

AN EARLY CHINESE SOURCE ON THE KAIFENG JEWISH COMMUNITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

The first Chinese to take any interest in the Kaifeng Jewish community, were "K'iu T'ien-sang and Tsiang Yung-chi".¹ In November, 1850, they were sent to Honan "to learn all they could of the Jews" by Bishop George Smith of Victoria in conjunction with the Rev. Dr. W. H. Medhurst. Later on, Smith and Medhurst published the report by K'iu and Tsiang, who gave a detailed account of the conditions of the local community.

Next was the Chinese historian Chang Hsiang-wen, who first studied the problem of the Kaifeng Jews. He visited that place in 1910 and examined the Ming stele, the earliest of three stones with four inscriptions pertinent to the Chinese Jews. The stele under discussion bears two inscriptions on the obverse and reverse side, dating from 1489 and 1512 respectively. A replica of that stele was made on the spot and is deposited in the Royal Ontario Museum at Toronto.²

The scholar and diplomat, Hung Chün 洪鈞 († 1893) mentioned the stele already in his *Yüan-shih i-wen cheng-pu* 元史譯文證補³, and announced that he would append the text of its inscriptions, but failed to do so.

1) A narrative of a mission of inquiry to the Jewish Synagogue of K'aifung fu, on behalf of the London Society for promoting Christianity among the Jews. Shanghai, 1851. A summary of this publication is contained in *The Chinese Repository*, 20:7, July, 1851, Art. 7, pp. 436-466. Unfortunately the Chinese characters of the names of the two emissaries are not given in this report and the present writer, so far, has been unable to trace them.

2) Bishop William C. White: *Chinese Jews*. Asia, New York, 36: 1, January, 1936, p. 61.

3) Ed. 1897, chüan 29, *Yüan-shih ko-chiao ming-k'ao* 元世各教名考, fol. 3a.

E. I. Ezra's study, *Chinese Jews*,⁴ contained a photograph of the stele taken in 1900 on the site of the synagogue.

A few years before Chang Hsiang-wen's visit in 1910, another stele with an unrecognizable inscription dating from 1679 was discovered built into a house.⁵ A third stele with an important inscription dating from 1663 has been preserved in the form of rubbings only, while the stone itself disappeared.⁶

Bishop William C. White, who began the work of the Canadian Church of England at Kaifeng in March, 1910, obtained custody of both, the steles of 1489/1512 and of 1679, in December, 1912. "A year later the stones were bought outright, with no conditions as to their custodianship other than that they were never to leave the province."⁷

The site of the synagogue was sold to the Canadian Church Mission early in 1914. Chang Hsiang-wen's description of its desolate state at that time is corroborated by the photograph in Ezra's study⁴ and by Bishop White's account.⁸

A REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE TA-LIANG 大梁 (KAIFENG) STELE⁹

I had heard of descendants of Jews in the city of Kaifeng, but I could not make out their origin. In the first moon of 1910 my daughter Hsing-hua 星華 accompanied me on a trip to the Sung 嵩 mountain (Honan

4) In *The East of Asia Magazine*, Shanghai, vol. 1, 1902, pp. 278-296; reprinted as a booklet by his son-in-law, Arthur Sopher, with a preface and an appendix in *The China Press*, Shanghai, 1926.

5) Cf. P. h. Berthelot in *Bull. de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, vol. 5, 1905, "La colonie juive de K'ai-fong et les stèles de la synagogue", p. 414. Berthelot reports that the stele of 1679 was originally in the house of a Mr. Chao. In March, 1904, an American engineer by the name of Jenks appealed to the viceroy to have it placed in the open. It was then leaned on the outside against the housewall, where it was enclosed.

6) Ibid. Berthelot, who visited Kaifeng in 1904, could not trace the stele of 1663. Bishop White, who started working there in 1910, stated likewise that it had disappeared. Cf. *Chinese Jews*, op. cit., p. 61; see also his "The Jews of Kaifengfu, in Honan" in the *China Mission Year Book*, 4th issue, Shanghai, 1913, p. 163. The name of the author has there been written "Whyte", instead of "White".

7) White, *Chinese Jews*, p. 60.

8) Ibid.; cf. also *The Jews of Kaifengfu*, pp. 162-163.

9) Chang Hsiang-wen 張相文: *Ta-liang fang-pei-chi* 大梁訪碑記, *Ti-hsüeh tsa-chih* 地學雜誌, 1:2, Hsüan-t'ung 2nd year, 2nd moon (1910), reprinted in *Min-kuo* 9th year, 11th month (Nov., 1920), fol. 6a-10a; the inscriptions of 1489 and 1512 are reproduced on pp. 8a-10a. The article (without the inscriptions) is also contained in Chang's collected works, *Nan-yüan tsung-kao* 南園叢稿, chüan 4, "Travels", fol. 8a-9a.

prov.) and Lo-yang. In Cheng-chou 鄭州 we met a Protestant missionary, who showed us his photograph of a Jewish stele. I had then the opportunity of seeing it for the first time. But the picture was too indistinct to recognize even a single character which annoyed me for a long time. Later on we went eastwards from Loyang to Kaifeng. We unloaded our baggage and everywhere made inquiries from the Kaifeng people, but nobody could tell us of the whereabouts of the Jewish stele. Also my friend, Mr. Lin Yu-jen 林有壬, for four years lecturer in the Military Academy, had heard nothing regarding it from the Kaifeng people. It then occurred to me that the Protestant missionaries must certainly know about it. The next day I went with Mr. Lin and Hsing-hua as interpreter to the Protestant church. The missionary, a certain Mr. K'o 柯, said that the stele was behind the straw-market, in a place called T'iao-chin-chiao Hu-t'ung 挑筋教衙衙.¹⁰ I hurriedly thanked Mr. K'o, hired a cab, and went there. On arrival we discovered a depression full of broken tiles, cattle and horse dung, and a mud puddle, but no so-called Jewish stele. A porter pointed to the northeastern corner and said that the stele was surrounded with a strawmat. So we three hurried to the place, lifted the matting, bent down, and studied the inscriptions. The stele was well preserved, only several scores of characters were damaged. I intended to copy them, but the evil smell was too strong to stay there for long. While I was hesitating, we suddenly noticed an old man peeping at us. The old man gave his name as Chao 趙 and stated that he was himself a follower of the T'iao-chin-chiao 挑筋教.¹⁰ He claimed to have rubbings of the stele in his home.¹¹ I was pleasantly surprised and we accompanied him to his house. When we arrived at his home, he called his nephew to

10) T'iao-chin-chiao 挑筋教, also written Tiao-chin-chiao 刁筋教, i.e., "the sect which extracts the sinews", alludes to the Jewish prescriptions for the slaughtering of animals, thus differentiating them from the Mohammedans. The character tiao 刁 is sometimes erroneously replaced by the character tao 刀 "knife". Because these designations were considered somewhat disparaging, the Jews have sometimes substituted them by T'iao-ching-chiao 挑景教, i.e., "the sect which does not accept Christianity", and by Chiao-ching-chiao 教經教, i.e., "the religion which teaches the scriptures". Cf. R. Löwenthal: *The nomenclature of Jews in China, Collectanea Commissionis Syodalis in Sinis*, Peking, vol. 17, 1944, pp. 366-368, terms no. 32-34 and 39.

11) It has been comparatively easy to obtain in Kaifeng rubbings of the inscriptions of 1489 and 1512, copies of which are also in the hands of the present writer. But the rubbings of the inscription of 1663 are not now available. A reduced reproduction of it is to be found in the work by Jérôme Tobar: *Inscriptions juives de K'ai-fong-fou*. Shanghai 2nd rev. ed. 1912, This book also contains the Chinese text with French translations of the three stone inscriptions of 1489, 1512, and 1663, which must still be considered as the standard renderings in any Western language.

meet us. Everything, the household and ancestor worship, were exactly the same as in an ordinary Chinese home. But, on close inspection, their highbridged noses and deepset eyes likened rather those of the Caucasian race. I questioned them thoroughly about their origin and history. The nephew was also familiar with them, but most of their information was legendary.¹² He alleged:

"We left our fatherland such a long time ago that we cannot trace the exact date. At our first arrival here, there existed altogether seven surnames: Chao 趙, Chin 金, Chang 張, Ai 艾, Kao 高, and two Li 李; *i.e.*, eight families.¹³ We do not know, where the Changs went later on. Now there are six surnames, whose members amount to less than 200 persons. Most of us are small traders. We ought to marry among our co-religionists, but, because the differences between poor and rich are too great, we are sometimes unable to follow this custom. However, we are always keeping the traditions of the *T'iao-chin* [religion], even extracting the nerves and sinews from the meat.¹⁰ Its prescriptions surpass even the Mohammedan religion in purity and truthfulness. The scriptures of our religion were preserved by our ancestors in gilt tubes which were stored in the synagogue.¹⁴ But I heard that several hundred years ago there arrived a Taoist monk, who insisted on airing the scriptures in the sun. A sudden storm sprang up, by which all the scriptures were blown away and disappeared. It was probably taken away by an heavenly spirit.¹⁵ Seventy years ago, a military student by the name of Kao 高, who was more vicious than a tiger, so recklessly trampled upon his co-religionists that he destroyed the synagogue and sold the materials. We could do nothing to prevent him. Several workmen, who were tearing down the synagogue, fell and were killed. That was due to the God of our religion, who cast his anger [against Kao] on to them. After the destruction of the synagogue a long time elapsed; then the district magistrate wanted to take away from us the site of the synagogue and

12) Actually, all the information furnished by the two members of the Chao family was based on facts, although many details were exaggerated or somewhat distorted. That was partly due to superstition.

13) The Chinese, therefore, called the Kaifeng Jews: Ch'i-hsing pa-chia 七姓八家 or "seven clan names or eight families." Cf. *Nomenclature*, p. 365, term no. 26.

14) Cf. the "Narrative" by Smith-Medhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 447. In the synagogue was "a cell in which were deposited t'ien-ching shih-erh t'ung 天經十二筒, the twelve tubes containing the divine writings." White mentions in his article "Chinese Jews", p. 61, that "one of the empty cases, which contained a roll of the Pentateuch, is deposited in the Museum of Toronto."

15) Cf. White, "The Jews of Kaifengfu", p. 165. There the author states that "some time after a Taoist priest in Shanghai was offering Hebrew Scripture rolls for sale."

intended to move our stele. We protested violently and the project was abandoned. Two years ago an Englishman by the name of P'an 潘 visited us during his journey.¹⁶ He said that he had been commissioned by our king to make friendly inquiries about us. Before he left, he took a picture of us. We presented him with a tube,¹⁷ expecting him to hand it over to our king. But these several years until now nothing has been heard of him. I shall leave for Shanghai in order to do business and shall visit my co-religionists, from whom I want to inquire about the present conditions of my country."

I listened politely to this information, paid for the rubbings, and took leave. I believe that the influence of religion on people is very strong; men, who have lost the origin of their religion, are continuing to keep strictly its traditions. This experience convinces me that it is most important for present-day China to reconcile races and religions. Is that not more essential than looking for steles? The inscriptions of the stele were composed during the Ming dynasty. They furnish details regarding the arrival of the followers of this religion and its doctrines. This fact proves that the scriptures were still in existence under the Ming dynasty. During its last years the city of Kaifeng suffered terribly from the rebels. The scriptures must certainly have been lost during that period.¹⁸ According to the inscriptions some of the scriptures came from Ning-po; [Jews] were also residing and serving as officials as far away as Wei-yang 維揚 (now Yang-chou 揚州, Kiangsu prov.) and Ning-hsia 寧夏. This proves that quite a few of them are scattered throughout China and do not live in the city of Kaifeng exclusively. I am hoping to trace them with the help of people, who are interested in recent problems.

16) This foreigner was presumably Oliver Bainbridge. Cf. his article "Chinese Jews" in *The National Geographic Magazine*, Washington, 18:10, October 1907, pp. 621-632; with 7 photos.

17) Cf. footnote 14.

18) As a matter of fact, these scriptures were already destroyed during the flood in 1642. Cf. the inscription of 1663 in T o b a r, *Inscr. juives*, p. 86.