings or, in the case of an 82 year old woman, maintain a seamstress shop. While their families plead for them to move—even the police suggest a safer neighborhood—the congregants remain steadfast. "When the shul goes, I go," asserted one determined member.

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What's the Chinese word for rabbi? Actually, there is none, but Daniel Jeremy Silver uses an equivalent term when a Chinese official asked his occupation. Writing in the winter 1981 issue of the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Rabbi Silver described his recent visit to China along with a fascinating account of Chinese

Jewish history. Although no physical remnant of the community exists now—the impoverished Kailong Jews were forced to sell even the synagogue bricks—Jesuit and medieval travelers recorded their unusual encounters with these people, enabling historians to tell the story of this exotic community (see *Jewish World*, Jan. 9).

Mainly residing in Kailong during the medieval period, the Jewish population never exceeded more than ten thousand in the entire country. They lived alongside another much larger minority Muslim community, who called them "blue turbaned Muslims." The Kailong synagogue combined Jewish and Chinese rituals: a *meitzitzah* separated women from men and incense was burned in a memorial hall to honor their dead and Confucius. The community ceased to exist in the 19th century, the last rabbi dying around 1800. Rabbi Silver notes that only a few "woebegone photographs" taken by travelers and republished in encyclopedias prove that, "yes, China's Jews really looked Chinese."

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But Can You Buy Lukshin Kugel at Notre Dame Dept. . . . Interviewed by the Brandeis student newspaper, *The Justice*, at her father's Playboy offices, Christine Hefner, a 1974 graduate, denied feeling uncomfortable attending a predominantly Jewish school. In retrospect, however, she thinks it is "ruly outrageous that you could not get a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich at Brandeis."

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A Jewish newspaper parody once contained an ad pleading for new subscribers to the *Jewish Daily Forward* with the following honest admission: "You don't have to read Yiddish to buy it." Well, now not only can you buy it but you can read it too—the Sunday *Forward* contains a special English language supplement, featuring translations of previous published stories and articles plus some original pieces.

A recent article was reminiscent of the late Harry Golden's "Only in America" stories: A 31 year old Jewish police officer is also a professional clown. As he performs in various neighborhoods throughout the city

to delighted passersby, his antics convey a serious message—to educate the public on techniques of crime prevention.

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Performing is an age-old Jewish tradition which probably inspired the NYU School of Arts Drama Review to devote an entire issue to the rich and varied history of Jewish Theater. In an introductory essay, the magazine editor points out the impossibility of "covering" a subject so vast, expressing the more modest aim of exploring only some varieties of Jewish Theater.

The result is a fascinating survey, describing the Haifa Theatre Project Group, the Jewish State Theatre of Moscow and an East European Purim performance including the music and lyrics with bilingual puns. While Yiddish Theater has received wide attention, Yiddish vaudeville, according to Marc Slobin, a Wesleyan musicology professor, "remains virtually untouched." For this journal issue, Slobin translated a playlet entitled "Among the Indians," by H.I. Minkes—the only extant script of Yiddish vaudeville. Contemporary Jewish American entertainment, he claims, derives from this little studied Yiddish comedy form.

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On January 18, ceremonies throughout the United States commemorated Reverend Martin Luther King's birthday. The slain civil rights leader had very close associations with a rabbinical organization, according to an article in the fall issue of *Conservative Judaism*. In May 1963, 19 rabbis representing the Rabbinical Assembly went to Birmingham, Alabama to declare their support for the nascent movement to achieve black equality. Archivist Rabbi Michael Schurdrich notes that many letters contained in the Rabbinical Assembly Archives demonstrate the profound concern and support for Dr. King's cause.

Ten days before his assassination, Dr. King addressed the annual R.A. convention and heard several hundred rabbis sing "We Shall Overcome" in Hebrew. Deeply moved, Dr. King said, "I have heard 'We Shall Overcome' probably more than I have heard any other song over the last few years. . . but tonight was the first time that I ever heard 'We Shall Overcome' in Hebrew. It was a beautiful experience for me."

the world at large did not appreciate just how much

# A Rabbi In China

*Daniel Jeremy Silver*

THE *kehillah* of Kaifeng called its rabbi *wu-ssu-tu*. The term appears to be a transliteration into Chinese of a Persian word, *ustad*, which means master or teacher. When I found that the immigration officer of the People's Republic of China who was handling our papers at the Canton railway depot did not understand my occupation as listed on my passport, I trotted out this newly-learned, old Chinese term. His eyes remained blank.

In China there are advantages to a title which no one understands. The Chinese need to know who you are or, rather, how important you are. The bureaucracy would lose face if a person was not given proper due. "Know before whom you stand," as a Chinese proverb, would represent a political warning rather than a theological statement. Since China's officials are afraid to admit ignorance (such an admission would diminish their face), they tend not to do the natural thing and ask. So a title not properly understood is inevitably magnified (better to do more than less), and we were treated with a deference to which this rabbi could easily become accustomed.

In the early spring of 1980 my wife and I spent a little over three weeks in China while I was on sabbatical leave. I came armed with the familiar set of romantic notions about Jews entering China centuries ago as members of the long caravans which traversed the Great Silk Road from Persia to Cathay bringing the wine, cotton and coin of the West to trade for the paper, silk and tea of the East. I had once felt myself face to face with just such an ancestor trader when I paused before the clay figure of a wine merchant dressed in a long traveling coat and bearing on his face unmistakable semitic features, shelved in the exhibition halls of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, among the figurines which had been found in a Tang Dynasty tomb. Actually, as I learned later, this figurine probably had been modeled after a Parsee or Muslim or Armenian Nestorian rather than a Jew. In dress

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and general look these men were not distinguishable, and Jews were a decided minority among the traders who banded together to form those slow-moving caravans which, a thousand and more years ago, crossed and recrossed the southern steppes of Russia between Samarkend and Tashkent and the cities east of the Great Wall.

On our way to the Far East we had stopped in Delhi where our first visit was to India's National Museum. Among its treasures this museum displays a trove of artifacts discovered around the turn of the century in the wastelands of Chinese Turkestan by Sir Mark Aurel Stein: Buddhist banners of intricate weave, naive wooden tomb figures modeled after life, and fragments of fresco painting which feature the full-fleshed beauty admired in Tang China. Stein's finds, which included a sizeable manuscript collection, enabled scholars for the first time to gain some intimate knowledge of the people who had lived on the Asian steppes and of the traders, including Jews, who took to the open road.

Our guide-curator described Sir Mark as a British civil servant, one-time Commissioner of Education in the Punjab, who had spent his vacations traveling to the far places and unearthing Asia's hidden history rather than hunting tigers or playing polo with colleagues. This is both true and misleading. Actually, Stein was a Hungarian *yeshivah bachur* afflicted with brilliance and *Wanderlust* who, like so many of his generation (he was born in 1862), abandoned the culture of his childhood for opportunity in the larger world, a *hejira* which ultimately led him from Budapest to Vienna to London and then, surprisingly, to India. There, while his colleagues in the Raj drank themselves into early graves, Stein gained immortality as the westerner who uncovered the history of the "horse people," the Tartars and Mongols, who periodically fell upon China, the Near East and Europe, pillaging, conquering and changing the course of history.

Stein had gone into the high Asian wilderness and at an oasis in Chinese Turkestan, Dadan-Uiliq, he had located a cache of manuscripts which included a letter dated 718, written in Judeo-Persian, using Hebrew characters, in which a trader in China asks a co-religionist back home for help in disposing of an unwanted acquisition—a flock of rather mangy sheep. On a later expedition, at a site known as the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Tun-Huang, Stein discovered another sizeable manuscript deposit which included a parchment on which a *selihah* prayer had been set forth. This Hebrew prayer, which can be dated to the eighth or ninth century, consists of alternate lines from the Prophets and Psalms, asks God's forgiveness for the bearer's sins and was, in all probability, carried as an amulet to

protect the trader against the dangers of the journey. Here was proof that Jews had been among the traders.

In preparation for our trip I read up on the more recent literature and discovered that, contrary to my early impressions, though some Jews who settled in China may have taken the overland route, it is more likely that the medieval Jewish settlers who are reported in China by various travelers, primarily Arab, came by sea from Persia or Yemen via India and Sumatra. Once they reached the ports of China they followed China's extensive river system to such important trading centers as Peking, Nanking, Hangchow and Kaifeng. This was the route taken by most Near Eastern and Indian traders and settlers, and there is every reason to believe the Jews followed the familiar patterns of trade and migration. A fifteenth century dedicatory stele in Kaifeng, which once stood in the court of the city's synagogue, describes the Jews as originating in Tien-Chu, which is one of the many Chinese designations for India, and calls them cloth merchants, thus suggesting that they specialized in weaving and dyeing.

If their way East is uncertain there is no doubt that Jews lived in the Middle Kingdom for many centuries. That incomparable teller of tall tales, the tenth century wanderer-fraud, Eldad Ha-Dani, claimed to have been ransomed from Chinese captivity by one of the leaders of the Lost Ten Tribes. The River Sambatyon, like Eden, was believed to be to the East, and the identification of China's Jews with the Lost Tribes was a popular medieval concept, particularly among Sephardic Jews, as can be seen in such works as Moses b. Isaac Edrehi's *Ma'aseh Nissim* (1818). Marco Polo met Jews in China on his first voyage (1286). The stele mentioned above dates the dedication of the synagogue in Kaifeng, then the capital of the Northern Sung Kingdom, to 1163. The Arab journalist, Ibn Khurdadbih (mid-ninth century) describes the sea and land routes which Jewish merchants, whom he calls Radanites, followed from Gaul to the Great Wall. Another Arab journal of the tenth century (Abu Zaid) reports a massacre of Muslims, Parsees, Christians and Jews in Khan-Fu (Canton?) during a dynastic rebellion.

Nine hundred years later, in 1722, a French Jesuit, Jean Domenge, visited the synagogue at Kaifeng, then the capital of Honan Province, and drew a sketch of a *ba'al kore*, dressed in typical mandarin fashion, complete with Chinese style *kippah* and pigtail, reading from a Torah encased in Yemenite fashion. China's Jews were practicing Jews.

Settlement in China followed on trade. The history of the *kehil-*

*lah* of Kaifeng and its synagogue, the only community of whose history more than a passing reference or two survives, has been known in the West since the sixteenth century when Jesuit missionaries first made contact with these folk and sent a record of the mission to their superiors in Rome. It happened this way. In the sixteenth century the Ming emperors welcomed to China a group of Jesuit priests because the country needed to master the new sciences of the West, particularly astronomy and mathematics, in which these priests were also trained. In 1605 a Kaifeng Jew, who had passed the provincial level examinations, traveled to Peking to lobby for a magistracy for which his degree qualified him. Ai Tien had heard of the arrival in Peking of Westerners of a scriptural faith and had mistaken these westerners, the Jesuits, for Jews. His government business completed, he visited the mission where he mistook a triptych which displayed a Madonna holding the infant Jesus and John the Baptist as a child for Rebecca and her twins. Matteo Ricci, the senior priest, disabused Ai Tien of his mistaken identification, but followed up this chance meeting by sending a subordinate to Kaifeng. Ten years later when Ricci's journal was published in Europe it included the report of this priest and the Western world gained knowledge of China's Jewish community.

The news caused considerable excitement. In many Christian notions of the Second Coming, the world-wide spread of Jews and their subsequent conversion was held to be a messianic prerequisite, and information on the Jews of China suggested that if only they were soon converted the millenium might dawn. Beyond this there was a special theological interest among Christian Bible commentators. The Church had long held that after the emergence of Christianity the rabbis had edited and made erasures in the Torah so as to excise all of God's promises about the Christ-Messiah. If Kaifeng's Torah scrolls were truly ancient (all of the community's records suggested that the Jewish migration to China had taken place in the centuries before the Crucifixion), its scrolls might prove to be originals, uncensored, and provide the long-sought original text. Over the succeeding decades the Jesuits of the China Mission tried to beg, borrow or steal one of the Kaifeng scrolls in order to have it examined as proof of Christian claims. They were not successful.

There were other reasons for the high degree of interest in China's few thousand Jews which Christian Europe evidenced, including, of all things, a long-ranging dispute between the Jesuit and Franciscan orders over the question whether a formal religious renunciation should be demanded of Confucian converts. The Jesuits, first



on the scene and realists always, sought to allow such converts to add Catholicism to their familiar habits without any formal renunciation. They argued that Confucius was a philosopher, not a prophet; that Confucianism was a moral philosophy, not a religion; and that there was nothing idolatrous in the veneration of ancestors or pantheist in the veneration of the Heavens. They saw no reason to make the Chinese give up these practices. The Franciscans, on the other hand, defined Confucian thought and ritual as idolatrous and polytheist; hence, they required the convert to separate himself completely from these forms. They held that the Jesuits' practice represented an attack on the integrity of Catholic teaching and asked Rome to rule that the Jesuits be more demanding.

What had Kaifeng's Jews to do with the so-called "Rites Controversy?" The Jesuits tried to reinforce their case by citing the practice of this synagogue. Jews were known to follow faithfully the Torah's strict rules against *avodah zarah*; yet, the synagogue included an ancestor's hall where incense was offered before memorial tablets, not only to the patriarchs and the community's own dead, but even to Confucius. If Jews, known for their strictness in such matters, did not define Confucian practice as a pagan religion but considered it a philosophy rather than a salvific doctrine, could not the Church take a similar position?

After the news spread many tried to visit Kaifeng. Sadly, there is no indication that Jews were among those who sought to come. I prefer to think that medieval Jewry lacked the opportunity to make the trip, though there are indications that the Jews of Cochin and the B'nai Israel of India knew of their co-religionists across the Himalayas.

Our itinerary did not include Kaifeng. The city has not been opened to tourism, but I confess I made little effort in that direction. Reading the extended work on *Chinese Jews* (1942) by the one-time Anglican Bishop of Honan, William Charles White, I learned that there no longer existed in Kaifeng a self-conscious community of Jews, or even any physical trace of their synagogue, whose sizeable precincts are known from drawings rendered by the Jesuit priest-visitor, Jean Domange, in 1722. I also had read the more recent articles by Donald David Leslie and Rudolf Lowenthal which revise and correct White's enthusiasts' errors. Here was a past I would have liked to visit, but the impoverished remnants of this *kehillah* had dismantled the synagogue and sold its pillars and bricks for scrap in the mid-nineteenth century and nothing remained to be seen. China's Jews have a past but no present. Their only present is represented by a

few weebegone photographs taken by travelers early in this century and regularly republished in encyclopedias and monographs, apparently to prove that, yes, China's Jews really looked Chinese.

An aside. A rabbi in Asia senses that he is never in a place where Jews have not been before; but in Asia *shelilat hagolah* is not a debatable Zionist thesis but a statement of recent history. There are today fewer than ten thousand Jews among the two billion citizens of Asia, a statistic which not only indicates an absolute reduction in numbers but suggests a reality which should give pause to our more fervent mission-of-Israel apologetes who tout Jews and Judaism as the necessary leaven in the development of civilization. In Asia we cannot claim to be one part in sixty.

One day while we were in Kunming, a city best known to the West as the Chinese terminus of the Burma Road of World War II fame, I passed up lunch to stroll through the city. About a half hour's walk from the hotel I noticed a red cloth embroidered with a star and crescent hanging from a courtyard balcony, and found that I had stumbled on one of the several mosques of Kunming. A crowd, as always, soon gathered, and in gracious sign language I was invited into a modest yard which was bounded in the rear by a wooden lecture hall. From ground level three steps led onto a columned porch whose two ends were formed by a plaster wall. Someone had painted picture postal card scenes of Mecca and Medina on these walls. Just inside the door there was a low table with flowers and vases. The interior space was a single, two-story room. To the rear of the open hall there was a *mithrab* and a preacher's seat. A tiled motto, decorated with ornate Arabic calligraphy, was recessed into the wall which faced Mecca. The floor was covered with prayer rugs. Except for the painted scenes, a Chinese synagogue might have had much the same look. There would have been an ark recessed into the center of the west wall suggesting the direction of Jerusalem. The *Shema* would have been engraved on the wall plaque. Originally, both mosque and synagogue would have included an imperial memorial tablet hung under the scriptural text. Imperial China required that all faiths kowtow to the emperor. Jews escaped violating the command, "you shall not bow down to them or serve them," by "bowing the head and bending the knee" in honor of the King of Kings. The royal inscription just happened to be on the same wall as the *Shema*.

This simple hall with its plain wood ceiling, undecorated columns and low table with vases and flowers so Chinese in character, suggests the feeling of a Chinese synagogue. To the left there was even a *mehitza*—a draw curtain on a bare wire which allowed

women to sit in a space at the extreme far right of the room.

Jews had lived in Kunming. Marvin Tokayer, one-time rabbi of the Jewish Center in Tokyo, interviewed in 1974 a minor Kuomintang bureaucrat, one Shih Hung-mo, an interview recorded in Michael Pollak's *Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries*, who told him simply: "My name in Chinese is . . . I was born in 1924 in Kunming city, Yunnan Province, into the leading family among the Jewish communities in Yunnan Province who belong to the first batch (of Jews) that came to China in A.D. 620 (p. 260)." Pollak's book, incidentally, is the most recent summing of the literature and is particularly useful for its analysis of the role of China's Jews in Western, particularly Christian, imagination. Shih Hung-mo may have been born into a family of Jewish ancestry, but it was certainly no longer involved in Jewish practice. The records, unfortunately, tell us nothing of any synagogue in Kunming or about that community's makeup or history. For Chinese Jewry Kaifeng is both type-site and the only known example.

The synagogue building of Kaifeng disappeared around 1850. The few remaining Jews, or some of them, sold its beams and bricks for a few taels of silver. But before we fault these people too severely let us remember that survival is the first law of nature. By this time Kaifeng's Jews were impoverished and could not afford to concern themselves with the needs of historians and tourists who might want to visit their synagogue a hundred years hence. A letter from Kaifeng's community, written within a year or two of the synagogue's dismantling, indicates that only one old lady remembered anything of the religious tradition. No one could any longer read Hebrew. The last rabbi had died around 1800. The Jewish religious enterprise in Kaifeng had long since faltered and weakened.

Twentieth-century travelers occasionally met and photographed a Chinese person from Kaifeng or elsewhere who, like Shih, knew that their families had been Jews but nothing about the practice of Judaism. It was rabbinic Judaism which had been practiced. The Jewish way had disappeared in the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from the Middle Kingdom. By contrast, the Jesuits who had visited Kaifeng in the early seventeenth century described a community where males were circumcised; the Sabbath was observed; the liturgy was Hebraic; the familiar holidays were followed; the Torah chanted according to the cycle with which we are accustomed and dietary laws observed. Among the names by which these Jews were known to their neighbors was "those who pluck the sinew."



The annual cycle of Torah reading was divided into fifty-three sections, as was the custom in Yemen, but this is also the form Maimonides prescribes in the *Mishneh Torah*. Little is yet known with certainty about the sources of Kaifeng's *minhag*. The Torah (there were at least twelve in Kaifeng during the Middle Ages) was read by a bare-footed *ba'al kore* from an encased scroll and, apparently, many could act in this role. Textual commentaries and colophon notes were written in Judeo-Persian, which was the lingua franca of the medieval trading centers of the East.

China's Jews, of course, did not escape the pressures of cultural assimilation. Chinese, probably Mandarin, became their everyday tongue. The honoring of parents mandated by the fourth Commandment of the Decalogue was interpreted as identifying Jewish family norms with the Confucian requirement of filial piety, a commingling of ideas which was ritualized when Kaifeng's Jews began to burn incense to the Patriarchs and other ancestors in a separate hall of their synagogue. In the good years when their elders were still rabbinically learned and their religious schools effective, these Jews may have used Hebrew value terms among themselves; but inevitably, traditional norms were transformed and translated into the nouns the Chinese language made available, the practice made necessary in order to explain Judaism to neighbors and to their own children. When *Adonai* became *Theos*, God's name in the Greek world and a less intimate name, theology began to replace history as the way to talk about God; similarly, *Adonai* lost some of its implicit force as a personal god when it became *Tien*, the Chinese name for Heaven. The faith of China's Jews certainly had a philosophical caste. *Halachah*, of course, literally means the way, but when *halachah* becomes *Tao*, the way, it takes on distinct and unexpected speculative levels of meaning. *Tien* and *Tao* appear on a dedicatory stele (1489) which once stood in the synagogue court. This inscription, incidentally, quotes from the *Analecfs*, *The Doctrine of the Means*, and the *Book of Changes*, but not from the Torah itself; identifies Abraham's search as one for Cheng Chiao, "correct religion," that is, truth, and clearly indicates that correct religion is based on the way (Tao), purity (Ching), truth (Chang), ritual (Li), and worship (Pai), all terms heavy with Confucian overtones. The stele stood in an open public space and was intended for outsiders, it may actually have been written by a hired non-Jewish scholar; but one senses that Kaifeng's Jewish leaders would have accepted Moses Mendelssohn's emphasis on Judaism as a distinct ritual which nevertheless shares

common convictions with all high-minded (read "dominant") traditions.

The Confucian religion and this religion, although they agree on essential points and differ in secondary ones, yet the principles of establishing the mind and restraining the conduct are nothing more than establishing the Way of Heaven, venerating ancestors, giving high regard to the relations between the Prince and his ministers, being filial to parents, living in harmony with wife and children, preserving the distinction between superiors and inferiors and among neighborly relations with friends. In short, these principles do not go beyond the Five Relationships (White, II 14-15).

That day I could have walked every street in the city of Kunming and not found a Jew. No one of us should go to China to find employment as a *wu-shu-tu*. So the question I faced, so unexpectedly, that noon hour was why Islam had survived in China and not our people. The answer would seem to rest on numbers. Kaifeng's community never exceeded twenty-five hundred. In all probability there were never more than ten thousand Jews in all of China. In the Middle Ages the Muslim community of China certainly numbered well into the hundreds of thousands. Today there are forty thousand Muslims in Kunming alone. Then, too, Islam came to China as an imperialist faith, while Judaism came as a faith accustomed to sufferance. Whatever missionary ambitions Jews may once have cherished had been whipped out of them by the tragic defeats of the first and second centuries.

China's Jews came from Muslim lands where they had long experience with the cruel joys of toleration and the necessity of enduring economic, political and social discrimination. In China their small numbers and the arbitrariness of governmental authority would have suggested the wisdom of continuing to keep a low profile. Geography also played a role. Jews had to come from months away in the Middle East. There were large Muslim populations close by in Southeast Asia and India from which China could far more readily be reached. Centuries passed in Kaifeng without a word or visitor from the outside Jewish world. Faith may be a private matter, but, from time to time, even the most loyal need confirmation that they are not alone.

Incidentally, the medieval Hebrew term for China, *Sin*, suggests great distance. Chapter 49 of the book of Isaiah contains a prophecy of return to Zion which includes the promise, "Look these are

coming from afar; these from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinnin" (Is. 12). The Sinnin to which Deutero-Isaiah referred probably is Seyene a place on the Nile in distant Nubia (at least the text of a Dead Sea scroll provides this reading), but the traditional commentators, for the most part, simply identified Sinnin with whatever place was at the greatest remove. And when medieval Jews needed a term for the furthest place, China, they simply appropriated this name.

Those who still falter before programs of Jewish outreach or who preach Zero Population Growth with non-discriminating zeal should remember not only Amalek but Kaifeng. There is such a phenomenon as critical mass in religious sociology as well as physics. Numbers are consequential. The Memorial Book of the Kaifeng Synagogue which, incidentally, is to be found in the Rare Book Room of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, lists a large number of women who bore Chinese or Muslim names. This suggests that in Kaifeng Jewish men took non-Jewish wives with fair regularity. In a traditional community intermarriage becomes an accepted norm only when necessity overmasters inherited taboos. There was no alternative, and since these Jews came from a Muslim environment and in China tended to live in the same cities as Muslim traders, as numbers dropped many seem to have moved over. Islam was always the larger element and its aniconism was more congenial to Jews than the florid iconography and inescapable idolatry of the Buddhist and Taoist shrines. In their turn, the Chinese seem always to have had a problem separating out the western unitarian faiths and often called the Jews simply "the blue-turbanned Muslims." The Muslims wore white turbans.

Besides the *wu-ssu-tu*, the Kaifeng community had synagogue personalities known as *man-la*. The *man-las* of Kaifeng filled various roles necessary to communal Jewish life including *shamash*, *shochet*, and *sofer*. The term, which is not Chinese, seems to derive from the same root as mullah. Jews, too, it would appear, took over Muslim forms, otherwise how explain how the title of a minor Islamic functionary came to be applied to those who served Kaifeng Jewry in similar roles.

I did not identify myself to the folk who opened the mosque for my inspection. After my experience at the immigration counter in Canton, I doubt whether they would have understood my interest; but that was not the whole explanation. Though the Jews had come to China in the same junks and over the same silk route as the Arabs, and lived cheek by jowl in the same communities, their relationship was



rarely an easy one. Muslims brought to China a sense of superiority over Jews which had been bred into them back home in Dar-al-Islam. Muslims, too, were alien to China's mainstream culture and consequently insecure; and there always must be someone to kick after you have taken your licks. Kaifeng's records tell of many indignities and attacks inflicted by the white-turbanned on the blue-turbanned. In the late nineteenth century an English traveler, inquiring about the synagogue, reported that he was mobbed and nearly killed in Kaifeng when a group of Muslims mistook him for a Jew.

That anxieties of this type should lurk beneath the surface of my mind I found on examination to be surprising. China was not a frightening place. The atmosphere is quite unlike that of the U.S.S.R. People on the street are helpful rather than surly. They are eager to talk rather than to create distance, but throughout Asia the Muslim population has been infected with a new sense of power. Israel is the enemy and, by extension, all Jews. I had sensed this particularly in India and Malaysia and I guess I had carried these shadows into China. Whatever the cause of my insecurity, I remember wondering how much China's hard-line, anti-Israel stance in the international arena had to do with her national interest, how much with the Third World's and Communist World's predictable espousal of the Arab cause, and how much with the existence of a large Muslim minority within her borders. It is estimated that Muslims make up five percent of China's present population. China is not a racially homogeneous society and the central government has problems not only holding a vast and disparate community together (provincialism always has been a fact of life in China) but with the task of imposing Communist ways, which are doctrinally affirmed only by a minority, upon everyone. The central government may have good reason to be cautious about creating unnecessary unhappiness among its minorities.

There is a sense in which China is not yet a nation. In the papers and in private conversation people are identified by their province of origin. Regionalism is particularly strong in the south, where the dominant Han racial and ethnic type lives side by side with sizeable communities of so-called minority peoples—mostly mountain and steppe folk—who, since time immemorial, have lived on their own in the mountains which separate China proper from the lush ricelands of southern Asia and the nearly empty lands on the eastern fringe of central Asia. In the south the national government is still wrestling with the elemental task of teaching Chinese to many of the minority peoples. One night in Kunming we were shown a propaganda film of

happy minority peoples before the gate of the Yunan Minorities University, dancing the day away in ethnic costume to the accompaniment of traditional rhythms. The very need for the film suggests the extent of the problem. China, like the U.S.S.R., must struggle with centrifugal forces. On the map China is a country. In our thought we tend to think of China as a distinct culture. In reality China is an agglomeration of various peoples and cultures on the way to becoming unified.

In Asia *shelilat ha-golah* is an existential reality rather than a debatable Zionist proposition. With the exception of a racially tight island like Japan where few, if any, foreigners were allowed to enter and where there is no evidence of early Jewish settlement, Jews long since established communities in most of the cities of Asia; but the older centers are no longer there. In Bangkok, Singapore, Taiwan and Tokyo resident aliens have organized *minyanim* and sometimes even built Jewish centers, but those are communities without roots. When there is no more business or employment they will move on. Most educate their children in the land of their passport which is rarely the land they now live in.

The practice of these marginal communities did help me understand what life must have been like for the early traders and something about the mix of Judaism and policy in their communities. When we arrived in Bangkok I found that the Jewish Center would be closed for *Shabbat*. The previous week an under-secretary of the Israeli embassy had celebrated his son's *bar mitzvah*. In my week there was no special occasion, hence, no service.

My calls elicited the information that alongside the center's erratic schedule of worship there was a regular downtown *minyan*. I called and identified myself, and after my credentials were checked, itself an interesting process, I was invited to present myself at six o'clock at a jewelry wholesale office on the fifth floor of an office building not far from the Oriental Hotel. On arrival I found myself among a group of men associated with the international jewelry trade: resident merchants, factors, messengers and messengers. Most had been born in Iran, Afghanistan and India, though to a man they held Israeli or American passports. Their ties were with Manhattan's Diamond Mart, Antwerp and Netanyahu. Sephardim all, they came together each week for worship, followed by a Sabbath meal at which the trade's elder presided. Here talk was of general and business interest, and besides the information that was shared, it was at this table that business disputes were resolved. Admission to the table represented admission to the trade. Since contracts are unenforceable

in the courts of the Third World, inclusion or excommunication from the group enforced honesty and cooperation. Here, in real life, was a traditional community in which the strands of commerce and religion were entwined inextricably and the religious ties clearly are primary.

I had identified myself as a rabbi, and though some of their welcome dissolved when they discovered I was not orthodox, it returned once I had a *kippah* on my head and had shown that I could *daven*. In the event we had a rip-roaring discussion of the heresies of Reform and I came to appreciate the practical force of their orthodoxy. Tradition was the bond of this community and any deviation would have weakened it. Moreover, halachic norms provided them with at least the feeling of having a legal code. I came to understand that political emancipation was not the only prerequisite for the emergence of the Reform movement. Before the authority of the *halachah* could be challenged Jews had to develop sufficient trust in a country's courts to enable them to let loose of their pragmatic reliance on traditional legal forms.

One of those who opened the doors of Kunming's mosque to me had indicated that daily services were held though the government did not permit any broadcast of the call of the muezzin. Here was another instance of a fact which, frankly, surprised me: shrines, particularly in southern China, were crowded with worshippers as well as tourists. The first two of the three weeks we spent in China were the days of the Chinese New Year. In Nanning, Kunming and Cheng-du we found young and old genuflecting before images of the Buddha, lighting candles before Taoist Lohans and burning joss sticks in the large bronze lavers which are placed in the forecourt of most temples. Many Chinese temples, particularly the one-time central Confucian compounds, are in disrepair. The forecourt of the most famous Confucian pagoda in Kunming is a metal fabricating shop, and the buildings themselves are shattered and crumbling ruins. Other shrines have been turned into parks and libraries, but the pieties of China have not been obliterated by two generations of Communist indoctrination or the Cultural Revolution.

On another day we visited a Buddhist temple in the hills west of Kunming. A sweeping circular wall enclosed the shrine and its park. The sanctuary was in the eastern quadrant. An open meeting hall, probably originally a lecture hall, lay against the west wall. The shrine was full of people lighting incense sticks and carrying branches of fruit blossoms as offerings. The meeting hall was filled with members of the Young Communist League boisterously engaged in the type of contests I organize at the annual Temple picnic. The



worshippers were not looking over their shoulders at the picnickers nor were the young Communists taking the names of the worshippers. There was simply no tension in the air.

It was a relaxed scene and those we talked to emphasized that the Cultural Revolution was over and that relaxation was a hallmark of a new era. At no time did party cadres march past us shouting slogans and waving Mao's Little Red Book. A professor friend told us that entrance to the universities is again by competitive examination and studies are being pursued by the able. The side streets are lined with grocery stalls where farmers offer what they have grown on their private plots.

How different is post-Mao China? Over lunch in Cheng-du an American, teaching English in the provincial university, insisted that a fundamental change had taken place and that the period of the ruthless enforcement of Communism had ended. People had suffered too much ever to allow the government again to convulse their lives. Wherever we went we heard the "Gang of Four" branded as the junta which had caused all of China's troubles, though no one took the time to explain how three men and one woman could bring a society of a billion people to a standstill. At one point a student made the tentative suggestion that the Chinese are conditioned to obey. When I suggested that the Cultural Revolution must then be seen as of Mao's devising, the thought died in the conversational air.

The Cultural Revolution brought China's economy and administration to a near standstill and the errors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are admitted rather freely. Peasants who can barely add two and two are not prime candidates for degrees in advanced physics, and party loyalty does not guarantee that a person possesses the technical or administrative skills required to run a modern industry. The administration of Hua and Teng had no alternative but to return the talented to their responsibilities, bright minds to their studies, and to allow farmers and workers a bit of income on the side. There has been relaxation, but . . . the Freedom Wall with its posters can no longer be found in Peking or, indeed, in any Chinese city. Last fall China held show trials of several men who had spoken too freely with foreigners and had televised their confessions and severe punishment as a national warning. The week we left China a new Espionage Act was published which defined spying as telling a foreigner almost anything one is not authorized specifically to tell him.

China needs trade with the West and the hard dollars with which to trade; hence, tourism. But there is evident concern that the tourist

meet those the authorities want him to meet and hear what they want to be heard. In China you visit where you are allowed to visit and talk to those who are assigned to talk to you or with those whom some authority wishes you to meet. You may have other names but, somehow, you will not make contact. We had the name of an American who taught journalism, of all things, at the university of Peking. We knew the department of the university where he worked. The hotel operator told us that she could not reach his office. When we pressed her she connected us with the Chinese Tourist Bureau. We had heard that he lived in the Friendship Hotel, a vast compound of buildings where we ourselves stayed. When we asked for his room number, we were told the hotel kept no record of its guests.

Concern over contacts has grown as the number of tourists has increased. We were allowed to exchange dollars for yuan, the national currency. Two weeks after we left China the government ordered that henceforth foreigners shall use a special script which can be spent only in authorized hotels, shops and restaurants. I wandered quite freely through the cities we visited and had many an interesting conversation in out of the way stores and simple restaurants. It will no longer be possible to go in where fancy strikes you, sit down, order tea and talk, for the tourist will not be able to pay.

China is not replacing authoritarian communism with a less arbitrary democratic socialism. Relaxation must be seen as a tactical maneuver, designed to accomplish a few practical goals—revive the economy, upgrade China's technology—rather than a shift of political goals. Ideologues may change their means but never their ends.

As a theologian I found that I had an insight into China which was useful as a complement to that of the political scientist. Communist Chinese policy is based on a messianic ideology which insists that certain irresistible economic laws determine the course of history. Maoism is no more or less than a modern apocalypse which purports to know what the course of history will be. Deng sees Mao's mistake as one of impatience. He was not misguided; rather, unfortunately, Mao became a *mekapetz baketz*, one who forces the end, the classic error of the fervent messianist. Mao became so caught up in his dream that he tried to use the force of the state to hasten the coming of the messiah and history cannot be rushed.

Mao was troubled by the contradictions evident in Chinese life. Despite years of egalitarian indoctrination, mind work is still prized more highly than manual labor. China was to be a worker's paradise, but the children of the old privileged classes earned a disproportionate number of places in each university class. In every city sleek, black,

nine-passenger limousines with curtained windows and Turkish rugs on the floor criss-cross the town from the compounds of luxury apartments to government offices. The old scholar nobility has disappeared, but the elite of the Communist Party sought the familiar privileges of power and moved heaven and earth to get their children into the university. As the free market shows, the capitalistic spirit has not been lost. The Cultural Revolution was designed to resolve these contradictions and so hasten the consummation of history. But, as Jesus or Shabbatai Zvi could have told Mao, you cannot force the messianic age. If it comes, it will come in its own good time.

Today a breed of more patient, but not less doctrinaire, messianists govern China. They have not abandoned the certainties of apocalyptic Marxist messianism for a vague and uncertain vision of a perhaps never to be achieved messianic age. They are still orthodox. Relaxation is a tactic, not a conclusion. The screws of authority are being tightened. On the day we left the one English language paper in Peking reported a speech by Hua in which he spoke of the importance to China of trade with the West, but repeated forcibly the party line of the inevitability of the West's decline and communization.

While there I found myself applying to China the title Theodor Herzl gave his utopian novel, *Old-New Land*. The past is visible and the present is being made to serve the future. Herzl did not come into my mind out of the blue. I often found myself comparing the recent history of our people and the Chinese. We and they represent the world's two traditional scholarship-prizing cultures which, in the course of the last century, had to face the challenges of modernity. I find it striking that, though we were submerged within an alien modernity, we managed to preserve our ties with the past; while China, a world unto herself, far removed from the West, abandoned her past and adopted an alien Western ideology as the national commitment. Were we saved by our scattering which created a situation where no small group could gain the authority to enforce their will upon all of us? China never voted for Mao. Were we saved by long experience adjusting our traditions to changes in the cultural environment? We had adjusted to Greece, Islam and Christendom while China had remained China. It is one of history's more poignant ironies that the Jew who wanted so badly to be let into Europe managed to retain feelings for the continuity of his tradition while the Chinese, who wanted only to be left alone, now are led by those who damn the old ways as reactionary and seek to uproot the old culture, root and branch. China's failure to hold on to her past made me more sensitive to the miracle of our partial success.



Preparing for the trip, I read a good bit of nineteenth and twentieth century Chinese intellectual history and found there many a fascinating analogue to the Jewish experience. Nineteenth century China, too, had its circles of the enlightened; men who were so taken by the new and its manifest power that they dressed in western clothes, sent their sons to western universities and worked to replace old-fashioned categories with modern terms. Towards the close of the last century China's first ambassador to Great Britain, Kuo Sung Tao, was so taken by what he saw that he urged his fellow countrymen to adopt western style political, juridical and educational forms and institutions. He argued that the ability of Russia and the European nations to impose treaty ports and custom rates testified to their superior power. Power is not simply a matter of military potential. Ultimately, power refracts a people's mental attitude and level of education. The West simply was more active, pragmatic and determined than the East. Like the Max Lilienthals of the Pale, Kuo called for the replacement of the *yeshivah* system with a system of European style schools and for the displacement of educational authority from traditional rabbis to academics trained in modern universities.

There was a Chinese *Haskalah* called, in fact, "the New Learning" and led, at first, by those who had been fortunate enough to have combined a traditional education with study abroad. These men produced journals like *Ha-Me'assef* in which they wrote of their hopes and doubts and published the results of an active translation program which made the works of Huxley, Mill, Spencer, John Dewey and Shakespeare available in China. A movement of language reform soon followed, aimed at replacing the elitist and esoteric academic language with *pai-hua*, plain speech. History came again to occupy a central place in Chinese thought and youth fought many an emotional and philosophic battle to free themselves from the age-old veneration of age and authority. Change the speaker and you have the rhetoric of many a Bund meeting.

The Chinese compliment others by saying, "He acts like an old man although still young." Englishmen and Americans encourage one another by saying, "Keep young while growing old." Such is one respect in which the different ways of thought of the East and West are manifested. Youth is like early spring, like the rising sun, like the trees and grass in bud, like a newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life . . . I do not wish to waste my fleeting time in arguing with them (the old generation) on this and that and hoping for them to be reborn and thoroughly remodeled. Tearfully, I merely place my plea before the fresh and vital youth, in the hope that they will achieve self-awareness, and begin to struggle. What is this self-awareness? It is to be conscious of the value and responsibility of

one's young life and vitality, to maintain one's self-respect, which should not be lowered. What is the struggle? It is to exert one's intellect, discard resolutely the old and the rotten, regard them as enemies and as a flood of savage beasts, keep away from their neighborhood and refuse to be contaminated by their poisonous germs (Tse-Tung Chow).

If too much is made of them, parallels are dangerous, but the fact remains that China had its Geigers and Hirschs, yet, let go of the past. Was it because China's adjustment to modernity could not escape being political? In China the direction of modernization was settled on the battlefield rather than in the classroom and study. What the West had that China lacked was power, and those who finally gave China a countervailing power were able to impose their vision. Instead of the emancipation of the individual citizen, the first imperative was the overthrow of the moribund Manchu Dynasty and the achievement of effective territorial sovereignty.

We were saved, to a degree, by powerlessness. God sometimes becomes most real to me in life's paradoxes.

