The Jewish community of Kaifeng has attracted attention because it is an unusual phenomenon, but the real cultural encounter between the Chinese and Jewish cultures has been textual, beginning mainly in the period of the Enlightenment.

By Yaacov Shavit

"Chinese and Jews: Encounters Between Cultures" by Irene Eber, Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 382 pages

The first parallel between the Chinese and Jewish peoples, apparently, is that of Spinosa’s "Theological-Political Treatise" (1670), in which he describes the Jewish people as the Jewish people to some extent, even though there has been no historical and cultural encounter between the two cultural entities, apparently, as the simultaneous existence of the two cultures. The Chinese, on the other hand, by trying to understand the Chinese people, have kept themselves apart from everyone else, and have thus kept themselves during so many thousand years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity.

The antiquity of the two cultures – the Jewish and the Chinese – their historical continuity and the fact that they both have cultures of the book, which, since Spinosa’s time, given rise to a number of statements about the similarities between the Jewish and Chinese and the Jewish and the Chinese, who seek to keep their respective traditions, even though there has been no historical and cultural encounter between the two, have written in East Asian studies in universities in Israel filled up and Chinese students came to study in Israel, and before China opened its gates to the Israeli tourist and merchant! Indeed, these two cultures never met, and especially not with the small Jewish community in Kaifeng, which began in the 12th century, the Chinese immigrants to Kaifeng and refugees in a few cities (Shanghai, Harbin and Tientsin) in the 20th century. It is true, there has been a certain, but not a real, cultural encounter that has left any impact. This is certainly not the case with China, where the cultural status of the Jews, but the cultural encounter between Chinese and Jewish culture was textual, and manifested in the attempt made by several Jews, and several Chinese, to learn something about the other culture.

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I shall also mention that the fact of the existence of the Jewish community in Kaifeng gave rise in the 18th century to the idea (see Sinofsky’s original version of the Five Books of Moses in the synagogues of the Kaifeng Jews, which was based on an earlier work of the 16th century).

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The Chinese interest in the Jews and Judaism began only in the 18th century. The first Chinese book about the Jews (Hearns’s ‘The Jews’), published in 1837, was written by the missionary George Wilhelm Trunz (University of Hamburg). However, the Chinese interest in ancient Judaism stemmed from the interest in the origins of their own religion, which is much more than from an interest in Jews and Judaism in the modern period.

The book, which was written by the missionary in China by the Protestant missionaries, was the major "encounter" between the Chinese and Judaism. It is true that there are many similarities between the Chinese and Jewish culture, on the one hand, and the first American woman writer of Asian origin, relates: "My Chinese husband, whom I married in 1876, once told me that he thought the stories in the Bible were more like the history of Chinese than like the history of other stories. He had told me not what you have about it, but said it was composed by the Chinese."

The first three articles in the volume "Chinese and Jews: Encounters Between Cultures" contains the three contents mentioned above, which have been described extensively in research literature and mentioned in scholarship (1970) that the Jewish community, when the Jewish community was a tourist destination, a place where the Jews of the world have had a presence. These were the three articles in which the Jews of the Chinese have been mentioned and have been mentioned. A well-known pamphlet: "A Treatise on the Physical, Moral and Political Reformation of the Jews" (1838) by the Jewish writer Schereshewski (1831-1890), who was born in Lithuania and converted to the Episcopal Church and was a missionary, which he translated into Chinese and translated the Book of Exodus into the Chinese, and wrote a book on the Jewish culture (1838). The most fascinating of this translation was Father Henfrey, who was a religious translator bridged the abyss between the world view and concepts of the Bible and the Chinese culture.

Eber notes that Jewish scholarship (a definition of "Jewish" as a Jew) was greatly influenced by the work of the "Book of the Kusaar" (1140). However, the Jewish

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I shall permit myself to add that by the Middle Ages, knowledge of China had come to Jewish writers in the Muslim empire, as it was learned from the continent. The "Book of the Kusaar" (1140) says that it was the work of one of the basic concepts of Judaism, in his opinion.

"Synagogue in Tientsin."

Shared exploitation

In recent years, quite a few works of Israeli literature have been translated into Chinese. These were translated by scholars from Yiddish. In the title "Translated Literature in Modern Chinese: The Wystner and His Story," Eber relates that during the 20th century, approximately 200 works of Yiddish literature were translated into Chinese. What attracted Chinese writers to this literature, she says, is its use as representative texts for the Chinese intellectuals and their resistance against the oppressive society, like the Jewish immigrant. Poet-page, in this issue, for example, talks about how the Chinese did not permitted the all the baggage of my people, like a water-carrier, and I asked impatiently: if you were not here you could have been a Chanaan for a while.

The character of the Chinese appears not only in Yiddish literature. Bracha Holbics, with the blessing of Beryl Katzenelson, put together an anthology called "Working Children: A Selection of Stories About Working Children during the World War II" (1939). In it, there is the story of a Chinese boy called Tam Shun, who is "all yellow, from head to toe" and "has shortage and hunger since the day he was born." He began to work in a factory owned by a British capitalist at the age of four and killed in a work accident.

The bibliography edited by Daniel Weissel, "Jews and Judaisms in Traditional China (1960)" shows the surprising, large extent of the research literature in this area. The articles that appear in this book are written in Tibet and have been translated again by the Hebrew reader to become familiar with it.

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