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"HOME AFAR": THE LIFE OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN JEWISH REFUGEES IN SHANGHAI DURING WORLD WAR II[*]

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Since its opening to the West in 1843, Shanghai had served as destination for four waves of Jewish immigration. The first Jews to settle in China were Sephardim from Baghdad, who migrated eastward in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Sassoons, Kadoories, Hardoons, Ezras, and Abrahams became wealthy merchants, and soon acquired British citizenship. The second group consisted of Russian Ashkenazim who escaped the pogroms and the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution. They were considered as the 'middle class' of the Jewish community in Shanghai. The third group of German and Austrian (and in smaller numbers Hungarian, Czechoslovakian and Romanian) Jews, numbering over 15,000, barely escaped the Nazi terror in the late 1930s. The fourth group consisted of about 1000 Polish Jews, including the only complete European Jewish religious school to be saved from Nazi destruction, the Mirrer Yeshiva.

The International Settlement of Shanghai seemed a viable option for the desperate refugees; this in spite of the fact that the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, and the Japanese, allies of Nazi Germany, occupied parts of the city. Nevertheless, in contrast to the German plan of *Entjudung*, the Japanese wanted to make use of alleged Jewish wealth and influence for the benefit of Japan's New Order. The official Japanese policy towards Jews stated that although Japan should avoid actively embracing Jews who had been expelled by her allies denying Jews entry would not be in the spirit of the empire's long-standing advocacy of racial equality. As a result of this policy, between the fall of 1938 and the winter of 1941, about 20,000 refugees travelled to Shanghai, their temporary home afar.

During the three-year period between 1938 and December 1941 most newcomers managed more or less to integrate into Shanghai's economy, despite the fact that they had come to Shanghai out of political necessity, and not for the economic prospects. Following the outbreak of the War in the Pacific and the Japanese occupation of all sections of Shanghai, the economic situation of the

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refugees significantly worsened. Furthermore, as stability in Shanghai was the most important priority for the Japanese, on February 18, 1943 the military authorities issued a proclamation about the establishment of a restricted area – or ghetto, as the refugees used to call it – for stateless refugees in Hongkou, where they were confined until the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

The end of the war opened up the possibility for the refugees of leaving Shanghai. However, when they were informed about the Holocaust in Europe, most did not want to return to their homeland. Many of them left for the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America, and after 1948, thousands of Jews went to live in the newly established State of Israel.

Key words: Jewish refugees, Shanghai.

Introduction

Between 1938 and the outbreak of the War in the Pacific about 20,000 Jewish refugees escaped to the international city of Shanghai. Their story has been recounted in a number of books and articles published over the past twenty years both in Chinese and Western languages. Some are memoirs written by the refugees themselves, those who formed part of this unique community, which existed for about a decade. They represent attempts to preserve memories for future generations. W. Michael Blumenthal, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury under President Carter and himself a former refugee in Shanghai, comments on the interest in this story for historians: "It is perhaps, above all, an interesting and important story to research and retell because it is so odd and improbable a tale. Interesting because of its peculiar setting; important because it involved a mixed and motley group of Holocaust survivors… in an obscure corner of the world" (Blumenthal 1996, p. 1).

Shanghai, open port

This 'obscure corner of the world', Shanghai, had been an open port since 1843 when Great Britain defeated China in the first Opium War. After the first foreign residential quarters had been established, this small town 'on the sea', the literal meaning of Shanghai, was to experience rapid change.

Politically, Shanghai became a treaty port made up of divided territories. It consisted of three districts, with the Chinese sections in the northern and southern parts of the city separated by foreign concessions – the International Settlement (British and American) and the French Concession. The foreign zones – which were under extraterritorial administration – maintained their own courts, police system, and armed forces. As a result of the Western presence, many of the modern facilities of Shanghai's urban life were introduced to the concessions as of the mid-nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Shanghai already boasted the infrastructure of a modern city even by Western standards. Like other treaty ports in China, Shanghai was open to foreign trade, and by the 1930s it had become one of

the biggest ports in the world with a population of four million people, among them about 100,000 foreigners.

From the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, real power in Shanghai was in the hands of the Japanese, who numbered about 60,000, outnumbering any other single foreign group, and controlling the city through their military.

Shanghai was a city of contrasts. As one of the Jewish refugees described the specific atmosphere of this extraordinary city:

> "…the many smells ranging all the way from the burned incense in the temples to the carts in which human excrement was collected for fertiliser; the peculiar sounds and noises emanating from the great variety of people from the poorest coolies to the wealthiest men in the world; from the life of the socially accepted taxi-dancers to the puritanistic British society ladies – Shanghai was neither occidental nor oriental."[1]

It was indeed a place of extremes where even such bizarre figures as Trebitsch Lincoln could live in peace. Born the second son in an Orthodox Hungarian Jewish family living in a small town south of Budapest, Ignácz Trebitsch went to Canada as a Christian missionary. Then after an eventful career as an Anglican curate in Kent, a liberal member of the British Parliament, a German agent in both world wars, and an adviser to warlords in China, he became a Buddhist abbot in Shanghai (Wasserstein 1988).

Jews in Shanghai

The Jewish community of Shanghai consisted of four rather distinct groups. The first Jews to settle in China were Sephardim from Baghdad, who had migrated eastward to newly established trading ports in India and China in the second half of the nineteenth century. Encouraged by the British to expand commerce in China, families such as the Sassoons, Kadoories, Hardoons, Ezras, and Abrahams became wealthy merchants, and many of their members soon acquired British citizenship.

The most prominent family by far were the Sassoons, who remained the most influential Jewish family in the Far East until the communist takeover of Shanghai in 1949. "The Rothschilds of the East" established an economic empire with centres in Bombay, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Shanghai, and were involved in great charitable enterprises. The headquarters of this empire, the Sassoon Building, stood at the intersection of Nanking Road and the Bund. Completed in 1929, this 77-meter-high art deco palace was known as the most sumptuous house in the Far East[2] (Jackson 1968, pp. 217–218).

[1] From the documentary *The Port of Last Resort – Refuge in Shanghai*, directed by Paul Rosdy and Joan Grossman.

[2] The Sassoons and the other Sephardi families did not break their ties with Shanghai. In the 1990s, the Kadoorie family donated 500,000 US dollars for the construction of the new Shanghai Museum, and Albert Sassoon became the first president of the present-day Jewish Community of Shanghai. This community comprises international professionals, businessmen and entrepreneurs of various backgrounds and affiliations, and has a resident rabbi.

While the Sephardi community in Shanghai totalled only about seven hundred people, the Russian Ashkenazim arriving in Shanghai in the 1920s numbered over five thousand. For the first group of Jewish immigrants, Shanghai was a land of opportunity. The second group came to China only partly in search of greater economic opportunities. Seeing China more as a haven, Russian Jews escaped the pogroms and the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution. However, in the course of a few years, they were able to find jobs and earn a modest living. They served as the 'middle class' of the Jewish community in Shanghai.

The third group of Jews arrived in Shanghai after a pleasant journey on Italian or German luxury liners, sometimes in first-class cabins. They took the one-month voyage from Genoa or Hamburg to the other end of the world not because they were rich merchants or adventurers, but because they were German and Austrian Jewish refugees, fleeing Nazi Germany. For them Shanghai was the only choice.

The fourth group consisted of about 1000 Polish Jews, including the only complete European Jewish religious school to be saved from Nazi destruction, the Mirrer Yeshiva. Its rabbis and students, numbering about 250, took the route from Poland to Lithuania, from Lithuania across the Soviet Union to Kobe in Japan, from Kobe to Shanghai, where they continued their pre-war routine of Torah study until the end of the war, when they finally reached Brooklyn.

The European background of the emigration

The anti-Semitic policy of Hitler's regime included the forced emigration of the Jews from Germany as early as 1933. The goal of the Nazis was a *Judenrein* Germany, a country free of Jews, which was to be achieved through economic measures, mass arrests, and persecution. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of their full citizenship in the Reich – thereafter, they became subjects of the state and those who had left Germany lost even that lesser status in 1941. Many Jews living in countries and territories under German occupation or political influence considered emigration a possible solution. Nevertheless, a major obstacle to leaving the organised terror behind and finding at least temporary shelter in other parts of the world was the fact that the Western countries were unwilling to open their doors to further Jewish immigration. This became obvious at the Evian Conference in 1938.

On the other hand, as Germany continued to expand its territory by incorporating Austria and the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia into the Reich, and as an increasing number of Jews fell under German control, the organised terror campaign against them intensified. The expulsion of the Polish Jews from Germany in October 1938 and the pogroms of *Kristallnacht* on November 9, 1938 were followed by carefully orchestrated acts of violence. Jews were rounded up, arrested, and taken to concentration camps, and many of them were released only on the condition that they leave the country within a limited period of time. This was the moment when most Jews decided to flee to countries that might offer them safe haven.

There was only one place, which, at least until August 1939, required neither visas nor police certificates, neither affidavits nor assurances of financial independence: this was the open port of Shanghai. The International Settlement seemed a viable option for the desperate refugees; this in spite of the fact that they hardly knew anything about China, and what they did know was not favourable at all. The Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, and the Japanese, allies of Nazi Germany, occupied parts of the city.

Japan, rising great power in the Far East

Japan had followed an expansionist policy towards China since the end of the nineteenth century. In 1932, Japan occupied Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. Japan was condemned for its action by the United States and the League of Nations. As a result, Japan left the League in 1933, and its relations with the United States and Britain deteriorated rapidly. In order to avoid international isolation, Japan shifted gradually toward the German camp.

The new alliance led to the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in September 1936, and was further strengthened by the 1938 cultural treaty. The Tripartite Pact of September 1940, signed by Germany, Italy and Japan, pledged a military alliance between the three countries later known as the Axis Powers.

The alliance between Germany and Japan was an uneasy one for several reasons. First of all, Germany had significant trade relations with China. In 1937, the year in which the Sino-Japanese War broke out, 37 percent of Germany's total arms exports went to China, mostly to areas under the control of the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek, the enemy of Germany's Far Eastern ally (Altman – Eber 2000, p. 55). Weapons exports ended only in 1938, the year the Reichstag recognised Manchukuo, but Germany broke diplomatic relations with China only in the summer of 1941. On the other hand, the Japanese government, seeing no reason for German interest in the Far East, and having no intention of becoming involved in European politics, considered the alliance with Germany a means to promote Japan's policy of south-eastern expansion and its gradual occupation of China (Menzel Meskill 1966).

Japanese attitudes towards Jews

The Japanese attitude towards Jews was completely different from that of the Germans. As there had never been a sizeable Jewish community in Japan, most Japanese knew little about the Jews and were unfamiliar with Christian theology and religious anti-Semitism in the Christian world. In Shinto Japan, the tradition of anti-Semitism did not exist (Kowner 1997, p. 2). Although Japan was greatly influenced by Nazi propaganda throughout the 1930s, Hitler's racial classification of Asians as inferior as compared to the superlative German race was incomprehensible and un-

acceptable (Goodman – Miyazawa 1995, p. 35). However, the Japanese had their own racial classifications and considered their own Asian neighbours inferior.

In contrast to the German plan of *Entjudung* ('removal' of the Jews from Germany), the Japanese wanted to make use of alleged Jewish wealth and influence for the benefit of Japan's New Order. They believed that Jewish capital, knowledge, and technical skills could contribute to the economic development of Japan and that the settlement of Jewish professionals, businessmen, and technicians in Japanese occupied territories, apart from being useful to Japan, would also attract American capital for the industrialisation of Manchuria (Tokayer – Swartz 1979, p. 9).

The Japanese policy towards the Jews, as representatives of the white race, was based on the principles of universal brotherhood, racial equality and justice. This does not mean, however, that anti-Semitism did not exist in Japan. The first Japanese to study Judaism and become acquainted with anti-Semitism were soldiers, Russian-language experts attached to the Japanese military contingent in Siberia (Goodman – Miyazawa 1995, p. 80). As a result of their contacts with the White Russians, they had not only studied Western military tactics but had also had lessons in the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Jews, including the Jewish plot to achieve world domination, as described in *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Kranzler 1976, p. 177). These Japanese experts, contaminated by anti-Semitism, believed in the stereotype of the wealthy Jew, the Jew with money and influence.

As early as 1933, Manchukuo had become the destination for Jewish professionals fleeing Europe. During this same period, Jews, mostly businessmen and professionals, went to Shanghai in ever increasing numbers. Following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the Japanese took control of Greater Shanghai (the Chinese parts of the city) and also occupied Hongkou[3] and two other north-eastern sections of the International Settlement, establishing a Chinese municipal administration under strict Japanese control.

After the flow of refugees began, Japan faced the constant problem of how to cope with the Jews without antagonising either Germany or the United States. Although they viewed the growing refugee influx with deepening anxiety and attempted to halt it, they wanted to make use of the economic and political power of the Jews. They also thought that restrictions to Jewish entry into Shanghai might worsen Japanese – U.S. relations and endanger the inflow of foreign capital needed for economic reconstruction. Furthermore, Jewish refugees were still in possession of valid German passports, even if there was a large red 'J' stamped on them, and visas were not necessary for Germans.[4]

The official Japanese policy towards Jews, formulated by the Five Ministers Conference held in Tokyo in December 1938, stated that although Japan should avoid actively embracing Jews who had been expelled by her allies denying Jews entry

[3] *Hongkou* is the Chinese official *pinyin* transcription of the district's name. In the 1930–40s, it was known and referred to as *Hongkew* by the foreigners in Shanghai.

[4] In August 1938, Jews were required to bear certain first names, and those who did not have the easily identifiable, approved names had to take the middle name Sara or Israel. In October of the same year, Jews were required to exchange their German passports for new ones, clearly identified by a large red letter 'J' (Grebenschikoff 1993).

would not be in the spirit of the empire's long-standing advocacy of racial equality (Rotner Sakamoto 1998, p. 56). As a result of this policy, between the fall of 1938 and the winter of 1941, about 20,000 refugees travelled to Shanghai, their temporary home afar.

Who were the refugees?

First of all, the Nazis regarded most of these refugees as Jews. They were largely middle-aged people, who came to China with their families, or, if it was impossible for the whole family to travel together, relatives followed them later. The refugees were slightly better educated than the average Jewish population in Germany, but there was no significant difference between their make-up in terms of professions and trades and that of Central European Jewish people more generally. Regarding their financial status, they were not poor – at least they had not been before they saw their properties confiscated or stolen by the Nazis – but they were not especially rich either (Hoss 2000, p. 133).

In their homelands, many of them had had to start a new life more than once. They had moved from the countryside to the city, or from smaller cities to the capital. They even moved within the big cities, sometimes not of their own volition. Many of them had changed professions, either because of the Great Depression or because of measures taken by the Nazi authorities that rendered them unable to continue in their jobs. Their courageous decision to travel to the unknown to begin something new, to build a new life, was thus based upon prior experience at home. And it saved their lives.

Most German and Austrian Jews came to Shanghai from one of the two capitals, Berlin or Vienna. About forty percent of the German-speaking refugees came from Austria, and almost all of the Austrian Jews came from the capital (Hoss 2000, p. 107). Nevertheless, apart from German-speaking Austrians, there were numerous Slavs and Hungarians among the refugees. A number of Hungarian Jews escaped from Horthy's Hungary to Austria after the defeat of the 1919 Soviet Republic of Hungary. Among those who left Hungary for Austria in the 1920s and later emigrated to Shanghai was Ladislaus Frank, editor of the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, and Adolf Josef Storfer, who had had to flee Hungary as early as 1911 because of his leftist views. In Vienna he was publisher of Sigmund Freud's works, and in Shanghai he published the *Gelbe Post*, considered the best journal to be published by refugees.

By trade, almost two thirds of the refugees were merchants, about one fourth of them were craftsmen or worked in the industrial sector, mostly as bakers, butchers, tailors, etc. There were relatively few people with a university degree or academic position. Those with university diplomas included doctors, dentists, pharmacists, lawyers and engineers. According to the 1939 *Emigranten Adressbuch für Shanghai*, many people in Shanghai earned their living by running small businesses such as cafés, restaurants, grocery stores, etc.[5]

[5] *Emigranten Adressbuch für Shanghai, November 1939.* Hong Kong, 1995 (reprint).

Passage to Shanghai

Shanghai could be reached from Europe by two different routes: by sea and by land. Jews from Germany and Austria travelled mostly on Italian ships from Trieste or Genoa, or on German liners from Bremen or Hamburg. The journey took about four weeks through the Suez Canal, but some 'cape-ships' which wanted to save on the canal tolls took the longer route around the Cape of Good Hope, which lasted about ten weeks (Ginsbourg 1940, p. 13). After Italy entered the war in June 1940, the sea route was virtually blocked; only a few more ships would be able to set sail from Marseille and Portuguese ports until early 1942 (Ristaino 2000, p. 140).

The land route led through the Soviet Union to Manchukuo, and from there refugees travelled to Shanghai or other Asian destinations on Japanese ships. These voyages were organised by Intourist, the official Soviet travel agency, and were to be paid for in US dollars. Soviet authorities granted transit or exit visas for those who possessed an entry visa for any third country. Refugees could journey east via the Trans-Siberian railroad until June 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union.

Entry to Shanghai

In Shanghai no country represented was authorised to exercise passport control after the outbreak of Sino-Japanese hostilities in 1937, as the city was not under the jurisdiction of China or any other single power. Immigration to Shanghai was *de facto* controlled by the Japanese Navy, since they controlled the harbour.

As the number of refugees grew (and by the early months of 1939 it had reached about ten thousand), restrictions were imposed on immigration by both the Japanese authorities and the Shanghai Municipal Council, the governing body of the International Settlement. According to measures passed in August 1939, entry to Shanghai was limited to those with sufficient means to support themselves or a landing permit based on a contract of employment or marriage with a local resident. The aim of these regulations was to control and limit immigration so that refugees would not become a financial burden on the foreign community of the city. As a result, fewer people applied for immigration certificates, and not all applicants were granted entry permits.

The relief work of refugee organisations

When the refugees arrived in Shanghai and were cleared through customs, they were taken to the Embankment Building, the reception centre for newcomers owned by Sir Victor Sassoon. If the newly arrived refugees had no friends or relatives to organise lodgings for them, they had to stay in one of the camps set up by the relief organisations. The first such organisation, the International Committee for the Organisation

of European Refugees in China (I.C.), was established in August 1938 by old Hungarian Shanghailanders, and financed primarily by Sassoon (1940, p. 290). It was also known as the Komor Committee after its honorary secretary, Paul Komor, a Hungarian businessman who had lived in Shanghai since 1898, and who had been involved in relief work as trustee of the Komor Charity Fund and chairman and treasurer of the Hungarian Relief Fund since 1924. Another important refugee organisation was the Committee for Assistance of European Refugees in Shanghai, under the direction of Michael Speelman. Among the leaders of the Speelman Committee we also find Hungarians, such as Eduard Kann, head of the Emigration Department, and Dr. Frederic Reiss, professor of dermatology at the National Medical College in Shanghai and chairman of the Medical Board.

Both committees worked according to the same system that been developed by earlier relief organisations. They collected monthly contributions from benefactors and provided those refugees without employment or other sources of income with accommodation and free meals. Both organisations had departments in charge of housing, food supplies, medical care, education, etc. Nevertheless, after the establishment of the Speelman Committee, the I.C. became primarily involved in providing identification cards for the refugees. Stateless refugees received identification cards signed by Paul Komor. These documents were accepted by the Shanghai Municipal Council as well as the Japanese authorities, and even by some foreign countries, such as Australia.

There was a significant difference between the responses to the refugee problem in Shanghai before and after the mass emigration began. In the early 1930s, every nationality set up its own relief organisations. These organisations received donations from their fellow nationals as well as other charities. At this point the problems that the relief organisations had to deal with were individual cases and could be solved with a single loan, on the condition that the persons in need would refund the money as soon as their financial situation allowed them to do so. Paul Komor described the goal of the Hungarian Relief Fund in 1935 as follows:

> "One of the main objects of the Fund is to keep Hungarians from becoming a burden to the Community at large or to beg in the streets. Everything possible is done to make it possible for those who cannot find employment here to return home or leave Shanghai."[6]

To return home? Or to leave Shanghai? Although, some refugees did manage to leave Shanghai for the United States, Canada, Australia or other countries before war broke out in the Pacific, these destinations did not represent a viable option for most.

For the local participants of relief work, it was very difficult to adapt to the changing situation. They might have had information about events in Europe, but they did not know the exact nature and certainly could not predict the outcome of the anti-Jewish campaign launched by the Nazis.

[6] Hungarian National Archives, K 672/1935/119. Komor to Boissevain, Consul General of the Netherlands in Shanghai. Shanghai, November 29, 1935.

Along with local relief organisations, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the International Red Cross, all had representatives in Shanghai. The resources of the Shanghai Jewish community dried up soon after the outbreak of the War in the Pacific, when the American and English armed forces were arrested and put into a prisoner-of-war camp on an island near Shanghai and civil enemy nationals were interned in the city. Although local JDC representatives were also interned in the spring of 1942, this organisation had the greatest impact on the refugees, as they provided free meals for about 8000 people a day (Margolis 1944, p. 171).

Refugee life in Shanghai, 1938–1941

The first arrivals managed to bring some of their possessions with them, such as furniture, tools, and even sewing machines, or simply to smuggle some money out of Germany through England or other routes when they left (Linden 1995, p. 7). As they had the means and experience to set up businesses, some of them became quite well off. However, those who managed to leave Germany under the strict control of the Gestapo, arrived with only the clothes they were wearing and one handbag each (Isaac – Isaac).

As the refugees settled in, the few of them with sufficient financial means started their own businesses, or if they were fortunate, found a job with foreign companies that enabled them to live in confined, yet total, privacy. Families with sufficient income (about 4000 people), were able to rent a house or apartment in the more elegant French Concession, or in the western parts of the International Settlement. The majority of the refugees, however, could not afford expensive housing, and had to settle in Hongkou, the Japanese occupied north-eastern part of the International Settlement, partly demolished during the 1937 hostilities, where rents were much lower than in the more prestigious quarters of the city.

Local relief organisations with the support of the International Red Cross and the American Jewish communities provided thousands of penniless refugees with temporary homes (Kranzler 1976, pp. 127–150). The first such ‘home’ (from the German word *Heim*, a term commonly used by the refugees) had been used by the British as an Old Women’s Home. Later, the refugees were housed in partially destroyed factory buildings or barracks, with blankets and bed sheets serving as walls between individual families. There were homes where men and women were separated into separate dormitories.

There were five temporary homes in Hongkou, owned by the Shanghai Municipal Council, Sassoon, Speelman’s company, and the London Mission Society. The first one, set up in January 1939, also had a kitchen that could serve about 7000 meals three times a day. Two other kitchens were established, one in a synagogue and the other in the reception centre. In spite of the fact that only a minority of the refugees observed dietary regulations, all kitchens served kosher food. By the time

the War in the Pacific broke out, when funds became insufficient, only one meal per day was provided.

Bad sanitary conditions and insufficient food resulted in widespread disease. The relief committees organised medical care in the form of outpatient clinics for every inhabitant of the homes, and there was an Emigrants' Hospital attached to the Ward Road Heim, led by a Hungarian physician, Dr. Verő, as superintendent.

Sir Victor Sassoon, a philanthropist as well as a good businessman, bought some houses in Hongkou and let the refugees rebuild them for free lodging. Refugees also rented houses from Chinese landlords and had them renovated by European craftsmen, who installed electricity and water pipes. Then they applied to the City Council for a water permit, which arrived after the compulsory bribe (Linden 1995, p. 8). Entire streets in Hongkou were rebuilt by skilled refugees. With its European-style houses, cafés, bars, restaurants, nightclubs and shops, the commercial centre of the district was called Little Vienna.

During the three-year period between 1938 and December 1941, most newcomers managed more or less to integrate into Shanghai's economy, despite the fact that they had come to Shanghai out of political necessity, and not for the economic prospects. In addition, only a few of them had a good command of English, the language commonly used in business circles.

Although many people were forced to live on charity, there was a rich cultural life within the Jewish community. Horace Kadoorie set up a school for Jewish children, where the language of instruction was English, but Chinese and French were also taught, and only after the Japanese occupation were German and Japanese introduced. The I.C. organised English classes for adults, and English was also taught in the refugee homes. ORT, the Organisation for Reconstruction and Training, offered six-month training courses in twenty-one crafts. The refugees published several newspapers and journals, professional musicians gave concerts, and plays were performed. Zionist groups were united into the Zionistische Organisation Shanghai, with its headquarters in the 'Hungaria' restaurant (Kranzler 1976, p. 378).

Life after the outbreak of the War in the Pacific

The outbreak of the War in the Pacific brought about the first major change in refugee life. On December 8, 1941 the Japanese military took control of the entire city, including all foreign sections.

As a result of the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, the economic situation of the refugees significantly worsened. All allied business establishments were closed, and those who worked for companies owned by enemy nationals lost their jobs. The legal status of the majority of the refugees also became uncertain just before the outbreak of the War in the Pacific, as those holding German passports were declared stateless on November 29, 1941. Without a valid ID the last hope of leaving Shanghai seemed to disappear.

After Japan's active involvement in World War II, the Nazis felt that they had every right to demand more cooperation from their allies to solve the Jewish problem. In the summer of 1942, 'rumours' spread among the refugees in Shanghai about Josef Meisinger, the Gestapo representative in Tokyo, who was sent to Shanghai to discuss the Jewish refugee question with the Japanese. It was said that Meisinger, the 'Butcher of Warsaw', who in 1939 was responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of people in the Polish capital while head of the Gestapo there, met in Shanghai with representatives of the Japanese Consulate, the military police, and leaders of the Japanese Bureau of Jewish Affairs to discuss the German plan for the final solution in Shanghai.[7]

The Japanese, however, wanted to do nothing that might have inspired enemy counterpropaganda and thus were unwilling to involve themselves in the final solution. Nevertheless, as stability in Shanghai was the most important priority for the Japanese, on February 18, 1943 the military authorities issued a proclamation on the establishment of a restricted area for stateless refugees in Hongkou where many of the Jews were already residing. Refugees were ordered to move inside the restricted area within three months. The proclamation did not address Jews in general (actually, the word Jew was not used at all), as not all Jews were subject to the new regulations. Stateless refugees referred only to those who had arrived in Shanghai after 1937 from Germany (including the former Austria and Czechoslovakia), Hungary, the former Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Those who had come before 1937 (the year the Japanese had occupied Shanghai), including most of the Russian Jews, were not subject to internment and remained free of restrictions. Also, the Japanese committed no acts of violence against Jewish religious institutions, schools, synagogues, or cemeteries (Zeitin 1973, p. 65).

The relocation of the refugees to the designated area was assisted by the newly established SACRA (Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association), with Dr. Abraham Cohn, a Romanian Jew who had been raised in Nagasaki and spoke Japanese fluently, as its chairman. Following the establishment of the restricted area, SACRA became the main local body for relief work, but most of the funding came from the JDC.

Life in the ghetto

The restricted area – or ghetto, as the refugees used to call it – had no barbed wire or walls around it, but people were not allowed to leave without a special pass. The proclamation meant that about 8000 persons who had settled in other parts of Shanghai had to give up their homes, shops, and offices, and sell them to the Chinese or Japanese (Gruenberger 1950, p. 342). The establishment of the ghetto ended most

[7] The details of the plan are described in Tokayer's book based on interviews with former refugees in Shanghai; nevertheless, in the course of my research, I have not found any archival evidence for the German *Endlösung* plan in Shanghai.

people's careers because if they worked for bigger companies outside the designated area, they could not obtain a pass from the Japanese authorities to enter or leave the ghetto. The Japanese Bureau for Stateless Refugees was in charge of issuing these passes. The Japanese officer in charge of issuing passes, Ghoya, the self-proclaimed 'King of the Jews', was a very short man full of complexes in his dealings with the taller foreigners. According to a former refugee, it was torture to wait in the broiling sun for hours or sometimes the whole day just to apply for a pass (Heppner 1993, p. 114). Only qualified people whose business 'served the public', such as physicians and engineers, managed to obtain a permit easily and have it renewed every month, thus continuing to work until 1945; however, most employees and businessmen became jobless.

The ghetto in Shanghai differed from its counterparts in Europe. The 15,000 refugees were not totally isolated as the small district of about one square mile had a population of about 100,000 Chinese, most of whom had been unwilling to leave their homes. The Japanese did not even guard the boundaries of the ghetto; barriers were only erected at some of the checkpoints, where Japanese soldiers, Russian police and Jewish civilian guards were posted. Moreover, every stateless refugee in the ghetto had to register with the Japanese police.[8] It was not difficult to leave the ghetto illegally; however, it was a rather risky undertaking because a foreigner in a Chinese city could easily be identified by the Japanese patrols.

Russian Jews held stakes in a number of businesses in Hongkou, and after the establishment of the ghetto they set up even more. Some refugees – such as carpenters, locksmiths, shoemakers, and tailors – had small businesses; others had small cafés or restaurants. Intellectuals gave private lessons in exchange for a lunch, but the majority were dependent on charity (Frank 1960, p. 216). The situation for the poverty-stricken refugees became even worse in the winter of 1943 when coal virtually disappeared – it was cheaper to buy boiled water than to buy coal briquettes and boil the water at home (Tobias 1999, pp. 86–88). Furthermore, electricity was rationed, and there was not enough food to keep from starving. Free meals in the soup kitchens were reduced to one per day, and the portions were carefully weighed.

In early 1944, the JDC resumed sending money through indirect channels via Switzerland to Japanese-occupied Shanghai, in spite of the American 'Trading with the Enemy Act' which forbade any Jewish or other organisation in the United States to transfer funds to enemy controlled areas. The quality and quantity of the food improved, and although serious malnourishment remained there was no starvation (Gruenberger 1950, p. 343).

The Shanghai Jewish Chronicle and German-language radio broadcasts reported on the development of the war in Europe. News of the German retreat and surrender was greeted with subdued celebrations.

[8] A "List of Foreigners Residing in Dee Lay Jao Police District including Foreigners holding Chinese Naturalisation Papers" which includes 14,974 names and dates from August 24, 1944, has been discovered and published recently in Germany (Armbüster – Kohlstruck – Mühlberger, 2000, CD-ROM).

The end of the war in Europe brought greater intensification to the war in the Pacific. The steady advance of the Allies in the Far East resulted in aerial bombardments in Shanghai. There were no bomb shelters or even basements in Hongkou. The Japanese, hoping that the Americans would not bomb the district inhabited by foreigners, had a radio transmitter and stored ammunition and oil in the restricted area.

On July 17, 1945, Okinawa-based U.S. bombers attacked the radio station that had been directing the Japanese shipping lines. Civilian areas were also hit by the bombs, leaving hundreds of Chinese and thirty-one European immigrants dead and several hundreds wounded (Tobias 1999, pp. 86–88).

The post-war period

The Japanese surrender in Shanghai was announced on August 15. The Japanese military remained in the city maintaining order until August 26, when a small landing party of American forces arrived. Shortly after the end of the war, all of Shanghai was occupied by Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang forces. The pass system and segregation were terminated. Jews were now allowed to move about freely throughout the city. Nevertheless, the Jewish refugee area in Hongkou remained almost intact because most of the people did not have the money to move back to their former homes or to rent private rooms. Representatives of the local relief organisations and the JDC returned from the internment camps, and UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) supplies were made available.

The end of the war also opened up the possibility of leaving Shanghai. As Shanghai's economy was quickly revitalised, some refugees, especially the Russians who did not suffer any wartime disabilities, sought to stay and establish their new life in Shanghai (Mao's regime, however, did not allow them to stay without Soviet papers), but the overwhelming majority of the refugees wanted to leave.

By the time the war had ended, the news that millions of Jews had been killed in German death camps reached Shanghai. The refugees were informed of the Holocaust by the local and foreign press and through personal correspondence. When they learned what had happened to their relatives in Europe, most did not want to return to their homeland. Those who had the fewest resettlement options elsewhere – mostly elderly people who did not want to or were not allowed to emigrate to the United States or other Western countries – returned to their home countries, but the rest wanted to emigrate. Hundreds of people left for the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America. After 1948, thousands of Jews, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Russians and Germans alike went to live in the newly established State of Israel (Armbüster 2000).

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