

The Judaic Response to Modernity and Its Referential Value to the Cultural Reconstruction in China Today

The Enlightenment and modernization in the West have not only tremendously changed the destiny and way of life of the Europeans, but also, like a hurricane involving majority of the peoples all over the world, affected their cultural and spiritual traditions. Faced with the challenge of modernity, none of civilizations, whether it is old or new, can escape from a choice between tradition and modernization. Among all of the nations including Chinese, Arabic, Indian, Jewish, Mexican and others, it seems to me that Jewish people is the most successful in response to the challenge of modernity. That is to say, the Jews have modernized themselves materially, living modern life on one hand, and they have maintained their cultural identity—Jewishness, on the other.

Since the Opium War, in Mainland China took place great events such as the Movement of Foreign Affairs, Reformation of Wu Xu, Nationalist Revolution of Xin Hai, May Fourth Movement and New Cultural Movement, communist revolution and the foundation of People's Republic of China, economic reform after the Cultural Revolution, etc., all of which are somehow related to the alternatives of modernity and tradition. After a century's efforts and zigzagged slow progress, the Chinese people have now being stepping on market economy, the right way to prosperous economy and material modernization. However, unlike most of the Jews who are aware of their cultural identity, that is, the Jewishness, Chinese people are still perplexed in their cultural identity. Most of them do not know what their cultural identity is and how to keep it. In short, they have lost their Chineseness culturally and are soul-less at present. It is the right time now for the Chinese to find the lost soul of the people.

Concerning the issue of Chinese cultural and spiritual identity, variety of opinions and disputations happened in the past century or more. For instance, "Overall Westernization", "the Quintessence of Chinese Tradition", "Chinese Body and Western Function", "Western Body and Chinese Function", Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Taoism and others. I have no intention to continue the existing discussions in this paper. What I am trying to do is, by historical analysis and comparison of Judaism and Confucianism, to find out the referential value of Jewish Reform and the process of modernization to current cultural reconstruction in China. I shall briefly describe the movement of Jewish Reform, analyze the formation of modern Judaism and its significances to Chinese cultural construction and finally try to demonstrate why the Jewish success of religion and modernization can be applied to China today.

I. The Reform of Judaism and Its Outcome

In 1801, the reform movement of Judaism opened its curtain as Israel Jacobson (1768-1822), the father of Jewish Reform, established the first Temple in a small town

of Harz in Germany. Soon after it, many Reform temples emerged one after another in Berlin, Hamburg, Blaslow, Burn, Heidburg, and Frankfort. The Reformers overcame the interventions from the royal sovereignty and preventions from the traditionalists and singled out to be an independent denomination marked by the first Central Rabbinic Conference in 1846.

The German Jewish thinkers in the first half of 19th century were directly or indirectly affected by a group of precedent philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel (1770-1831). The intellectual climate at that time was considerably complicated in the Jewish world. However, there is no doubt that the theory of historical evolutionism was upheld by the major leaders of the reform movement like Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Sammuel Holdheim (1806-1860) and later an American reformer Isaac Mayer Weis (1819-1900) and others. They thought that history is a process of evolution and expresses itself in different ways in variety of historical phases. The tradition as manifestations of the Absolute Spirit must adjust itself to the changed society. Judaism must adapt itself to the Changed time.^① As Abraham Geiger stated, Judaism was a living and changing system of faith. It shaped its forms in history and as a tradition involved its followers in a moving process. Judaism was divided into different forms with distinct characteristics in different historical stages. This theory was opposite to the traditionalist Jews who regarded Torah, either Mosaic Law or Rabbinic tradition, beyond history and timeless, therefore eternal and unchangeable. For the traditionalists, however, it was the Torah that changes the time and society, not the reverse.

The reformers changed the rituals of synagogue worship and folk practices. They discarded Hebrew language in sermons, prayers and hymn chanting and started to speak vernacular language, that is, German. They introduced organ accompany and choir with both men and women from Christian churches and replaced the traditional chore without musical accompany. They let women sit with men in synagogue services in which there were no seats for women before. They accepted both Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah and abandoned the “barbarian” circumcision (quotation from Geiger) for the Jewish boys, which was traditionally taken as the sign of covenant with God. They also deserted the “strange and odd dietary law” (quotation from Geiger), regulations and other unnecessary and over elaborate formalities.

The most significant outcome of the Reform Movement is the split of traditional Judaism and formation of modern Judaism which includes the following three major denominations. (1) Reform Judaism, which broke through the fence of traditional Judaism, emerged as an independent denomination after the reformer’s fierce struggle

^① See David Rudavsky, *Modern Jewish Religious Movements: A History of Emancipation and Adjustment*, Behrman House, Inc. New York, p.171-172, 177-188. Among the philosophers who influenced the Jewish reform movement, Kant is the most important one. In his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Kant defines religion as in essence a moral system on the basis of conscience. In biblical Judaism, however, God was a political autocrat, not a moral Being, who merely desired obedience to commands and mechanical worship. Judaism was “ a collection of mere statutory laws” , stressing only external acts and outward observances, and thus was “really not a religion at all”. Despite the criticism from Kant, the Jewish reformers accepted his principle that pure religious faith is essentially moral and tried hard to present Judaism as an ethical religion. See Michel A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity, A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, Oxford University Press, 1988,p.64-66

of nearly five decades. (2) Orthodox Judaism as the remains after Reformers moved out. It also includes Hasidim and Neo-Orthodoxy Judaism as a mixture of traditional Judaism and romanticism. (3) Conservative Judaism, which took the form of historical school in Germany in 19th century, formerly appeared in the United States of America later. It basically upheld the Reform Judaism in changing the old Jewish ideas and rituals with progressive outlook, but adopted conservative attitude and kept more tradition in worship services. Both Reform and Conservative Judaism belong in the category of liberal or progressive Judaism whose followers cover 72% of the American Jewish population.^① Apart from the three main denominations, another small denomination, that is, Reconstructionism was founded by M. Kaplan in 1920s. It considers Judaism as a civilization with the concept of God, a force made for salvation. It is a newest movement of Judaism with radical theory and conservative practice and has impacted the Jewish world mainly by its philosophy.^②

Now what are the aims of Jewish reform movement and is it successful from historical perspective?

The reform movement in 19th century virtually adopted a twofold of tasks which were put forward by Mendelssohn when he defined the goals of *haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) in his *Jerusalem: The Jew* “sought to break down the ghetto barriers and transform the Jew into a European, who, at the same time, would retain his Jewishness. Accordingly, the Jew was to be integrated into Western culture and trained to live in two milieux, the worldly and the Jewish, thereby assuming dual cultural responsibility.”^③ In reality, after two centuries since the commence of Reform in 19th century, we can now assert that the objectives of the Jewish reform have been attained in the main, which can be justified by the following facts.

Above all, most of the European and American Jews have modernized themselves by integrating into the main steam of Western societies in many ways, especially in science and technology, politics and economics. According to a recent survey, 167 Jews and persons of half-Jewish ancestry have been awarded the Nobel Prize, accounting for 22% of all individual recipients worldwide between 1901 and 2004^④ In addition; the Jews have been an eminent political force in many countries apart from Israel. According to the Political Graveyard, a website about U.S. political history and cemeteries, 138,150 Jewish politicians including both living and dead are listed. As we all know, some Jews have become prime minister or cabinet ministers in Britain, France, Australia and other great countries. Again, the Jews have won and tightly held the first place in the monetary domain of many western countries and produced a good number of most wealthy enterprisers and numerous great thinkers. Furthermore, even the Jewish households and family life have been changed and modernized

^① National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, Introduction, p.2

^② In recent years, humanist Judaism as a small and secular denomination appeared in some countries though its influence is not strong enough to match other movements.

^③David Rudavsky, *Modern Jewish Religious Movements: A History of Emancipation and Adjustment*, Behrman House, Inc. New York, p.73. It is true that Mendelssohn was a Jewish philosopher before the Jewish reform movement and he did not intend to change traditional Judaism which he regarded as revealed by God, eternal and unchangeable. He was a reformer of Jewish life and not a reformer of Judaism. However, the twofold of tasks he raised for the Jewish enlightenment before was in effect accepted by the later Jewish reformers and fulfilled through the reform movement of Judaism.

^④ See www.jinfo.org.

tremendously and the Jewish children have been best educated in modern world. ^①

However, it is also an undisputable fact that Judaism still plays a very important role in Jewish life. Take American Jewry as an example. In light of the demographical survey of the United Jewish Community in 2002, the population of American Jews is 5.2 million and around 56% of them are registered in synagogues and participate in regular services and the other 44% are not in the lists of synagogues and do not take part in religious service regularly. ^② The religious Jews spent Shabbat and other holidays and festivals in accordance with the Jewish religion; and even a good number of irreligious Jews, celebrated Jewish holidays too. It is unnecessary to enumerate examples to illustrate the Jewish people's spirituality and religiousness, for everyone knows that in the West, the Jews are a religious people and majority of them find their identity in Judaism as a way of life.

To sum up, since 19th century, the Western Jews have gradually modernized themselves and fulfilled integration into modern societies. And meanwhile they have also lived as Jews and maintained their Jewish identity by practicing Judaism to certain degrees in different denominations.

Now from the process of modernization and maintenance of cultural and spiritual identity of the Jews in Diaspora, we can reach the following conclusions.

First of all, tradition and modernity are not directly opposite to each other but to a great degree in harmony with each other. Modernity is the manifestation of human reason which created modern science, technology and industrialization necessary to human material life and promote human well-being. However, Human beings also live moral and spiritual life on which science and technology do not work. Therefore, religions are needed. For a people like the Jews with long history and rich culture, tradition should not be discarded. What the people can do is to innovate and reform as took place in Judaism since 19th century. Majority of the modernized Jews, whatever denominations they are in, have maintained tradition to some extent and found their identity from Judaism and its practice.

Secondly, modernity can be grafted on the stem of tradition. A Jew can be a scientist and at the same time, a religious person who follows Mosaic Law, goes to synagogue on Shabbat day, celebrates Jewish festivals and lives religious life. Though not all of the successful Jews are religious, a good number of religious Jews have shown that traditional values and modern life can be co-existent without conflicts. As a matter of fact, they are complimentary and beneficial to each other.

Thirdly, tradition should be reformed. Tradition is not to be reserved without

^① In accordance with Max Weber, the major characteristics of modernization are the rise of cities, bureaucracy, the nation-state, capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and secularism, as well as the correlative decline of small town life, local political autonomy, and agricultural economy, the nobility and landed aristocracy, feudalism, and religious authority. It is clear that majority of the Western Jews, with vicissitude of history, have moved out of small towns and rural villages, left the previous face-to-face communities and many of them have been living in big cities, in the nation-states and capitalist system as middle class. Therefore, we can also assert that the western Jews have already in the main modernized. See Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*, 1983, p. ff

^② National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, Introduction, p.2

condition. The purpose to keep tradition is to adapt itself to the changed situation in order to serve the people properly. Tradition without change cannot be the way of life of the people in changeable society. If a tradition does not fit the changed society well, it should and could be changed. If Judaism did not reform itself, it could not have been the guide for nearly 80% of the Jews (Reform and Conservative denominations) in variety of countries. It seems to me that liberal Judaism can nowadays play an important role in Jewish spiritual and moral life mainly because of the reform movement initiated in 19th century and developed afterwards. Even the Orthodox Jews and neo-orthodox Jews, changed their way of life to some degree in the direction to modernity.

Fourthly, to reform is not to abandon tradition. The Jewish reform was in the frame of Judaism rather than beyond it. In other words, to reform is to critically inherit not to give up tradition. As declared the statement of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1999, “Throughout our history, we Jews have remained firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, even as we have learned much from our encounters with other cultures. The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality.....This Statement of Principles affirms the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledges the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices.”^① Whereas the attitude to Zionism, dietary law and other precepts were revised and changed, the basic beliefs and principles of Judaism were not changed.

Finally, religion is irreplaceable to maintain a nation’s spirit or identity. Faced with the powerful Christian culture with the strongest missionary tendency, any non-western people, if they intend to resist western impact and free from the fate of assimilation, have to strengthen and develop their religion in order to attract mass and make it the soul or spirit of the people. Jewish people would have lost their soul and identity without Judaism. Ancient Judaism shaped ancient Israel and modern Judaism with variety of denominations has formed the Jewish spiritual and cultural identity of the modern Jews.

I will contend that the Jewish way to cope with the relation between modernity and tradition points to a way for other peoples with the similar social and cultural background.

II. The Referential Values of Jewish Reform to the Construction of Chinese Culture

One Chinese proverb says, “A stone from another mount may also be made into a good jade.” That is especially true when it comes to the referential values of modern Judaism to the reconstruction of Chinese culture. The contemporary Chinese people can benefit a lot from the experiences of Jewish reform.

^① *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention Central Conference of American Rabbis, May 1999, p.1

Since the Jewish experiences have demonstrated that tradition and modernity are reconcilable, the appropriate attitude for Chinese people in facing the choice of them should be “both...and”, instead of “either...or”. That is to say, on one hand, it is improper to westernize by embracing foreign cultures without reserving the tradition, on the other hand, the attitude of nationalism which is characterized by sticking to the tradition stubbornly and excluding foreign cultures blindly is not appropriate either. The wise choice should be accepting modernity while giving considerations to traditional values.

Since Jewish people have succeeded in transplanting modern science, technology and industry on the basis of Judaism, it is advisable that Chinese people make an attempt to make use of western science and technology on the basis of Chinese traditional values. Science is universally useful and has no borders or boundaries. Although having originated and developed in Europe and North America, modern science does not exclusively belong to the West. It is one part of the civilization of the whole humanity in the whole world. History has shown that Chinese traditional culture failed to come up with a systematical science, not to say modern technology, though it included some scientific elements and factors. So I cannot see any possibility or necessity in “developing” or tracing the origin of modern technology in Chinese tradition as some scholars had attempted to do.² One possibility might be learning from the Jewish attitude, that is, to take the existing modern sciences and technology from the West, and employ it in the modernization in China. In this case, philosophers should dispense with their intellectual efforts and let the scientists introduce and innovate bravely. As to the scholars of humanities, they have their own vocation, that is, to reform and reconstruct the tradition creatively, set up cultural and spiritual values and develop them into the spirit of Chinese people.

Since the successful maintenance of Jewish identity to some extent lies in reform of their tradition, we Chinese people should follow the Jews and reform our traditional culture. In dealing with values and cultural spirits, we should not take the attitude of “bring everything here”, instead, we should emphasize reform and reconstruction. Reform of the tradition is an approach of both reserving and discarding in treating our traditions. Similar to the reform of Judaism, our reform and reconstruction are carried out on the basis of Chinese traditions, and it is not like “setting up a brand new oven after damaging everything”. We should differentiate and conserve the essence of our traditions that is in accordance with spirit of the times and humanity, while discarding the dross that is outdated in contemporary times. Simultaneously, we should open our minds, absorb and assimilate the universally excellent achievements in both the eastern and western civilizations. On that basis, we can set up new cultures and new religions that function as the Chinese spirit of the new era.

Although the Judaic reform led to divisions of Judaism, none of the

² Mou Zongsan, an outstanding representative of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism, holds the view that the Confucian study of Sageliness Within cannot serve as the metaphysical basis of democracy and science. He hence proposed Self-Negation of Conscience and develops an indirect way of Kingliness Without for democracy and science. He also thinks that religion can only solve settlement of personal life, but not that of a nation. He failed to realize that religion can solve the problem of national spirit.

denominations has gone out of Judaism. Similarly, in the times around May Fourth Movement, the Chinese academia split into several sects in response to the Western modernity, such as the school of “Overall Westernization” represented by Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, the school of “Chinese Body and Western Function” with Zhang Zhidong as its representative, the School of “quintessence of Chinese Tradition” represented by Zhang Taiyan, Liu Shipei, Ma Xulun and others, and the school of “Western Body and Chinese Function” advocated by and Li Zehou.^① With the experiences of Jewish reform in mind, we can say that theories of “Overall Westernization” and “Western Body and Chinese Function” are expendable since their principal orientation is negation of the tradition and neglect of the succession of national spirit. The school of quintessence of Chinese Tradition refuses to follow the mainstream of modernization by sticking stubbornly to traditions without differentiation; hence their approach is also expendable. The contrast between the School of Westernization and the School of quintessence of Chinese Tradition” is comparable to Jews converted to Christianity and the Orthodox Jews in the Jewish reform movement. The former are rebels of their tradition while the latter are its defendants. One of the fruits of Judaic reform is the successful restraint of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Although still as an independent group of religion, the Orthodox Jew is a minority (21% of the religious Jews in the U.S.). Thus among the above options, we can see the thought of the School of Chinese Body and Western Function” is more practicable in the reconstruction of Chinese culture today. It is comparable to liberal Judaism which includes the majority of Jews who respectively belong to the Reform and Conservative movements.

However, the thought of “Chinese Body and Western Function” I proposed here, is quite different from that of the school with same name in late Qing dynasty represented by Zhang Zhidong. Their practice was to accept the traditional Chinese system of values unchangingly while introducing Western technology. By Body (Ti) they meant the Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties and Function (Yong) was referred to making use of Western science and technology. In their thought, Body contained the meaning of “fundamental” and “principal” while Function is instrumental, secondary and complementary. In terms of their purpose, they did not transcend what Wei Yuan proposed “mastering the western technology in order to resist the Western barbarians”. They did not realize the changes of the times and hence failed to realize that Body should also be adaptable to the changes of the times. Body is closely related to Chinese tradition, especially the Confucian tradition, but it should be the tradition reformed according to spirit of the times and reconstructed on the basis of absorption of the cultural essences of both the East and the West, not the unchangeable old convention. I think the Body in this sense can jointly function with

^① “Overall Westernization” is the theory of a group of Chinese intellectuals who entirely upholds western civilization including science, tautology and values and break with the traditional Chinese culture. “Chinese Body and Western Function” means to take the Chinese traditional ideologies, Confucianism in particular, as the unchangeable value system or root and stem and western science as less important branch which can be used in improvement of material life only. “Quintessence of Chinese Tradition” represents an attitude against everything western and for everything of Chinese tradition. “Western Body and Chinese Function” refers to a theory of those who accepts western culture and science as the basic value for modern Chinese people and regards the traditional Chinese values as at most some kind of supplement.

modern science and technology and is capable of meeting the needs of Chinese people and hence can become the spiritual backbone, their cultural identity, and function in the spiritual settlement of Chinese people^①

As to the differences between Chinese people and Jews, I propose two points: first, Judaism is a successive tradition without ruptures while the Chinese tradition was not. Second, Jewish tradition is a typical religion while the Chinese tradition is not. The two differences mean that the construction of Chinese culture today should not be completely the same as that of the Jewish reform in 19th century.

The reform of a continuous tradition—Judaism, means the innovation and reconstitution of it with a theory of historical evolution as its standard. The Jewish reformers differentiated and discarded the some doctrines, rituals and customs, while choosing and reserving the factors that were adaptable to requirements of the times. In fact, the Jewish reformers and Conservatives both adopted this approach. But that is not practical for the construction of Chinese culture, for our tradition on the elite level, at least in mainland China, was broken in the times around May Fourth Movement in early 20th century. Nowadays, the majority of Chinese, the young generation in particular, know little about the traditional values except some professional philosophers and scholars. The traditional values were deprived of its carrier — intellectuals. Hence, the priority of the contemporary Chinese cultural construction should not be innovation as it was in Jewish Reform Movement. The first mission should be the link or connection with the tradition, that is, we should go way back to where the tradition was broken, and bridge the gap between tradition and the present culture. Only after that can we take the task of innovation and reconstruction.

However, the linear quality of time means that history will never be replayed and we will never travel back to the past in terms of time. So the sequence of connection to and innovation of the tradition is not in the sense of time but of logic. It is not possible and practical to spend ten or more years on recovering the tradition without reforming the tradition and reconstructing a new culture.

In time, connection and innovation happen simultaneously. That is, understanding and connection of the tradition coincide with its reform and reconstitution. The combination of connection and innovation is a two-fold of mission which is much more complicated and difficult than the innovation of Judaism. That should not be neglected in the process of building the contemporary Chinese culture.

The second difference between Chinese and Jewish cultures is of great importance. The Jewish tradition is a religious one. It consists of not only beliefs, rituals and customs, but also organizations and believers. That is to say, Judaism is an institutional religion. An ideology as a belief without organization or believers can in

^① I agree with Dr. Chen Ming, chief editor of *Yuan Dao* on his cultural conservative standpoint and his proposal of reconstruction of Confucianism. However, in his thought I can only see the exclusive emphasis of Yuan Dao or searching for Dao without Ti (Body) or any specific affirmation of the tradition. I emphasize the positive elements of traditional Confucianism, such as the thought of Heaven, the moral principles such as Humanity (ren), Righteousness (yi), rite (li), Wisdom (zhi) and Faithfulness (Xin), and the secular ethics such as respectfulness (gong), magnanimity (kuan), fidelity (zhong), affability (wen), kindness (liang), frugality (jian), tolerance (rang). Assimilation of the excellent achievement of cultures home and abroad will lead to a new Confucianism which should be the Body of Chinese culture. The overall structure of contemporary Chinese ideology can be set up by the combination of the Body (ti), the new Confucianism and the Function (yong), democracy and science.

the main be a philosophical system, which is only a rational pursuit of a few people and hence very limited in its influence. With believers and organizations such as churches, the belief of a religion is deeply set in every believer's mind and is performed in daily life and specific actions. So, religion is much more acceptable for the mass than philosophy. At present, some 80% of the world population is believers of certain religions and they regard their own religious beliefs as their cultural identity and spirituality. That is what Judaism is to the Jews. Undoubtedly, the Chinese tradition also included some religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism. But the disciples of Buddhism and Taoism are only a minority of the population in mainland China. Moreover, the two religions seem too passive and elusive (escaping from the physical world) to become popular among most people. The factual main stream of Chinese tradition was Confucianism. But Confucianism is not deemed as a religion in the minds of many Chinese people. Ideologically, the pre-Qin Confucianism is much more religious for its thought concerning Heaven. But the Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties paid less attention to Heaven, instead, human became the center and its main pursuit is the instruction of Rite and self-cultivation. That undermined the religious characteristic of Confucianism. Functionally, however, Confucianism was a religion, an institutional religion consisting of beliefs (concepts of Heaven and man, nature and providence, for example), customs and organizations. Ever since the "Ba Chu Bai Jia, Du Zun Ru Shu" (exclusive acceptance of Confucianism and discarding a hundred thought schools) during the reign of Emperor Wu of Western Han dynasty, Confucianism was combined with the monarchal system and became the state religion. Since Sui dynasty, with the promotion of the official examination system, Confucianism became the state religion that attracted followers from extensive fields and was integrated with its contemporary bureaucratic systems as one. That condition continued until late Qing dynasty. Undoubtedly, Confucianism functioned as the Chinese identity and national soul in Chinese history, and as the destination of cultural pursuit and guidelines of daily life for Chinese people. Considering the Jewish reformation and modern Judaism, Chinese people should re-establish Confucianism and make it their cultural identity. That has become the most important task in the contemporary cultural construction in China. To be exact, we should go back to the period of May Fourth Movement and connect contemporary to the tradition, Confucian tradition in particular. Though the critical inheritance and creative transformation, we should try to make Confucianism a religion or religious ethics with doctrines, rituals, organizations and followers.

The American Jewish scholar Joseph R Levenson thought that Confucianism had been laid in the museum of history with the end of monarchy in China, and it would never recover and become a living religion.¹ He surely noticed the characteristic of link of traditional Confucianism and monarchy system. But he forgot that Confucianism was not always the official religion, for example, during the period of time between Confucius and Dong Zhongshu in the Han Dynasty. So it will not necessarily be the official religion in the future. He did not understand that ideology is

¹ Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern fate*, trans. Zheng Dahua, Ren Jing, China Social Sciences Press, 2000, p 334-343.

somehow independent and it can detach from its former subject and adjust to new carriers. My point is that after the collapse of the monarchy bureaucracies, the carrier of Confucianism should shift from government officials and scholars to the common people. China has a population of 1.3 billion persons who, just as the people of most other countries and religions on the earth, are thirsty for spiritual guide which are required by human nature. That is the hotbed for Confucianism to take root, sprout and grow up. Hence in the process of constructing the contemporary Chinese culture, the mission of scholars should be not only to connect the tradition, set up new tenets, extend the “intellectual course” of Confucian thoughts, but also to disseminate Confucian religion, transmit Confucian doctrines to the mass, develop Confucian disciples of them, hence make Confucian beliefs and values practical guidelines of life for the populace. Only then can we proudly say that the Chinese people can not only realize the material modernization but also develop their unique identity and national soul, and hence become a real and dignified member of the peoples of the world.

After the failure of Wu Xu Reform, Kang Youwei vigorously promoted Confucian religion in order to make it the national soul of Chinese people. In his book *Levenson* summarized Kang’s viewpoints that, without Confucianism, China is like a ship without a steering wheel that is going to sink at any time; Confucianism is the special national identity of China; deprived of it, the country will perish, and the people cannot exist on... the Jews, having reserved their religion, still exist though their state has perished...² A century has passed, Kang Youwei’s opinion on Confucian religion and national soul is still worthy of our reconsideration and recognition.

III. Why Jewish Experiences Are Referential

Some one may well question, why are the Jewish experiences of their religious reform and modernization valuable for Chinese people today?

In response to that question, we need to retrospect the background of the Reform of Judaism and the over hundred year course of Chinese history.

After the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, Jewish people were entitled to political rights for the first time in a western country and they enjoyed the same rights with French people. Then, with the continuous military victories of the Napoleon Empire, Jews in some other countries were given the same political rights. Before the revolution, Jewish people lived in ghetto secluded from the outside world physically and culturally, with nothing like power or privilege but discrimination and persecution. For the Jewish people living under other’s roof, the attainment of civil rights was regarded as freedom and emancipation granted by God, just as the Exodus of the ancient Israelites suddenly exposed to modern society, the emancipated Jews had never been so close to the western world that unavoidably they had to face the impact and challenge of modernity in politics, economy and ideology.

Politically, Jews began to recognize nationalism in the sense of geographical group, and admitted that Jews were no longer one nation but a religious group.

² *Levenson, Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, p. 163.

Compared with the religious group, the nation in the sense of geographical group is more important. The emancipated Jews felt that they should not stick to the old ethnic identity, but merged into the nation they resided in and became citizens loyal to the modern nations. That nationalism not only disintegrated the original Jewish identity, but also broke down the relatively independent Jewish communities and their legislative organizations and systems.

The challenges from modern economy to Judaism were as sharp, if not sharper, as those from modern politics. “as soon as he (the Jew) emerged from the ghetto, he was forced to live on the plane of development established by the modern economic system.”¹ The Jews turned from craftsmen, peddlers to company owners, businessmen, white-collar workers almost overnight. At that time, Jews had to adjust themselves so as to survive and develop in the complicated competitions in industry and commerce. They had to collaborate with non-Jewish people, accept the non-Jewish working customs and life styles, adjust to Christian rituals and holidays, such as religious service on Sunday, Christmas, Easter, etc. as a result, it was becoming more and more difficult to observe the Jewish Sabbath and other religious festivals. Furthermore, economic benefits got to outweigh spiritual interest; profits almost became the only pursuit of the people; the pressure of life drove most Jews to work hard for survival with no time to think about the Judaic affairs. Accordingly, the traditional opinion of future salvation was giving way to the benefit and happiness of the present life. People began to adopt an indifferent even hostile attitude toward religion. Furthermore, at the beginning of modern times, the concept of Class replaced Nation, and Jewish workers also emphasized a sense of Class instead of Nation, and lost interest in Jewish identity and Judaism. Thus only the middle-class Jews still stuck importance to Judaism. In a word, modern economy made the life styles set up by traditional Judaism outdated.

Besides the political and economic impacts, modern ideology proposed enormous challenges toward Judaism. In his book *Judaism as a Civilization*, Kaplan summarizes three trends of modernist ideology: the trend to judge the truth of everything related to human with scientific approaches, the trend to judge good with the socialized standards, and the trend to regard aesthetic experience and creation as the basic human need. According to the scientific approach, biblical God, miracles and revelation were all challenged by history, anthropology, psychology and comparative religious study. The traditional Judaism was a God-centered religion. The key of the goodness of human deeds rested on whether they were in accordance with the divine law. The meaning of human existence was to glorify the Lord. The perfection of human lay in his capability to communicating with God. With the God-centered tradition broken by the human-centered modernity, happiness and pleasure became the standard of goodness. The traditional laws concerning food and clothes and taboos in dressing were all against the standard of pursuit of human happiness, hence there were no reasons to retain them. Furthermore, since aesthetic pursuit can be the goal of human spiritual life, aesthetic education can take the place of religion and the ideas of

¹ Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as A Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1981, p. 29

supernatural God and salvation in the world to come become of no use any more. In short, similar to the Copernican revolution in the field of science, the human-centered ideology to a great degree deconstructed Jewish traditions in 17-18th century.

In a word, modern politics, economy and ideology became the first challenge to traditional Judaism after the middle Ages. The ideas of God, future salvation, chosen people, miracles and revelation in Bible and Talmud faced unprecedented doubt, and the customs and rituals lost their original values on the scale of enlightened rationality and modernity. The life styles of Jews were changed and their sense of Jewish identity was greatly weakened. In all, precious to the Jewish reform, Judaism was confronted with modernity and slipped into unprecedented crisis and the related Jewish sense of the people was seriously endangered.

Facing the challenges of modernity and crisis of Judaism, many Jews began to think that Judaism was out of fashion, hence the personality of the Jews cultivated in such a religion was inferior and their life styles were outdated. On the other hand, for many Jews, Christianity was superior, the life styles of modern Europeans were more civilized and the personality of Christians was worthy to be learned and followed. In such situations, some Jews developed a sense of self-hatred and began to think of converting to Christianity. German poet Heine once said that Judaism was a misfortune rather than a religion. Factually, after the enlightenment, groups of Jews were baptized and converted to Christianity, including Heine, the family of Marx, children of Mendelssohn, etc. Before the reform in 19th century, Judaism had become a burden for many Jews, and it was popular to participate in European mainstream society by converting to Christianity. Under such circumstances, some Jews apprehensive of their fate and prospect could not help asking: was there any reason for Judaism to exist with the challenges from the Enlightenment and modernity? Should, or, can Jews continue to be as a people with spiritual identity? If the answer is positive, then what will Judaism be in the future? The reform movement in 19th century was the response to the challenge of modernity under such circumstances.

Though the reform and reconstruction of Chinese culture is different from the Judaic reform which began in 19th century, the two movements have much similarity in background.

The War of Opium in 1840 was a turning point of history in China. Since then, the arrogant empire that had long been secluded from the outside world began to open her door. It was followed by a succession of unfair treaties with foreign countries such as *Nanjing Treaty* and *Maguan Treaty*, territory and indemnification ceded and commercial ports opened. China was endangered and exploited in sovereignty, economy and culture. Who could imagine the proud and arrogant Central Empire slipping into the state of colony and semi-colony of the western powers? Facing the impact and challenges from the West, Chinese people realized unanimously that lagging behind other countries means asking for humiliation from them and that the responsibility of building a strong and prosperous country was on the shoulder of every Chinese person. The national psychology of humiliation and indignation turned into actions to help the survival of the nation. First the Movement of Foreign Affairs arose with its aim to build a wealthy country and strengthen the army. Then was the

Reformation of Wuxu that was aimed at constitutional government. In 1911, the Xinhai Revolution broke out and then Republic of China was set up, and then led to the Movement of Restoration of Monarchy by Yuan Shikai, which was followed by the Period of Warlords. The successive events provided Chinese people with no hope of national prosperity. Besides the Movement of Foreign Affairs and political reforms, some Chinese people pursued cultural approaches to rescuing the people and the nation. They compared western cultures with Chinese tradition and realized the negative aspects of Chinese traditions in realizing modernization in China. Thus the Neo-cultural Movement around the period of May Fourth Movement followed. In the movements, some insightful Chinese intellectuals promoted use of modern Chinese (Bai Hua Wen) in writing, expressing new thoughts and advocating new moralities while stopping practice of classical Chinese, old thoughts and old ethics. They raised the slogan of “Down with the Confucian mansion and welcoming Mr. Democracy and Mr. Science”. Various thoughts coexisted at that time, such as “Overall Westernization”, “the Quintessence of Chinese Tradition”, “Chinese Body and Western Function”, Cultural Nationalism, so on and so forth. How to save the nation, the people and the culture become the heated topic in various social classes. Heated were the disputations between Science and Xuan (metaphysics), the historically unprecedented introduction of Marxism and foundation of Communist Party of China, etc. In a word, from 1840 to the period of May Fourth Movement, confronted with sharp challenges from western modernization, some Chinese people adopted a series of responsive strategies and actions with the purpose of saving the nation from perishing and revitalize China. But the fact was that China was still in the miserable conditions of undeveloped economy and political chaos. Even worse, the 2000 years Chinese cultural tradition was broken, hence Chinese people slipped into an unprecedented cultural crisis, which reminds us of the religious crisis of Judaism before its reform.

The Japanese invasion in 1930s turned the Chinese attention to national war crisis, which somehow concealed the cultural crisis. As the popular saying of the academia in that time said, the war against invasion preceded the enlightenment in importance. Undoubtedly, the foundation of People’s Republic of China was a great event which caused enormous changes of the country. The independent new China paved the way for Chinese people to stand up among other nations of the world. However, from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution (ended in 1976), again China stuck to the policy of “closing the door and secluding from the outside”. A series of movement after the establishment of new China, among which are Socialist Reform Movement, People’s Commune Movement, and the Movement of Reform and Opening to the Outside World following the Cultural Revolution, were after all attempts in the field of economy, science and technology. The Cultural Revolution with the slogan of “breaking the old world and setting up a new one” was disastrous for traditional Chinese culture. In the cultural sense, the Movement of Reform and Opening to the Outside World threw China into the situation similar to that during the May Fourth Movement, facing challenges from western cultures and the once concealed cultural crisis, falling into the state of lacking the cultural identity which was owing to the

broken cultural tradition. Thus began a new series of cultural reform and reconstruction movements. Opening to the Outside—Cultural Crisis—Cultural Reform, the formula is not only the description of the history from 1840 to May Fourth Movement, but also a portrait of the cultural journey of the two decades after the Cultural Revolution.

It's true that even in the condition of semi-colony, Chinese people had their own country, which was different from the Jews in Diaspora in foreign lands. But the difference is not a decisive factor. What is decisive is the similar “cultural march” that both Jews and Chinese people had to take, symbolized as Opening to the Outside—Religious/cultural Crisis—Religious/ cultural Reform.

Besides the similar backgrounds, Chinese cultural reform also shared the same goal and mission as the Jewish Reform. The goal of the Jewish Reform was to retain Jewish cultural identity by reserving Judaism while accepting modernity and merging into western society. After a century of misery and efforts, more and more Chinese people have realized that what is facing them is, on one hand, to realize modernization in economy, to catch up with western countries in living standards, and to establish a sound legal system, on the other hand, to inherit their own culture, and make the Chinese people exist as a people not only because of their “yellow face”, but also because they share a common spiritual identity. The greatness of Jewish people lies in their success in fulfilling the seemingly paradox dual task after years of efforts. But the Chinese people are still in the process of experiment and trial. For historical reasons, the journey for Chinese to fulfill the dual task is full of more hardships and difficulties. But once set, the goal should not be given up, for it, as the goal of Judaic reform, was originated from the age-old and profound tradition, from the spiritual need of the people, from the inner efforts to be a well-deserved member of the world. It was also a reasonable choice between tradition and modernity after more than 100 years of journey of blood and fire.

Similarity in their goals is owing to the age-old history and cultural tradition of the two peoples, and because of their similar experiences of insult and humiliation from other nations. With tradition, they have to face the problem of cultural inheritance; with the pressure of modernity, they resort to reform and change. Inheritance and reform, tradition and modernity, are what Chinese people have to balance in their road toward the realization of the dual goal, as what the Jews did in 19th and first half of 20th centuries.

Jewish approach to modernity is different from that of the European countries. In the European pattern, science and democracy originated spontaneously from their own rationalist philosophy, Protestantism developed from within Christianity. That is the natural outgrowth of the tree of western culture. The Jewish journey of reform and modernization was to transplant some elements of the foreign culture (science, universal humanist values, for example) to their own tradition on the basis of inheriting and reforming their tradition. In this case, China is more similar to Jews than to Europe. Thus, if we are justified in asserting that the European pattern of enlightenment and modernization is not suitable for China, we can safely say that the Jewish pattern is more referential to the reconstruction of Chinese culture today.

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