Revising the date of Jewish arrival in Kaifeng, China, from the Song Dynasty (960–1279) to the Hung-wu period (1368–98) of the Ming Dynasty

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Abstract

The Sinologists Chen Changqi, Wei Qianzhi, Zhang Qianhong and Liu Bailu have suggested that the Chinese Jews settled in Kaifeng, China, during the Song Dynasty. However, there are no historical records or physical evidence that prove the existence of a Jewish community during the Song Dynasty. A recent discovery of records refutes the Song-entry theory, and suggests that the synagogue of the Kaifeng Jews was first established during the Ming Dynasty. These records include the description in a Buddhist book Fo-zu Tong-ji (Buddha Almanac) of monk Ni-wei-ni, a sentence that recounts the history of the Kaifeng Jewish Chao clan on a 1679 stela, and the genealogical sequence of the Kaifeng Jewish Li clan in a book, Diary of the Defence of Pien.

The prominent Jesuit Matteo Ricci records the existence of a small Jewish community in Kaifeng, China, after receiving a visit from a Chinese Jew in 1605. This encounter has ever since aroused great interest among Christian organizations and researchers. The debate about the origin, arrival and nature of the Kaifeng Jews is one of the most heated in the entire field of Sino-Judaica, arguably second only to that surrounding the history of the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai. However, many previous studies

were based solely upon either misleading preconceptions or the imagination of researchers instead of historical facts. There is a pressing need for serious thinkers to re-examine the story of the Kaifeng Jews.

Four stelae found at Kaifeng, with inscriptions dating from 1489, 1512, 1663 and 1679, record the important events of a Jewish community. The oldest, that of 1489, commemorates the construction of a synagogue in 1163. The second, that of 1512, details the religious practices of the Kaifeng Jews. The third, that of 1663, commemorates the rebuilding of the synagogue. It also repeats information from the two earlier stelae. The fourth, that of 1679, recounts the history of the Chao clan, the chief patrons of the Kaifeng synagogue. Many researchers believe that the Kaifeng Jews experienced neither discrimination nor persecution during the 800 years (from the Song Dynasty) of their residency in Kaifeng, until a process of gradual assimilation proved complete about 150 years ago. However, the story of the Kaifeng Jews might not be entirely true, and the stelae offer clues as to how they misrepresent the facts. It is difficult to determine when exactly the Jewish community in Kaifeng was formed, as the stelae contradict each other and suggest three entirely different historical periods.

The Han-entry theory

The inscription on the oldest stela, dating from 1489, says that the religion started in India, and the Jews came to China with Western cloth, intended as a tribute for the emperor. An unnamed emperor of the Song Dynasty (960–1279 ce) welcomed them and stated, ‘You have come to Our China; reverence and preserve the customs of your ancestors, and hand them down at Pien-liang [Kaifeng].’ Meanwhile, the 1512 stela indicates unequivocally that their ancestors entered and settled in China during the Han Dynasty

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(206 BCE–220 CE), whereas the third stela even declares that the Kaifeng Jews came to China during the Zhou Dynasty (1100–771 BCE).\(^5\) Chen Yuan completely rejects the Han-entry theory because the earlier 1489 inscription supports a Song Dynasty entry, and no physical evidence can be found to support the Han-entry conjecture:

Yet in the more than one thousand years from Han to [Song,] if there were settlers of Jews, why have they not left a single trace of any person, event, or structure? Why does the [1489] inscription place the transmission of the religion in Song, and not before? The claim that the Kaifeng Jews are descended from those who came to China in Han is not credible. It is possible that some Jews reached China before Han, but the Jews in Kaifeng could not possibly descend from them.\(^6\)

If we compare the above translation by Shapiro with Chen Yuan’s original text in Chinese, we note an apparent error in the translation of the first sentence. The correct translation should be: ‘Yet in the more than one thousand years from Han to Ming’ rather than ‘to Song’. That is to say, Chen Yuan not only rejects the Han-entry theory, but also doubts the Song-entry theory. Although most scholars now accept that the Kaifeng Jews came to China at the end of the tenth century, during the reign of the Song Dynasty, Chen Yuan’s doubts should still be borne in mind when we re-examine the possibility of the Song-entry theory.

The Song-entry theory

It is quite strange that there are no historical records relating to the community during the Song Dynasty. Leslie attributes this merely to an official lack of enthusiasm for non-Chinese cultures,\(^7\) but this is a far from satisfactory explanation. Tributary trades, a form of international business in the Song Dynasty, in which foreign traders brought presents to the emperor, and the emperor rewarded them with more valuable goods, were typically

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documented events. Detailed information of 49 such trades during the Song Dynasty was recorded in the history book Ce Fu Yuan Gui (册府元龟). Nevertheless, we cannot find any clue to the Jews’ arrival in China with Western cloth for any Song emperors.

Both Chen Changqi and Wei Qianzhi argue that the Jews went to China in 998, as Song History records that in the year 998 monk Ni-wei-ni (僧你尾尼) and others had travelled for seven years from India to pay homage to Emperor Song Zhenzong. They take it as given that Ni-wei-ni was not a Buddhist monk but a Jewish rabbi. Zhang Qianhong and Liu Bailu even cite one statement in Song History as proof that a large population of Jewish expatriates, having followed monk Ni-wei-ni all the way from India, went to Kaifeng on 20 February 998. Since these Chinese scholars are influential historians, the idea is popularly accepted in China. Nevertheless, if their arguments are correct, why do the Jews not mention the name of the emperor in the 1489 inscription to make their certificate of residence seem more authentic? The account in Song History is far too brief to tell what gifts monk Ni-wei-ni and his followers took to the emperor. Were there records of monk Ni-wei-ni in any other chronicles from the Song Dynasty, we might solve the problem once and for all. Unfortunately, Zhou Baozhu has searched in almost all the relevant historical books and documents, and he could find no document concerning the arrival of monk Ni-wei-ni. However, after careful research in Fo-zu Tong-ji (佛祖统计 Buddha Almanac), a Buddhist book composed by monk Zhi-pan (志磐) in the Song Dynasty, I found the following statement: 'In 998, the Central Indian monk Ni-wei-ni (沙门你尾抳) and others came to China to meet Emperor Song Zhenzong with Buddhist relics, scriptures, banyan leaves and several banyan seeds.' The description in the book uses

the term Sha-men (沙门) Ni-wei-ni rather than Seng (僧) Ni-wei-ni, as used in *Song History*, though both words mean ‘Buddhist monk’ in Chinese. From this we learn that monk Ni-wei-ni did not bring Western cloth with him, and that he was not a Jewish rabbi.

There is also no physical evidence to support the Song-entry theory except for the stela inscriptions made during the Ming Dynasty. According to the 1489 stela, a synagogue was established by An-du-la in Kaifeng in 1163, and at that time Lie-wei (Levi) Wu-si-da (Oustad, which means ‘Rabbi’ in a Jewish context in Persian) was given charge of the religion. There is, in fact, compelling evidence that the synagogue may not have been built in ancient times, after all. Leslie notes that White translates one sentence of the 1512 inscription as ‘the synagogue of the ancient temple was rebuilt’, but Chen Yuan’s punctuation suggests an alternate translation, ‘the temple was an ancient temple [古刹 Ku-ch’a], and was converted into a place for venerating this scripture’. Therefore he doubts that the synagogue was converted from a non-Jewish temple if it was truly ancient. Ancient Chinese grammar seems to support Leslie’s suspicion concerning the information in the 1512 inscription. But if the information in the 1489 inscription is also considered, the Kaifeng Jews did mean that their synagogue was an ancient temple, because they used the word Ku-ch’a twice as modifier of the word Qing-zhen-si (Temple of Purity and Truth, a term often used for a mosque). Notwithstanding this, the temple cannot be ancient if it bears the title Qing-zhen-si. The word Qing-zhen-si has only been prevalent since 1448, according to a stela in Beijing Dongsi Mosque. The Jews were called the Lan-mao Hui-hui (蓝帽回回 Blue Hat Hui-hui), and the word Hui-hui

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16. See Q. Zhang, ‘From Judaism to Confucianism: Studies on the Internal Causes for the As-
(Muslim) only became popularly used in the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, foreigners who lived in China were called *Fan-ke* (番客 literally ‘foreign guest’).

Zhou Xun doubts the authenticity of the Kaifeng community, believing it to have been largely a Western cultural invention. She maintains that the community had no Torah scrolls until 1851, when six scrolls and some 50-odd small manuscripts suddenly appeared, ready to be sold to eager Western Christian collectors. However, Pollak examined seven Kaifeng scrolls that he was able to locate, as well as documents pertaining to some missing scrolls. He found that between 1642 and 1663 thirteen *Sifrei Torah* were copied or restored by the Kaifeng community. The oldest parchments of the Torah, now held by the American Bible Society, may date back to no later than the fifteenth century, but these parchments were not copied in the Chinese calligraphic style characteristic of other scrolls. Thus, it is impossible to deny that the Jewish community did exist; yet it is also quite hard to accept that the Kaifeng Jews did not copy any Torahs during their 300-year history through the Song and Mongol Yuan Dynasties.

I suggest that the answers to these riddles lie in what has been avoided, not in some hypothesis colligating the clues themselves. Many Chinese historians and Western scholars believe that the Jews went to China during the Song Dynasty; this is on account of their reluctance to refer to the political and social context of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The assumption of an uncoercive and gradual assimilation of the Kaifeng Jews during the Ming Dynasty is to manifest unwarranted confidence in spite of the facts. A careful review of social circumstances during the early Ming Dynasty will reveal that pressure from Chinese society would provide the Jews with a motive to falsify their history.
The Date of Jewish Arrival in Kaifeng, China

Social circumstances during the early Ming Dynasty

Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, the founder of the Ming dynasty, established his reign in the name of expelling Mongols and other foreigners in order to recover the dominion of ethnic Han Chinese. During the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, the Semu people (色目人, diverse ethnic groups including Muslims and Jews) had been privileged over the Han Chinese but below the Mongol caste. To guard against the millions of these Semu people, the emperor issued many discriminatory decrees, which may have greatly changed Jewish social and linguistic traditions, as well as the ethnic make-up of the Kaifeng Jews.

Above all, as one of the Semu groups, the Jews saw their social and linguistic traditions undergo enforced change under the severe social conditions of the early Ming Dynasty. Tan Qian notes that in February 1368 the emperor ordered resumption of the wearing of the traditional clothing of the Tang Dynasty, and forbade foreign clothing, the use of foreign languages, surnames and given names. Furthermore, the imperial policy of discrimination and forced assimilation was also reflected in the marriage system, which eventually changed the ethnic make-up of the Kaifeng Jews during the Ming Dynasty. According to Ming Hui Dian (明会典 The Record of Laws of the Ming Dynasty), Volume 22, the Ministry of Revenue stipulated that as Mongols and Semu people had already been living in China, they were free to marry Han Chinese people but not within their own ethnic groups. Those who broke the law would be sent to government ministries as slaves, and their property confiscated. A similar decree can also be found in Volume 141, in which the Ministry of Justice ordered that, while any Mongol or Semu people were free to marry Han Chinese people, as long as the marriage was agreed by both families, they were not free to marry within their own ethnic groups. Those who broke the law would receive 80 strokes of the cane and be sent to government ministries as slaves. These historical documents confirm that intermarriage between Jews and other ethnic groups was undoubtedly


prescribed by the government in early Ming Dynasty. Although there is no record of whether or not these policies were consistently enforced, researchers note that the assimilation of the Kaifeng Jews intensified and escalated during the seventeenth century, which resulted in changes in Jewish social and linguistic traditions, as well as intermarriage between Jews and other ethnic groups, such as Han Chinese and the Hui minority in China. Therefore pressure from Chinese society can still not be excluded as one of the possible reasons for the assimilation of Kaifeng Jews into the Chinese population. It is also important to note the possibility that the Kaifeng Jews fabricated their own history in order to avoid being discriminated against or persecuted as foreigners. As during the early Ming Dynasty foreign merchants were not allowed to enter China, and if it is assumed that the Kaifeng Jews did not enter China during the Song Dynasty, the only remaining possibility is that they went to China during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty.

The Yuan-entry hypothesis

Chen Yuan claims that Chinese sources do not mention the existence of Chinese Jews until the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. Cognate terms such as *Shu-hu* (术忽), *Zhu-he* (珠赫), *Zhu-wu* (主吾) or *Zhu-hu* (主鹘) are found in Yuan History and Yuan-shi Yu-jie (元史语解 Thesaurus of Yuan History). However, there is no reliable historical record about where the Kaifeng Jews came from. The Kaifeng Jewish community offered very unclear information concerning this issue. The inscriptions of 1489 and 1663 claim the religion of those Kaifeng Jews as being transmitted from *Tian-zhu* (天竺), while the 1512 inscription uses a term *Tian-zhu Xi-yu* (天竺西域). Xi-yu is an umbrella term used to describe lands west of China, but Tian-zhu has only been associated with

六《律令·婚姻》蒙古色目人婚姻，蒙古色目人，听与中国人为婚姻，务要两相情愿，不许本类自相嫁娶，违者杖八十，男女入官为奴。


India throughout Chinese history. Pan Guangdan believes that Tian-zhu refers to India, while Xi-yu, in the context of Kaifeng Jews, means Persia.\textsuperscript{25}

In many ways, various forms of evidence contradict the notion that the Kaifeng Jews originated in India. First, words of Persian origin are found on the stelae. For example, the word \textit{Man-la} (1489, 1663 inscriptions) equates with the Persian word \textit{Mullah}.\textsuperscript{26} Another example is use of the word \textit{Wu-si-da} (1489, 1663 and 1679 inscriptions), a transcription of the Persian word \textit{oustad}, which is used to mean rabbi by Persian Jews.\textsuperscript{27} Second, in a seventeenth-century Torah scroll in the British Museum, text was copied in a Hebrew square script similar to that used by Persian Jews.\textsuperscript{28} Third, Leslie notes that sections of the Pentateuch of the Jewish community have short colophons in Judaeo-Persian.\textsuperscript{29} Elkan Adler even finds that the Persian rubrics in the liturgies of Kaifeng Jews are in the Bokharian dialect.\textsuperscript{30} All of this evidence seems to suggest that the Kaifeng Jews came from Persia, and it therefore seems strange that the 1489 stela claims the Jews were from India.\textsuperscript{31}

I believe that the Kaifeng Jews entered China together with the Hui-hui people (Muslims) during the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. The Jews lived in the Muslim district in Kaifeng, and they used the same terms, such as \textit{Man-la} and \textit{Qing-zhen-si}, as the Hui-hui people. What is more, the Jews were called \textit{Lan-mao Hui-hui} (Blue hat Muslims) by the local Chinese. In much the same way as the Jews, the Hui Muslims in China even today still firmly insist that their ancestors arrived in China during the Tang or Song Dynasty, although historical records show that the dominant population of the Chinese Hui Muslims are descendants of the Hui-hui people of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. Consequently, it is rational to hypothesize that, like the Hui-hui people, the Kaifeng Jews were originally brought to China from Persia by the Mongols.

\textsuperscript{26} See White, \textit{Chinese Jews}, vol. II, p. 12. The word \textit{Mullah} means local Islamic cleric or head of a mosque, and is still commonly used among Chinese Muslims.
\textsuperscript{28} See Kaifeng Torah: www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/kaifengtorah.html; accessed 26 July 2016.
\textsuperscript{29} Leslie, \textit{The Survival of the Chinese Jews}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{31} The author of this article is not fluent in Persian, and therefore secondary sources have been relied on in order to make this argument.
If the Yuan-entry hypothesis is correct, the conflicts in the stories of the community’s origins can be easily understood. One of the largest immigrations in the history of China was the 160,000 artisans, craftsmen and young men drafted into the Mongol army from Samarkand and Bukhara after the conquest of Khwarezmia in 1220. If this fact is taken into consideration, it becomes easy to understand why the Kaifeng Jews used Persian words or even spoke the Bukharan dialect. Moreover, the obsession of the Kaifeng Jews with ancient lineages, as Michael Pollak comments, was less of a mistake and more of a ‘protective maneuver’. The Jews pushed their phase of immigration from Mongol Yuan to Song Dynasty, Han Dynasty or even Zhou Dynasty to make it seem that the Jews had been settled in China for almost as long as the Han Chinese. Therefore it is understandable that the Kaifeng Jews claimed that their ancestors came from India rather than Persia due to the same manoeuvre, as India had long been a holy land of Buddhism in Chinese people’s minds since it was introduced into China at the end of the Han Dynasty. It is reasonable to believe that the Kaifeng Jews tried every means to disguise their true identity serving as the ruling caste in the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, and to show that they were the same as their Han Chinese neighbours. However, even if the Kaifeng Jews intentionally concealed their history, some clues must remain that indicate when the synagogue was actually built.

The 1489 stela mysteries

The 1489 stela offers information on the early history of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Its inscription records that in 1163 Lie-wei (Levi) Wu-si-da was charged with the administration of the religion, and that the An-du-la began to build the synagogue. In 1279, the Wu-si-da rebuilt the ancient temple, the Qing-zhen-si. The synagogue was restored by An Cheng (俺诚), a physician, in 1421, and enlarged in the years 1461 and 1489. There are more than 30 names mentioned in the inscription; however, only An Cheng’s life story is recorded in detail. That said, An Cheng, the physician, must be a very important figure in the history of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Fang

Chaoying considers that the story about An Cheng was written in a cryptic way that misled researchers into making incorrect interpretations regarding his identity.  

Weisz translates the life and times of An Cheng as follows:

Ancheng, a physician in the 19th year of Yongle [1421], received a proclamation from the Prince Ding of the Zhou Prefecture making it public that he ‘bestowed incest’ to rebuild and restore the Pure and True Temple. In the temple was (placed) the Order of the Great Ming the ‘Long Long Life’ tablet. In the 21st year of Yongle [1423], an imperial memorial conferred upon him for his meritorious services the surname Chao. He received the rank of Military Commissioner in the Embroidered Uniform Guard, and was promoted to Assistant Military Commissioner of Zhejiang.

Weisz has studied White’s translation, but uses the more accurate Pinyin to transliterate Chinese terms, making his translation of the above paragraph more accurate and easier to understand for current researchers. However, he makes a serious mistake in his translation, as does White. Both omit one important detail, Zou-wen You-gong, which translates as ‘made a report to the throne and was adjudged meritorious for it’. Fang Chaoying translates an official record in Ming Tai-zong Shi-lu (Life Record of Emperor Yong-le):

Yung-lo 18th year, 12th month, wu-shen (14th) day [18 January 1421], An San, a soldier of the Honan Central Bodyguard Division, was promoted to be an assistant commissioner of the Embroidered Uniform Guard and received the new surname and name, Chao Cheng. This was on the substantiation of his accusation of treason against Su, the Prince of Chou.

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35. Ancheng actually contains two Chinese characters: An Cheng. White translates ‘An Cheng’ as ‘Yen Ch’eng’. Fang Chaoying points out that ‘Yen’ should be changed to ‘An’ from the labial ending am. The character has long been used as a phonetic transliteration of am or ab. See Fang, ‘Notes on the Chinese Jews’, p. 126.
36. Weisz’s translation is wrong. Zhou-fu Ding Wang (周府定王) means the prince with the posthumous name Ding, of the princedom of Zhou. See Fang, ‘Notes on the Chinese Jews’, p. 127.
37. This is a spelling mistake. The correct word form is ‘incense’. See White, Chinese Jews, vol. II, p. 12. White translates it as ‘a present of incense’.
38. Weisz keeps the older transliteration for the word ‘Chao’ (趙); the Pinyin for it should be Zhao. To maintain consistency with previous translators, I follow Weisz in using ‘Chao’ in this article.
42. Ibid. The Pinyin for Yong-lo and Chou are Yong-le and Zhou, respectively. In this article I follow Weisz in using Pinyin.
The above official record reveals several inaccuracies in the inscription of 1489. An Cheng’s real name was An San (俺三), who was a soldier in the Honan Central Bodyguard Division and not a physician. It is true that the surname Chao was conferred on An San by Emperor Yong-le, but the inscription does not mention that the given name Cheng was also an imperial memorial. An San received a promotion because he accused the Prince of Zhou of treason, but the date of his promotion was 1421 rather than 1423, as the 1489 inscription records.

Fang believes the author of the 1489 inscription concealed anything of an unsavoury nature about the history of the Kaifeng Jews. First, the author combined the two names, An San and Chao Cheng, to form the name An Cheng to suit the status of a physician of non-Chinese ancestry about to be honoured with a Chinese surname by imperial order. Second, An San’s military status was intentionally omitted from the inscription in order to conceal the truth of his betrayal against Prince of Zhou. An San’s division was one of the three bodyguard divisions hereditarily in the service of the Prince of Zhou. Third, as An San informed the prince in 1420, which put him in danger of the death sentence, the presentation of the incense or gift by the prince in 1421 could not have been a voluntary act of friendship towards the Jewish community. Therefore the writer of the inscription cleverly disguised An San’s conduct by setting it two years later, in 1423 instead of 1421. Fourth, Fang believes that the statement in the inscription that places Chao Cheng’s promotion to the provincial post in 1423, though not corroborated, may be taken as factual.43

It seems that Fang has solved all the 1489 inscription mysteries; however, following in-depth review of the passage quoted above, along with other passages about the Prince of Zhou translated by Fang, the story of An San becomes more fascinating. On the one hand, his name was cleverly crafted. An San literally means ‘An the Third’. Such a name indicates that An San was the third male child of his family according to traditional Chinese custom, and might have been born poor because his name was not a formal personal name. In contrast, the name Chao Cheng means ‘Chao the Honest’, which befits the status of an officer. He was considered ‘honest’ on account of his accusation of treason against the Prince of Zhou, and his new family

name Chao was the surname of the emperors of the Song Dynasty. During the Ming Dynasty the emperors granted Chinese surnames to subjects who petitioned for new family names according to their own suggestions. If An San had not offered the information that his people came to China during the Song Dynasty, he would not have received the family name of Song Emperors. It seems that this Kaifeng Jew, An San, tried to obtain some official endorsement from a Ming emperor that his ancestors had come to China during the Song Dynasty. On the other hand, An San’s true identity was carefully covered up. As mentioned earlier, Fang believes that An Cheng’s identity in the inscription as a physician served to conceal An San’s military identity. He believes that ‘any mention of An’s earlier military service would have revealed his relationship to the prince as that of a slave to the master and to inform on one’s master, however justified, was always an unworthy act.’ Fang’s explanation seems plausible; though even if An San was a physician, to inform on his superior was still considered unethical. I think the real reason to present An San as a physician was mainly because the writer of the inscription hoped to raise An San’s social status. As Prince of Zhou was a botanist and physician, there were many physicians composing medical books under his leadership at the palace. Consequently, the author of the 1489 inscription presented An Cheng (actually An San) as a physician rather than a low-ranking soldier. Having said that, I doubt that his true identity was even that of a soldier. How would a common soldier dare to repeatedly accuse of treason a prince, the younger brother of the emperor? And how did An San’s report secretly appear on the emperor’s desk? Based on Fang’s translation of other paragraphs in Ming Tai-zong Shi-lu, a timeline of events can be created as follows.

On 10 November 1420, the Prince of Zhou was summoned by edict to be present in the capital in March 1421. Prior to this, An San and others had repeatedly lodged accusations against the prince for plotting treason.

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44. See, for example, Ming Ying-zong Shi-lu (‘Life Records of Emperor Yingzong’), vol. 276. When Tatar Bei-dou-nu came to surrender, he was appointed as an officer. In April 1457, the emperor conferred on him a new name, Bai Zhong (‘Bai the Loyal’) according to his own petition. Original text: 《明英宗实录》卷276, 三月甲戌条载: 鞑靼人北斗奴来归, 任职鞑官都督, 天顺元年三月, 应其本人请求, 上赐名曰白忠.
Then, on 18 January 1421, An San got his promotion and received the new surname and name. After that, on 16 March 1421, the Prince of Zhou arrived at the capital. Emperor Yong-le showed him the documents supporting the accusation submitted by An San and others. The Prince of Zhou banged his head on the ground and said repeatedly 'My crime warrants the death penalty'. The emperor did not pursue the case on account of their fraternal relationship. On 5 May 1421, the Prince of Zhou was allowed to return to his princedom. Finally, on 10 June 1421, the Prince of Zhou, grudgingly offered to return the officers and men of his three bodyguard divisions to the emperor.47

The above account does not mention what evidence An San offered to accuse the prince of treason, and it seems strange that the prince was not punished for his treason, the most serious crime in ancient feudal China. However, the outcome seems to explain everything. The prince lost all his army despite the official history recording that the Prince of Zhou surrendered his command willingly. That is to say, An San successfully helped Emperor Yong-le remove the potential threat from the Prince of Zhou, even if the prince, the botanist and physician, had never plotted treason. Such meritorious service as An San performed definitely qualified him for promotion from common soldier to assistant commissioner of the Embroidered Uniform Guard or Jin-yi-wei (锦衣卫). Jin-yi-wei was the imperial military secret police that served the Ming emperors. An San's new position seems to suggest that his true identity was that of a spy who served the emperor as a common soldier in the bodyguard division of the Prince of Zhou. This can be the only explanation for why a low-ranking soldier dared to accuse a prince, and succeeded in having his report delivered to the imperial desk of the emperor. In addition, I agree with Fang that the presentation of incense or a gift by the prince in 1421 could not have been a voluntary act of friendship towards the Jewish community because An San accused the prince in 1420, put him at risk of the death penalty. In Chinese Buddhism, the expression 'bestow incense' actually means more than burning incense before the image of Buddha and presentation of gifts to monks in the temple; it may also be regarded as the donation of money to the temple.48 It seems to me that the Prince of Zhou bribed An San in the form of supporting the Jews to build

47. See Fang, 'Notes on the Chinese Jews', p. 127.
a synagogue. However, I do not agree that the writer of the inscription intentionally disguised An San’s conduct by setting it two years later, in 1423 instead of 1421. I discovered that Chao Cheng was actually promoted to the provincial post in 1424. Fang found no record of this because it is recorded in a book that he did not examine. The promotion is recorded in *Ming Ren-zong Shi-lu* (Life Records of Emperor Hong-xi). Chao Cheng was promoted by Emperor Hong-xi, son of Emperor Yong-le, about one month after the demise of Emperor Yong-le. It seems most probable that the writer of the 1489 inscription simply ran the two promotions together by mistake, as the inscription was written 65 years after Chao Cheng’s second promotion.

Comparing the 1489 inscription and the official Ming history books, the life of a Kaifeng Jew, An Cheng in the inscription, is revealed. However, this is still not the end of his story. Many researchers believe that An-du-la was the title of the person who supervised construction, and White explains that in the inscription of 1679 An Cheng (or Chao Cheng) is seen to have been an An-du-la. However, Löwenthal points out that ‘the 1679 text in no way mentions Chao Yingcheng (or Chao (Yen) Cheng) as the An-du-la. It is clearly referring to the one and only An-du-la mentioned in the other two inscriptions, as having built the synagogue in 1163.’ I agree with Löwenthal that An-du-la is the name of a person rather than a title; nevertheless I believe White is definitely correct to make the connection between An-du-la and An Cheng. There is an important fact about An-du-la on the 1679 stela, which recounts the history of the Chao clan. One sentence reads:

> Looking back from the present to the past, we see that the one who inaugurated (the synagogue) was our embroidered uniform ancestor (*Jin-yi*...)

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Although White notices this information on the stela, he fails to explain who An-du-la really was. The 1489 stela indicates that the synagogue was established by An-du-la in 1163, and rebuilt by An Cheng in 1421. As indicated earlier, An Cheng had the surname ‘Chao’ conferred on him by Emperor Yong-le, so he can be considered the founding patriarch of the Chao clan in Kaifeng. If An-du-la in the Song Dynasty was also the ancestor of the Chao clan, then An-du-la must be the ancestor of An Cheng. However, the 1679 stela also mentions An-du-la as Jin-yi Gong (锦衣公 Our embroidered uniform ancestor); therefore, the only possibility is that An-du-la was An Cheng, assistant commissioner of Jin-yi-wei or the Embroidered Uniform Guard. It is more likely that the Kaifeng Jews moved the story of their synagogue’s founding from 1421 far back to the Song Dynasty in 1163, as Jin-yi-wei only existed during the Ming Dynasty. Löwenthal thinks that An-du-la is the transliteration of Abdullah. I believe that An-du-la or Abdullah was the ‘religious name’ of An Cheng. In addition, it seems that the Kaifeng Jews were not familiar with the history of Song Dynasty because Kaifeng had already been ruled by the Jurchen people of the Jin Dynasty for 37 years by 1163.

Despite this, the assumption that An-du-la was An Cheng, a person who lived in the Ming Dynasty, still seems unreliable because history can only be based on facts, not just rational analysis. In fact, there exists circumstantial evidence regarding the Kaifeng community, which is information on another important Jewish clan, the Li clan. The 1489 inscription records 17 surnames...
which are believed to be those of Kaifeng Jews in the Song Dynasty. Li is the first surname mentioned in the inscription, and An (later Chao) is the second. The inscription also mentions 14 Man-la, among which 9 were from the Li clan. According to White, Rev. D. MacGillivray even thinks that the Jewish meaning of the surname Li is Levi. That is to say, the Li clan was as important as, or even more important than, the An clan. White includes an excerpt from a book, *Diary of the Defence of Pien*, which contains a genealogical sequence of the Kaifeng Jewish Li clan. White translates the first sentences of this excerpt as: ‘The Li family formerly lived in Peking. Previous to the Hung Wu period, at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, the family moved to Pien (Kaifeng).’ There is a mistake in White’s translation of the word Qian (前 ‘previous’). As the excerpt was taken from a version of the diary printed in the Qing Dynasty, it was required at that time to add the word Qian before the reign title of a previous dynasty. Therefore the correct translation is: ‘Originally, the Li clan lived in Peking. During the early years of the Hung Wu period (1368–98) of the previous Ming Dynasty, the family moved to Pien (Kaifeng).’ This evidence confirms that Li clan, the clan of Man-la or synagogue leaders, went to Kaifeng during the early Ming Dynasty. If so, the community must have been established during the Ming Dynasty. Therefore An-du-la probably lived in the Ming Dynasty, and he was very likely An Cheng. In other words, the synagogue was initially built rather than rebuilt or restored in 1421.

Conclusion

The recent discovery of records totally dismisses the only evidence that supports the Song-entry theory of the Kaifeng Jews. The assumption that monk Niweini in *Song History* was a Jewish rabbi and that the Kaifeng Jews arrived in China in 998 was initiated by Chen Changqi. Wei Qianzhi later discussed Chen’s idea and supported it. As Zhang Qianhong was Wei’s student, and Liu

59. A similar example can be found in the Hua-jue Mosque, one of the oldest mosques in China. The Chinese inscription on a stela dated to 742 reads ‘Bai-du-er-di (摆都而的) led the religion [in the Tang Dynasty]’, while on the reverse side of the stela the Arabic inscription shows that ‘Badruddin led the religion [in the Ming Dynasty], and passed away in 1545’. See J. Feng and G. Tie, *One Hundred Questions about Islamic Culture* (Beijing: China Today Press, 1992), p. 151–3.
Bailu was Zhang Qianhong’s student, the assumption has been repeated and not questioned. I believe the Kaifeng synagogue was first established during the Ming Dynasty in 1421, and that two figures in the 1489 inscription, An-du-la of Song Dynasty and An Cheng of Ming Dynasty, were actually one person. The earliest reliable date for Jewish arrival in Kaifeng is the Hung Wu Period (1368–98) of the Ming Dynasty. In addition, it was the coercive decrees during the early Ming Dynasty that forcibly accelerated the assimilation of the Kaifeng Jews into the Chinese population. Facts supporting this research are not difficult to find; however, researchers tend to believe that the Jews went to China during the Song Dynasty because they wish to believe that there existed, in human history, a unique 800-year continuous history of a Kaifeng Jewish community that did not suffer from discrimination or persecution. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of historians to restore historical truth, whatever that truth might be. As there are definitely no events particularly against Jews and Judaism recorded throughout Chinese history, the story of the Kaifeng Jews is still unique, although in reality it may be 300 years shorter than has hitherto been believed.

Note
In the text, the author keeps to the convention of Chinese names, i.e. family name before personal name, for the convenience of Chinese readers in this field; but the personal names are given only as initials in accordance with normal English practice in the footnotes.