Chapter 4:
Strangers in Shanghai

Too little is known about the first steps a person took upon arrival in Shanghai. Surely a Baghdadi Jew coming from Bombay or Calcutta to the port city in the 1840s or even the 1850s would not have put up at a Chinese inn, considering it no doubt beneath his station. Shanghai being an important junk port must have had numerous inns where itinerant Chinese merchants could lodge. But by the end of the nineteenth century Shanghai had changed greatly. Hotels catering to Westerners, such as the Astor close to Nanking Road (now Nanjing-dong Lu), were now available. By then employees arriving to work in the Jewish firms would have names and addresses and were probably provided with accommodations by their employers. In the early years of the treaty port few, if any, married men brought their wives and such distant postings were considered temporary.¹ Still at the turn of the century entire families had settled in what had become a modern, westernized city and these would have helped single men who came in increasing numbers.

Nothing much, if anything, is known about where Russian Jews and later Russian refugees turned upon arrival. Many of them destitute, they would hardly have gone to hotels, of which there were quite a few by the teens and 1920s. Unlike the Baghaddis, who came by ship, the Russian Jews came overland, which despite train travel on the Trans-Siberian and the Chinese Eastern Railway, was a tiresome and long journey. What were the first steps they took to find accommodations? How did they go about procuring food or cooking it? To be sure, Chinese vendors sold ready-to-go food, but most of the Russian Jews had little or no money. Like the Baghaddis, those who came later, say in the 1920s, were more fortunate in having earlier newcomers to turn to for advice and possible help.

By the end of the 1930s when the Central European refugees arrived, the Baghdadi and Russian communities were for the most part comfortably settled in the International Settlement and the French Concession. Some like the Harrods and Kadoories lived in large mansions that still stand today, though others made do with more modest domiciles. Whereas most Russian Jews were not well-off, and in many instances were poverty stricken, wealthy families were not lacking among them either. Judith Ben-Eliezer described her protected childhood in a large house in the International Settlement. “On our side were

¹ The loss of the Shanghai cemeteries is especially vexing in this connection, for some clues might be had from gravestones about nineteenth century burials. The earliest burial of a woman in Hong Kong’s cemetery is 1860 of Rachel Hagiora. I thank Mrs. Judy Green for making this information available.

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four houses, all more or less with same size grounds, a front garden large enough to contain several tennis courts and a vegetable garden at the back.”

The Tukaczynski (Tekoah) house was perhaps less sumptuous, but as described by Shoshana Kahan, “It has been a very long time since I enjoyed a home as much, a dear Jewish house ... full of light and Shabbat-like. This is Shanghai’s aristocracy.”

A great deal more is known about the process of arrival and settling in of the Austrian and German refugees who came at the end of the 1930s. Increasingly, they are publishing memoirs and, even if these are written from a great distance in time, they nonetheless afford glimpses of the painful adjustments their authors had to make. In addition, we have some very rare letters, the occasional diary, and a variety of documentary and newspaper materials from the 1938–1941 years, the years of their arrival and their attempts to somehow make a living in Shanghai.

In this chapter more attention will be paid, therefore, to the large Central European refugee community in Shanghai and, where indicated, their interaction with the settled Baghdadi and Russian communities. The seven years, 1938–1945, under consideration divide naturally into two periods: 1938–1941, before the Pacific War and the Japanese occupation of the Chinese portions of Shanghai, and 1942–1945 when the Japanese controlled the entire city. The war years will be discussed in the next chapter. All three communities were faced in the latter period with a new reality by the occupation and each had to adjust differently to the painful circumstances of wartime conditions. Whereas the first period can be discussed in some detail, the three and a half years of the Pacific War will unfortunately be fragmentary. Although unquestionably of great interest, the more detailed accounts furnished in a number of sources about the earlier period are lacking for the war years. One of the remarkable aspects of these seven years as a whole, however, is that individuals coped as best they could with adversity, trying and not infrequently succeeding in leading productive lives.

## Getting Settled: Flats and Heime

The refugees who landed in Shanghai before the large onslaught in 1939 had an easier time adjusting and sometimes had successful new careers for a time.

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at least. To this must be added, however, a certain number of lucky coincidences and a great deal of daring, and their willingness to take chances.

The Eisfelder family is a case in point. The family of four arrived in Shanghai in November 1938 before the large influx began. Their steamer was met by members of the Komor Committee (I. C.) and they were given the address of their accommodations on 125/3 Wayside Road, actually in a lane off the main street. The house in which they were assigned a room, like many others, be-
longed to a Russian (or was perhaps leased by him), who then rented rooms to make a living. By chance, Mr. Eisfelder was introduced some time later to a Mr. Kammerling, a Russian Jew of Turkish origin, who in his later years devoted himself to helping the Jewish community. Fortunately for the Eisfelders they had left Germany while still able to take funds along and, having passed a course in cake baking in Berlin, they leased with Kammerling’s assistance an apartment on 1255 Bubbling Well Road (now Nanjing Xi Lu). They hired a Chinese staff of bakers, pastry cooks, and a waiter, and on February 11, 1939 the Café Louis opened for business. The café, also a restaurant, served lunches and dinners, as well as cakes and handmade chocolates. Café Louis continued as a thriving business until February 1943, when stateless Jews were forced to move to the so-called “designated area,” or ghetto. Dr. Cohn, head of the newly created S.A.C.R.A. Committee, bought the café and later handed it over to the Japanese.  

The Zunterstein family, too, prospered, though in a different field of endeavour. Also in November 1938, Al Zunterstein arrived in Shanghai together with his aunt and uncle and their son. Unlike the Eisfelders, they did not go immediately to a flat, but were sent to a Heim, or shelter – the aunt and uncle to one for married couples, the two youngsters to one nearby for bachelors. Within only a few days his relatives rented a flat in the French Concession. Several months later, Al’s parents and sister arrived and the family was reunited. Meanwhile Al had found a job with a trucking company. As he remarks in his perceptive memoir, “When we arrived only very few refugees had pre-

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5 Heime, or homes, were actually large buildings rented or bought for the refugees and quickly reconstructed as dormitory facilities. Until the end of 1938, only a floor of the Embankment Building was available and there was a place for bachelors on Whashing Road (Xuchang Lu). Then, in January 1939, the first dormitory was arranged for 1000 newcomers at 16 Ward Road (Changyang Lu). Others were opened later at 680 Chaoufoong Road (Gaoyang Lu), a school at 150 Wayside Road (Haoshan Lu), another school on Kinchow Road (Jingzhou Lu), a building at 66 Alcock Road (Anguo Lu), and a factory complex at 1090 Pingliang Road (Pingliang Lu). Heinz Ganther, Günther Lenhardt, eds., Drei Jahre Immigration in Shanghai, Shanghai: Modern Times Publishing House, 1942, p. 17. According to SMP report, reel 17, file 5422(c)7, September 5, 1939, another Heim was at 138 Ward Road and at 100 Kinchow Road, housing an additional 1,375 persons. See also CAEJR, 86.4, CAEJR report to Daljewlb, Hicem, November 11, 1940, which in addition supplies the addresses of the various offices concerned with refugee affairs. However, the available data does not allow for an accurate estimate of how many people lived at any one time in the shelters.
ceded us, so it was easy for us to find jobs from sympathetic and helpful fellow Jews.”

Late in 1939, Al’s father rented a garage and a sewing machine. A Chinese tailor was soon found and he sewed samples of work clothes for hospital employees. This was a lucky turn because work clothes came to be in demand, and his father was able to rent two small houses in the International Settlement, one for the business, the other for living quarters. Like the Eisfelders, the Zuntersteins also had to move to the designated area in February 1943. A Chinese acquaintance who had a house at 800 Tangshan Road, lane 818, with a toilet and a roof garden, helped out and a deal was made.6

Howard (Horst) Levin, though a single youngster and only seventeen years of age, but similarly innovative and enterprising, was preparing himself for making a living while still sailing on the Biancamano to Shanghai in December 1938. On board ship he had met an Indian Bombay-based tool businessman whose Shanghai office was not functioning due to the Sino-Japanese war. Howard offered to help him out and shortly after his arrival received by mail a package of samples as well as addresses of Shanghai companies. He began life in Shanghai in one of the shelters, but according to his account, stayed only a few days and soon rented a room from a Chinese family.

Selling tools proved to be fairly lucrative and Howard soon received a sizeable commission from his Bombay acquaintance. He next tried his hand at selling advertisements for the newly established Shanghai Woche. The editor, Wolfgang Fischer (1898–1075),7 encouraged Howard to report on cultural events, which he did most enthusiastically. Finally, an introduction to Roy Healey (Halley or Hilley), manager of the American radio station XMHA, affiliated with NBC, landed him a job as a radio programmer. The German language broadcasts began May 2, 1939 at 4 o’clock in the afternoon and ran for ninety minutes each day except Sunday. The broadcasts consisted of news, music and commercials.8

With the support of Fischer and the newspaper’s staff, Howard also broadcast special programs from various coffee houses. These programs were very popular and many were humorous, such as the benefit evening for the hospital

8 YVA, 078/72, Howard (Horst) Levin interview with I. Eber, October 14, 1988, pp. 10b–12, 13–17, 18–24. Levin reviewed his activities as broadcaster, “2 Jahre,” Shanghai Jewish Chronicle, Vol. 2, no. 119 (May 2, 1940), p. 7, stating that his broadcasts had been running since May 3, 1939, and, since the station also used shortwave, the German language broadcasts could be heard in areas remote from Shanghai.
fund on June 25, 1941, which he broadcast from the roof garden of the Mascot Café, or the various informative lectures on topics important to refugee life.\(^9\) Howard Levin’s career as a radio personality came to an end with the outbreak of the Pacific War when the American radio station shut down.

The Deman family of four, Wilhelm Deman, his wife and small daughter, and his wife’s mother, Berta Antal, arrived in Shanghai May 15, 1939, and were assigned a place in one of the shelter facilities. However, Deman, a resourceful and successful businessman in his native Vienna, had sent approximately 100 letters to the United States asking that no more than $1.00 be sent to Shanghai as he was allowed only 10 RM per person to take abroad. And indeed, when he checked at the post office a packet of letters was waiting for him with the grand total of $160. Having come into this unexpected fortune, the Demans at once rented a garden apartment of three rooms and a porch from a Russian named Grebneff, who in turn had leased the building from a Chinese or from Sir Victor Sassoon. Deman writes that Grandmother soon sat in a rocking chair on the porch looking at the garden with two palms and flowers. By the time their lifts arrived with their office and household goods, they had been able to hang out their shingle advertising translations and correspondence services.

The Demans’s enterprising spirit, together with good luck, led by January 1940 to a position for Wilhelm as director of the Junior Club of the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association (S.J.Y.A.) in the Kinchow Road School, the so-called Kadoorie School.\(^{10}\) When in September 1941 the club had to vacate the premises, the Demans took over the well-known Gregg School of Business on Yuen Ming Yuen Road (now Yuan Ming Yuan Lu),\(^{11}\) moving its contents to their own building on 9 Monkhams Terrace. But then Mr. Grebneff sold the building to a Japanese forcing the Demans to relocate both their school and themselves to yet another address. Unlike other refugees, they did not have to move again after February 1943 when stateless Jews who had arrived after 1938 had to move into the designated area. The address at which they now lived, 369 Kwen-ming Road (now Kunming Lu), was already within its borders.\(^{12}\)

More examples could be cited of families and persons who, with initiative and luck, escaped the shelter facilities after a short time, managing somehow

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9 YVA, 078/42, Howard (Horst) Levin radio broadcast XMHA. This is the text of the “Mascot” broadcast together with a brochure of advertisements. YVA, 078/43, XMHA broadcast texts of various lectures. Typed manuscript.
11 The director of the Gregg School, a Mrs. Carole M. Stewart, was returning to the United States in September 1941.
to regain a measure of independence. Perhaps because he was optimistic by nature, Deman was able to remark in retrospect, “Shanghai was not a destination but a way station. At what time a destination for us and for others would become available was unfathomable. From this the conclusion should be drawn that the time of transition must be utilized as best one can.”\textsuperscript{13} Yet the large number of Central European refugees who arrived in 1939 vegetated in the Heime without any hope of gainful employment or of a measure of independence. They ate the largely unpalatable and generally unvarying food served to them from the kitchens. In November 1940, when there were four such shelters housing around 2,200 inhabitants, although many more – approximately 9,000 refugees – received meals in the kitchens.\textsuperscript{14} This number increased greatly during the war years. Of course, provided they had the money to do so, refugees could supplement their meager kitchen diets with other provisions such as hot tea and bread, even sausages, which were sold at small tables in front of the dormitories by refugee peddlers.\textsuperscript{15}

In contrast to the writers of the memoirs, discussed above, who remained in one of the facilities for only a short time and who put the memory of their unpleasant stay quickly behind them, the authors of several letters written at the time tell a grim story about these places. The letters were written by Mr. or Mrs. Hirschberg, most of them to their son Hans, who had left earlier for the kibbutz Ein Harod in what was then Palestine. The Hirschbergs and their young daughter Lilly arrived in Shanghai June 4, 1939, remaining in one of the shelters until November. After a pleasant crossing on the Italian liner \textit{Conte Verde}, the shock of Shanghai, heat and mosquitoes in the dormitory, the refugee crowds, and the unpalatable food overwhelmed them. In one of the letters Mr. Hirschberg wrote:

\begin{quote}
An income is not to be had here. We are housed in a totally bombed out section of town, in the midst of ruins, Chinese dirt, and vermin. An immigrant makes his living off [other immigrants] ... and if this does not work [he lives] by stealing and cheating. We have, thank God, food and a roof over our heads ... [but as to food] in the morning a piece of dry bread and a little tea. At noon, hot soup, 9/10 water, together with a piece of dry bread. In the evening, a piece of dry bread and two bananas or two tiny hard boiled eggs. This is repeated unchangingly ...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Ib\textit{id.}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{14} Ganther, \textit{Drei Jahre Immigration}, p. 17, mentions one enterprising refugee who brought warm meals from the kitchen to over 100 refugees on a handcart that he had acquired for that purpose. The Committee eventually put an end to his business venture.
\textsuperscript{15} YVA, 078/56A, “Ein verlorenes Jahrzehnt,” p. 121.
\textsuperscript{16} Letter from Samuel S. Hirschberg to his son Hans, July 10, 1939. This and other letters from her parents are in the possession of Mrs. Lilly Flis, their daughter. I thank Mrs. Flis for making these letters available.
Mr. Hirschberg notes the difference between those who are in charge and the helpless refugees; if someone complains, he is told that, after all, he was not invited to come to Shanghai. Relationships among refugees also left much to be desired. In another letter, Mr. Hirschberg wrote that there are ugly scenes and daily fights among the refugees. Indeed, these sometimes become physical battles and the previous night two couples had fought with knives. He added that Jewish criminals who have been released from jail also arrive in Shanghai and come to live in the shelters.\textsuperscript{17} There were those refugees who later described their encounter with Shanghai as extreme culture shock. They were appalled by the poverty and the unsanitary conditions. Although, to be sure, for the younger generation the experience of exile had something positive to offer, many older people thought Shanghai deplorable.\textsuperscript{18}

But not all later arrivals ended up in the Heime. The Polish refugees from Japan who came in the summer and early fall of 1941 were a special case. The actress, R. Shoshana Kahan and her husband Layzer who landed from Kobe in October 1941, were able to move at once into a room on Seward Road rented for them by friends. One month later they found a room in the French Concession and happily left Hongkou. In her diary, she ascribed this to the fact that the Polish and Lithuanian refugees refused to lower themselves as the Germans had done.\textsuperscript{19} But the matter of the 1,000-odd refugees from Japan may have been more complex, as a letter from Ellis Hayim indicates. Three hours before the Asamaru Maru docked with 350 Polish refugees, Inuzuka Koreshige informed Captain Herzberg, executive officer of the Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai (CAEJR) that “under no circumstances would the Japanese Landing Party allow the Polish refugees an asylum in Hongkew.” Among the various reasons that Inuzuka gave was that no one was allowed to reside in Hongkou without a permit.\textsuperscript{20} To this Hayim replied in a meeting with Inuzuka that the Japanese N. Y. K. company had disobeyed government orders, which required refugee passengers to have a permit, by accepting these 350 without proper documents.\textsuperscript{21} What kind of compromise was eventually worked out be-

\textsuperscript{17} Letter from Samuel S. Hirschberg to his son Hans, August 1, 1939.
\textsuperscript{20} The problem was, however, more complicated than that. Apparently the Home Ministry in Japan was anxious to send the refugees to Shanghai, but Shanghai was not eager to have them, a fact that the Foreign Ministry ignored. See Sakamoto, \textit{Diplomats and Jewish Refugees}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{21} SMP, reel 17, file 5422 (c)10, Ellis Hayim to G. Godfrey Phillips, September 4, 1941. Actually, this was not the first time Kobe Jews were shipped to Shanghai without permits.
between the Japanese authorities in Hongkou and the CAEJR is not known. The fact is, however, that none of the Polish refugees from Japan became shelter residents. They settled in as best they could in rented rooms and apartments.

For many refugees, room or flat living did involve a different set of problems. Those lucky enough to have found accommodations with indoor plumbing considered themselves fortunate, even if they usually had to share toilet and washing facilities with several families. Others had to manage Chinese style with a bucket and the “honeypot,” a wagon pulled by a coolie who came each morning to collect the refuse. Hot water had to be bought from the alley water seller and water for drinking had to be boiled. Nor was cooking a simple matter. Most apartments or rooms were not equipped with a coal cooking stove, and Europeans were not accustomed to charcoal cookers, or hibachis, as Shoshana Kahan called them, that had to be lit in the alley because of the smoke. She also hated the tea stored in a thermos which, she wrote, had a strange taste and was not hot.22

Shopping for food improved in time as Hongkou's refugee commercial center developed on East Seward and Chusan Roads (now Changzhi Dong Lu and Zhoushan Lu). Until 1942, at the market on Chusan Road, increasingly more stands appeared, operated by refugees, where housewives could buy fruit and vegetables and even kosher meat. Ollendorf’s hot dog stand was famous. In the spring of 1939 jams, honey, and cakes had already become available. Money was needed for such purchases and few refugees had enough, especially with increasing inflation. Second-hand stores sprang up where those who had still managed to bring possessions were able to sell them.23 Chinese peddlers were eager buyers of Western goods and on Ward and Chusan Roads many a transaction was concluded.

The fact that most of the Central European refugees did not have marketable professions was a major problem. A list of professions compiled in 1940 shows that the majority were merchants, 1,100 in all. Next were musicians numbering 260, physicians 220, and dentists 180. Other professionals, such as photographers, cooks, mechanics, or carpenters would hardly find employment in Shanghai.24

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22 Kahan, In faier un flamen, p. 287, entry for November 1, 1942.
Despite the general poverty, coffee houses and various kinds of eateries were doing a brisk business. By 1942 there were more than fifty establishments including bars catering to refugees. 25 Many advertised in the German Jewish press, such as Café Munter and La Bohème on Ward Road; the garden cafe Ostro on Wayside Road or Piccadilly Garden on East Seaward Road; the roof gardens Thal and Mascot also on Wayside Road. 26 Whereas on special occasions the more affluent might have gone to more elegant establishments like the White Horse (zum Weissen Roessl), many of the single men without cooking facilities would have frequented the cheaper eateries. Going out for an afternoon coffee to Café Hauser as, Mrs. Deman’s mother, Mrs. Antal, was in the habit of doing was probably rare. 27

Entertainment

The variety of plays, concerts, movies, and shows available in Shanghai is amazing, especially since China was at war since mid-1937 and the economic situation was far from favorable. Depending on a person’s financial resources, the latest Hollywood productions could be seen in one of the Settlement or Concession movie theaters, such as the Capitol on Museum Road (now Hu Qiu Lu) or the Rialto on Kweichow Road. In May 1940, for example, the Eastern Theatre was showing Cecil B. de Mille’s classic The Sign of the Cross with Charles Laughton and Claudette Colbert. 28 Shanghai’s famous night clubs, catering to an international clientele, were located in the Settlement and the Concession. Well-off Russian Jews would have frequented the DD night club on Avenue Joffre (now Huai Hai Zhong Lu), which served Russian cuisine, or the night clubs on Yu Yuen Road (now Yu Yuan Lu), such as the Roy and the

25 Dr. Seeger, German General Consulate, Shanghai, report February 2, 1941, p. 3. Courtesy Bernard Wasserstein. See also Ganther, Drei Jahre Immigration, pp. 130–131 who writes that in Hongkou were approximately 200 tea rooms and “Imbisstuben.” A list of restaurants and cafes together with brief biographies of some of the restaurateurs and/or businessmen is in the Shanghai Woche, no. 17, October 3, 1942. I thank Hartmut Walravens for making the newspaper available.

26 Café Munter advertised in Die Laterne, June 21, 1941 as the place to regain one’s health in its shady garden. La Bohème announced a café like in Paris, pleasant and reasonable prices, JN, December 27, 1940. Café Ostro too had reasonable prices as well as radio transmission and the Thal roof garden was open all day, JN, no. 11, May 20, 1941, p. 1. The Mascot roof garden promised good music and excellent cuisine, JN, August 30, 1940. YIVO Library, reel Y-2003-1854.


Bolero.\textsuperscript{29} But these were upper class establishments, not frequented by visiting soldiers and sailors, who were more likely to go to joints in the vicinity of the harbour, especially the street Chu Pao San, nicknamed “Blood Alley,” with its night clubs and taxi dancers.\textsuperscript{30}

A number of both Russian and Central European musicians had come to Shanghai. They never managed to form an orchestra, some becoming music teachers while others, more fortunate, joined the Shanghai Municipal Symphony Orchestra. According to Michael Philipp, as many as fifteen refugee musicians played at one time with the municipal orchestra.\textsuperscript{31} Still others taught at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.\textsuperscript{32} Some performances were given in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{29} Advertisement in \textit{Nasha Zhizn}, no. 4, May 23, 1941, p. 7, and \textit{Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury}, no. 105, May 1, 1940.
\item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{Gelbe Post}, Vol. I, no. 2, May 16, 1939, p. 42.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Alexander Knapp, “The State of Research into Jewish Music in China,” in Roman Malek, ed., \textit{Jews in China, From Kaifeng ... to Shanghai}, Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 2000, p. 506.
\end{itemize}
Shanghai Jewish Club to which both refugees and old timers came. For a time a group performed chamber music and were accorded an enthusiastic reception, but this ended with the outbreak of the Pacific War. Musicians of classical music did not find a fruitful field in Shanghai and most could not make a living from music. They needed additional jobs to provide an income. Furthermore, no doubt, the lack of a proper stage prevented the staging of operas. But even light opera was not that frequently performed. More popular by far were cabaret, variety shows, and solo performances. These could be staged in coffee houses, and even when performed in theatres no large scale organizational problems were involved.

The arrival in 1941 of a number of Jewish-Polish actors from Kobe who performed in Yiddish brought new life to the Yiddish stage in Shanghai. Shortly after she came to Shanghai, Shoshana Kahan together with her husband Layzer, J. Rapoport and Raja Zomina, a gifted singer who had been in Shanghai since May, appeared in a variety show in the elegant Jewish Club on Bubbling Well Road. Regarding another one of her performances a reviewer wrote that “until now [audiences did] not have an opportunity to hear Yiddish artists of this caliber,” hence their great interest. But a mixed reaction greeted serious theater. A performance of *The Dybbuk* by S. An-ski (pen-name of Solomon Seinwil Rapoport, 1863–1920), despite Raja Zomina’s inspired performance and an excellent production by Boris Sapiro (about whom more below) in the Lyceum Theater, was poorly attended. On the other hand, a performance of *Mirele Efros* with Shoshana Kahan was described by her as a great success. But the performance of plays was a problem: Time was needed for rehearsals, money for costumes, settings, etc., and plays could be performed only once,

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35 Kahan, *In fayer un flamen*, p. 287, entry for November 6, 1941. She remarks that it was a very successful evening and the actors remained among the Shanghai Jews for a long time after the performance. According to Wolfgang Fischer, “Raja Zomina,” *Shanghai Woche*, no. 2, June 6, 1942, Zomina captivated audiences with her performance of Yiddish songs.
36 *Undzer Lebn*, no. 28, November 14, 1941.
37 A dybbuk is the soul of a sinner that after death transmigrates into the body of a living person from where it must be exorcised.
38 Review in *Undzer Lebn*, November 28, 1941. It is not clear in which language *The Dybbuk* was performed.
39 Kahan, *In fayer un flamen*, p. 290, 290–293, entry for February 20, 1942. The play was also announced in *Undzer Lebn*, no. 40, February 6, 1942, but was not reviewed.
as she remarks, because audiences were too small for additional performances. Variety shows presented fewer problems and Shoshana and others appeared in these to considerable acclaim. Critical voices were also heard, however, and J. Rottenberg wrote that despite increased cultural activity in Yiddish, theatre performances were not always up to standard. He suggested the establishment of a theatre society, and may have had in mind a society similar to the one founded by the German refugees.

Yiddish theatre experienced a severe setback when in November 1942 the luxurious premises of the Jewish Club on 722 Bubbling Well Road were taken over by the Japanese authorities for the Press Office of the Army and the Jewish Club had to move to the Masonic Hall on 163 Avenue Road (now Beijing Xi Lu). “The removal of the Club from its own building was made voluntarily ...” reported Our Life laconically. But, according to Shoshana Kahan, the Masonic Hall was in a dreadful Chinese area and Yiddish entertainment thereafter took place but rarely. She did not exaggerate. By summer 1943, it was obvious that Yiddish theatre was severely curtailed.

In contrast, German language theatre had an earlier start and proved remarkably popular. Several reasons may account for this. Between 1939 and 1946 there was in Shanghai an uncommonly large number of actors and actresses, singers, and musicians as well as persons who in one way or another were connected with the stage. Although exact numbers cannot be established, Michael Phillip counts around 200 persons. Another reason may be that Shanghai’s German-speaking population was much larger than its Yiddish-speaking one. Moreover, the several theatre companies usually presented comedies and light theatre their public liked best and was willing to pay for. In short, those who went to the theatre wanted to be entertained and the actors

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40 These were reviewed in Undzer Lebn, no. 9, January 30, 1942, no. 45, March 13, 1942; review of Raja Zmina’s performance, no. 55 (3), May 21, 1942.
41 J. Rottenberg, “Vegn a Yiddish teater in Shanghai (About a Yiddish theater in Shanghai),” Undzer Lebn, no. 78 (26), October 30, 1942.
42 “Jewish Club Removed to New Premises,” Our Life, no. 25, December 11, 1942, and Nasha Zhizn, no. 90, January 22, 1943. The first Jewish Club had opened in August 1932 at 1321 Rue Lafayette, in October 1941 it had moved to its own building on Bubbling Well Road.
43 Kahan, In fajer un flamen, p. 297, entry for December 6, 1942 and p. 326, entry for November 21, 1944.
44 “Annual General Meeting of Shanghai Jewish Club,” Our Life, no. 54, July 16, 1943.
obliged. The *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt* put it succinctly: The public prefers cheerful to serious works.  

The problems encountered by Yiddish theatre – money for costumes and settings, time for rehearsals when actors had to hold down jobs to earn a livelihood – were also common to the German language theatre. But there were other problems as well. One was the scarcity of scripts. Neither actors nor directors had brought a sufficient number or variety along, nor, of course, could scripts be purchased in local book stores. For this reason a number of plays were written by refugee dramatists in Shanghai. Another was the problem of an adequate stage, mentioned earlier. Due to the lack of European-style theatres, plays were performed in movie houses where stages were too narrow. Initially, variety evenings were performed on the small stages of the shelters, most of which were converted school buildings. In exceptional cases, facilities of the British Embassy were used, where, for example, the controversial play *The Masks Fall* (*Die Masken Fallen*) was performed in November 1940.

On the initiative of Ossi Lewin, the owner and editor of the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, the Artists Club, as an association of artists, was established in spring 1939 with about fifty persons. Less than a year later, in January 1940, the Artists Club became the European Jewish Artist Society (EJAS). Its president remained Ossi Lewin and the secretary continued to be Alfred Dreifuss (1902–1993), an important personality in Shanghai’s artistic and cultural life. EJAS, too, ceased to function in spring 1941, in part perhaps because by then Dreifuss had resigned as secretary, although in 1946 he claimed that the organization had run out of money.

Several other theatre organizations were active aside from EJAS. Among these was the Sapiro-Bühne, established by the actor-director Boris Sapiro, who also presented Yiddish plays, some of which he had written himself. The Ensemble, a company headed by the actor Fritz Melchior (1897–?) presented serious drama. Continuing to function during the war, his *Pygmalion* at the

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46 “European Jewish Artist Society,” *JN*, no. 7, November 1, 1940, p. 7.
47 Philipp, *Nicht einmal einen Thespiskarren*, p. 54.
48 Ibid., pp. 53–54, 101, and Alfred Dreifuss, “Theater in Shanghai,” *Aufbau*, August 16, 1940, p. 13. Presumably the actors were not allowed to perform the plays in the International Settlement and the British Embassy, as extraterritorial territory, made its premises available.
49 For a brief biography of Dreifuss, see Philipp, *Nicht einmal einen Thespiskarren*, pp. 162–163.
Eastern Theatre, despite the problems of the stage, had a glowing review.\textsuperscript{52} According to David Kranzler, altogether more than sixty plays were performed in Shanghai, a fairly large number, which may have been even larger had not thirty three plays been prohibited by the Japanese censor during wartime.\textsuperscript{53} Included in the repertoire were such well known European playwrights as Shaw, Molnar, Strindberg, as well as twenty six original plays by Shanghai refugee writers.\textsuperscript{54} Unfortunately, the scripts of the latter either no longer exist or are not available, except two that are of special interest because they deal with political material.

The two plays were written by Hans Schubert (Hans Wiener, Hans Morgenthaler, 1905–1965) and Mark Siegelberg (1895–1986) and are \textit{Foreign Soil} (Fremde Erde) and \textit{The Masks Fall}. The second drama is undisguisedly anti-Nazi and reflects one of the author’s concentration camp experiences while he had been incarcerated in 1938. When performed in 1940, it raised a controversy in the \textit{North China Daily News}, with Michele Speelman stating that provocative subjects like these should be avoided in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Foreign Soil} is different and has as its subject the Shanghai refugees. The brief synopsis below cannot do justice to this powerful drama that evokes the difficulties of Shanghai existence, “getting by” attitudes as contrasted with petty bourgeoisie prejudices, sacrifices and sensitivities, and the mistaken assumption that even love can be purchased like a commodity. A refugee doctor wants to buy a practice, but has no money. If his wife were to sell her pearl necklace, it would suffice for the purchase. He does not know that his wife has already sold the necklace to the couple who manage to manipulate all situations to their advantage, and since she does not tell him, she desperately tries to obtain the needed sum. The wife works in a bar, entertaining guests. A Chinese client falls in love with the woman and gives her the needed sum. Eventually, of course, the story unravels, the husband discovers the affair, the wife leaves him, but in time husband and wife are reconciled, and decide to leave Shanghai to work in the interior in an epidemic infested area.\textsuperscript{56}
The drama operates on several levels, but its central motifs are questions of bourgeois morality and genuine love of a married couple. Nor do the authors condemn the couple who take the easy way out, unhampered by moral issues. The Chinese man who tries to buy the love of a woman is also not portrayed unsympathetically. To the contrary, one feels sorry for him for he seems genuinely in love with the doctor’s wife. To what extent did this play raise issues the refugees preferred not to touch? How many women had to earn money one way or another while their husband’s self-image as bread winners was increasingly tarnished? How to deal with European-Chinese relations in an environment where prejudice and dated notions of middle-class morality predominated?

It is certainly significant that the play was performed only twice and, unlike The Masks Fall, was not staged again in the post-WWII era. The problems of politically engaged theatre and specifically Jewish theatre are pertinent here, and politically engaged drama was not popular with Shanghai audiences. As an ideologically motivated Marxist, Alfred Dreifuss believed that art must serve politics and Shanghai theatre ought to take an unequivocally anti-Fascist stand. To demand of theatre, however, to become an instrument of anti-Fascist propaganda when refugee audiences wanted no more than a few hours of entertainment and forget their present hardships seems unrealistic under the circumstances. Moreover, the question of Jewish theatre was for most artists an existential one. Had they not lost their native homes and livelihood because they were Jewish? Yet, their identity as actors was not, in fact, with Jewish drama but with drama from many countries. Also, which Jewish theater should be considered, western or eastern European? And if it is to be the latter, it would have to be Yiddish theater which was foreign to both the German-speaking actors and to the audiences. Dreifuss’s insistence that émigré theatre must have a cultural message seems misplaced.57

Whether refugee theater had high standards or not is a question that will most likely never be answered. Immigration is not artistically creative, argued one critic, but seeks to conserve. Its goal is to preserve those artistic aspects that it has brought along, perhaps add to them, yet mainly to make certain that artistic elements are not lost and can be carried forward after emigration ends.58 Much of the blame for the low level of Shanghai theater must be ascribed to the audience, wrote Dreifuss, its taste was too cheap, and actors were

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57 Philipp, Nicht einmal ein Thespiskarren, pp. 123–124.
never able to develop their own style. But then Dreifuss was often overly critical. Shanghai was not Berlin or Vienna. Conditions were too difficult and the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 put severe limitations on all cultural life. That first-rate actresses and actors like Lily Flohr and Herbert Zernik – to name only two – carried on against all odds is to their credit, their stamina and determination, and to a spiritual resilience not many were able to muster.

Litigation

Crime was pervasive in Shanghai in the twenties and thirties, ranging from petty theft to murder, to racketeering, and especially after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in July 1937, to terrorism. Gangsters, racketeers, and terrorists (to which must be added the effects of collaboration with the Japanese invader) as well as the futile attempts by the several police forces to bring about a semblance of law and order have been described in several excellent works, and the dismal picture need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say, that the narcotics trade and gambling were major factors and in both Japanese and Chinese political figures had a large stake. There is no evidence that Jews, wherever they hailed from, participated in organized crime.

The court system up to the Pacific War in December 1941 and thereafter, when the Japanese occupied all of Shanghai, was complex and several court systems functioned simultaneously in the city. Under the terms of extraterritoriality, foreign nationals were subject to the laws of their own countries and cases were heard in their countries’ consular courts. The Shanghai Mixed Court consisted of a Chinese magistrate and a foreign consular co-judge who shared the judicial function. This court handled cases between Chinese and Chinese and foreigners. In addition there was a system of Special District Courts, set up under an agreement between the Consular Body and the Chinese government ten years earlier. Whereas the Central European refugees would have

63 “German Jews Reported Setting up Own Court on Alcock Rd.”, CP, November 13, 1939, pp. 1, 5.
few occasions to engage in legal action against one another in court, there was no absence of litigation.

For example, Mr. Henry Bachrach filed a suit for damages against Louis Eisfelder, owner of the Café Louis in First Special District Court because his wife’s coat had disappeared from the cloakroom. Bachrach’s lawyer pleaded that, according to the Chinese Civil Code (article 697?) a café owner was responsible for the items entrusted to him. Mr. Eisfelder’s attorney argued, on the other hand, that she should have kept the coat at her table. This case brings into focus the fact, as Heinz Ganther states, that the refugees did not know Chinese law and that they did not understand Chinese, the language of judicial proceedings.

More serious was the case of the Canadian and Oriental Exporters Company brought also before the Special First District Court in July 1939. The company had promised to renovate housing on Tungshan Road, requiring of the prospective tenants key money and advance rental payments. When the company requested additional money, and when it was discovered that the houses were, for all practical purposes, ruins, the people demanded return of their funds and went to court. The company, it turned out, was run by two Russians and a German refugee, Julius Mayer, who was the liaison man with the victims.

Whether it was due to immigrant initiative or the result of a decision taken elsewhere, in the summer of 1939 Kurt Marx decided to establish an Arbitration Court, which would hear legal cases between immigrants and would attempt a compromise. At about the same time, the Komor Committee (IC) organized a similar court, until eventually the two organizations merged and an arbitration court of the Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai (CEAJR) was established. The drawback was that none of these had the power to enforce its decisions. In some instances, writes Ganther, the Komor Committee used the threat of withdrawing support to force one or the other party to compromise, but threats were highly unacceptable.

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66 Heinz Ganther, Drei Jahre Immigration in Shanghai, p. 103.
67 Ibid., p. 104. Ganther’s information seems not entirely accurate. The SMP report, reel 17, file 5422 (c), November 13, 1939, states that the CAEJR established the Arbitration Court on October 12, 1939 and not the Komor Committee.
Both Chinese and European lawyers objected to the arbitration court at once. The Chinese attorneys charged that it violated and undermined Chinese sovereign rights. The German government had relinquished extraterritorial right in China and therefore “Germans were not entitled to rights similar to those of other nationals here.” (It must be remembered that German Jews did not lose their citizenship until October 1941). Moreover, the code drafted by the court, among others, makes Chinese law inapplicable to Jews, forbids Jews to take their cases to Chinese courts, and allows only lawyers registered with the court to appear before it. Thus the arbitration court infringes “directly on the jurisdiction of the First Special District Court.”  

An article in the Hwa Pao charged, in turn, that “the establishment of a Court constitutes an act of an organized group. A Court can be established only when there exists a national law for its observance.” And the refugees had neither a country nor a national law. The European lawyers claimed that the court would be ineffective. Some of them may have been disaffected by being excluded from the list of recognized lawyers. Finally, Dr. A. Grossman, the legal advisor, considered it necessary to explain publicly that the court was an arbitration court operating in accordance with Chinese law and local customs, when the sum in question exceeded $500. However, the Arbitration Court was short-lived. After the Japanese occupation of all of Shanghai in December 1941, the CEAJR court relinquished its function (under duress?) to the Jüdische Gemeinde and to the lawyers who were acceptable to the Japanese authorities.

What was a member of the Shanghai Municipal Police to make of a report he had received about criminal activities committed in Germany by Jews who had come to Shanghai? There was Arthur Rosenbaum who had been charged in Luenen with forgery of public documents; Walter Fraenkel was charged in Schneidermühle with the offense of adulterating food, operating a slot machine, and rape; and Siegfried Levy from Altona, Hamburg, was guilty of high treason and sexual offenses between Jews and Aryans. Would he assume that these were trumped up charges or would he draw conclusions about increased

68 CP, November 13, 1939, pp. 1, 5. The code was published in the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle, February 18, 1940, but the issue was unfortunately not available.
69 SMP translation, reel 17, file 5422 (c), November 14, 1939.
70 “Tribunal Set Up by Jewish Emigres Hit,” CP, November 14, 1939, p. 3 and Ristaino, Port of Last Resort, p. 136.
71 “Local Jewish Refugee Court Explained,” CP, November 15, 1939, pp. 1, 3, and his letter, p. 10.
72 SMP report, reel 17, file 5422 (c) 11, April 6, 1942. The report adds that since the court deals with civil cases it is of no special interest to the police.
73 SMP report (confidential), reel 17, file 5422 (c), April 27, 1939, signed by D. S. Pitts.
crime problems in Shanghai? A report by D. S. Pitts is revealing about assumptions held among the police. According to him, “a certain number of bad characters” are bound to be among the refugees.

Although there is no reason to infer that crime will manifest in large degree among the newcomers, but with the number of refugees always growing ... such a development cannot be overlooked. In fact the potential factors for an increase in crime are already established ... Already two concrete instances have come to the notice of this office in regard to the attempts by young German Jews to secure money by fraudulent means.74

A random sampling of cases brought before the Special First District Court in August and beginning of September 1940 and reported to the press confirms that fraud was, indeed, the most common offense. Siegfried Pinkus, Isidor Director, and Hans Rechtling were arrested and brought before the court for passing counterfeit $5.00 bills. Kurt Mucha was similarly convicted for counterfeiting Chinese banknotes.75 Ernst Rosen stole beer in the value of $1,000 from the shop where he was a salesman and Hans Selig stole an autographed picture of Enrico Caruso from a stationery shop.76 More serious fraud was committed by Victor Siedler, who borrowed money from another refugee and gave him forged receipts.77 Bernhard Meyzel defrauded three refugees of $4,973 for presumably being able to get Japanese permits for them.78 The court looked askance at all forgeries and especially those involving the Shanghai Municipal Police. In a widely publicized case, Gabriel Lax, a Polish lawyer and one time police commissioner in his native Poland, was convicted of forging SMP seals and the signatures of two refugees offering a family of German Jews employment in Shanghai.79 Lax’s well-intentioned deed badly backfired. Murders among the refugees were practically unheard of and when they occurred tended to be crimes of passion.80

On the whole, however, and considering the impecunious condition of most of the refugees, petty crimes were few, even if it is assumed that more actually occurred without reaching the court. A police report emphasized,

74 SMP report, reel 17, file D5422 (c), March 15, 1939, signed by D. S. Pitts.
75 CP, August 16, 1940, p. 2, and CP, September 7, 1940, p. 2.
76 CP, August 17, 1940, p. 2 and CP, September 4, 1940, p. 2.
77 CP, August 24, 1940, p. 2.
78 “Emigree Jailed for Fraud Here,” SEPM, October 21, 1940, p. 2.
79 CP, June 9, 1940, p. 2 and CP, June 16, 1940, p. 2.
80 Such, for example, was Inge Vasen’s murder by L. Heyman, who he found had taken another lover. “Refugee Sentenced for Murder,” North-China Daily News, October 20, 1939, p. 9.
It is a fact that the majority of refugee criminals are residents of the Hongkew area but their crimes have been invariably petty ones whilst taking into consideration the Jewish refugee population in Shanghai the number of criminals is an extremely small one.\textsuperscript{81}

That fraud, embezzlement, and theft increased as conditions worsened during the years of war should be, no doubt, assumed. But after December 1941 the courts no longer functioned and the Japanese police together with its informers assumed an increasingly more powerful role. In the several memoirs that are available, questions of litigation are not raised and thus the war period remains largely undocumented on the subject of crime, although as stated earlier, the Arbitration Court of the Jüdische Gemeinde continued to function during the war years.

**Publishing**

The abundance of Jewish publishing should not come as a surprise, considering the prevalence of large and small presses in Shanghai, the large number of Chinese and foreign language newspapers, journals, and book printings. To be sure, many papers were short-lived. Often weeklies changed to monthlies, or changed hands and/or names. Nevertheless, Russian,\textsuperscript{82} German, Yiddish, or English readers, even Polish readers of \textit{Echo Shanghajskie}, had access to news, provided they could afford the price of a newspaper.

One of the oldest English language journals was \textit{Israel's Messenger}, which served almost exclusively the Sephardi community with news about Jewish social life in Shanghai and events in Palestine.\textsuperscript{83} The Russian Jewish paper, \textit{Nasha Zhizn} (Our Life) did not commence publication until 1941, eventually adding a Yiddish page and a year later an English page. The paper ceased publication in 1946.\textsuperscript{84} Agudat Yisrael published two Yiddish journals, \textit{Dos Vort

\textsuperscript{81} YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Report from Richardson, Special Branch, August 6, 1941.

\textsuperscript{82} Shanghai’s Russian language publications were especially numerous, with at least six daily newspapers. Ristaino, \textit{Port of Last Resort}, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{83} Founded in 1904 by Nissim Ezra Benjamin Ezra, \textit{Israel’s Messenger} was published as a fortnightly. The journal was suspended between 1910 and 1918 when it resumed publication as a monthly until 1941.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Nasha Zhizn} began as a weekly, but was frequently irregular during the war. Its editor was David B. Rabinovich. See Rena Krasno, “History of Russian Jews in Shanghai,” in Malek, ed., \textit{Jews in China}, pp. 336–337 who mentions several other Russian Jewish publications in English.
(The Word) in 1941 and *Di Yidishe Stimme fun Vaytn Mizrakh* (The Jewish voice from the Far East) in 1942. There was even a Hebrew paper, *Me’or Torah* (Torah light), published between 1944 and 1946, in which legal questions raised in the Talmud and raised again in Shanghai, were discussed. Most of the articles were written by rabbis from the Mir Yeshivah. Most numerous by far, however, were the German language papers. The longest run was that of the bilingual daily, *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, which began publication in January 1939 and continued until October 1945. Under Ossi Lewin (1905?–1975?), the paper even appeared during the war years because its publisher apparently cooperated with Japanese censorship. Presumably the paper would have succumbed to the competition, stated an article in 1946, had it not been saved by the Pacific War when other papers were closed down.85 The weekly, *Shanghai Woche*, edited by Wolfgang Fischer also appeared in 1939 changing a few months later to the 8-Uhr Abendblatt, a daily that ceased publication in 1941. It started up once more in 1942 under its first title.86 For the more intellectually inclined reader there was the *Gelbe Post*, which appeared between May and November 1939, owned and edited by Adolph J. Storfer (1888–1944)87 until bought by Ossi Lewin.

A number of papers were short lived, surviving barely a year, like *Der Queerschnitt*, published in 1939, *Der Mitarbeiter* between 1940 and 1941, or *Die Laterne* in 1941. The *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt*, edited by Philipp Kohn, was the paper of the German Jewish Community and together with the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle* was the only paper published during the Pacific War.88 Finally, mention should be made of at least three medical journals that were published between 1940 and 1943. Among these the *Shanghai Medical Journal*, edited by Th. Friedrichs, was in English, German, and Chinese.

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86 In the first issue of May 28, 1942, Fischer writes on p. 1 that the paper appears again as a weekly after a lengthy interruption. The last issue that I have seen is dated January 9, 1943.
The papers provided the opportunity for the many professional journalists to continue their journalistic careers as well as earn a livelihood. Advertisements were an important feature of the papers, offering services and especially information on stores where goods might be obtained. For readers this was important information and for the papers a source of income. Hence, as noted earlier in the case of Howard Levin, selling advertisements was another way to supplement small incomes. Once the papers closed down due to the Pacific War, incomes disappeared and writers and journalists were one of the hardest hit groups. In 1943, Anna Ginsbourg made an impassioned plea on behalf of these unfortunates writing that “some have already reached the limit of mental depression and physical exhaustion.”

What did the papers publish? Local news was of major importance, such as announcements of events, concerts, performances, or publishing events. The difficult lot of the Central European refugees was frequently discussed in the pages of Our Life and the means of assisting them.90 Criticism of local efforts were, however, also voiced, and Wolfgang Fischer wrote, “We have not forgotten that for the new Jewish Club in Bubbling Well Road a sum of a million was raised overnight, while thousands of our impoverished, hungry co-religionists received only small amounts [of money] from the immensely rich local Jews.”91 The Gelbe Post, in contrast and in addition to local news, tried to

90 For example, “Let us Come to the Assistance of German Refugees,” Our Life, no. 10, August 28, 1942.
91 Wolfgang Fischer, “Wir und Shanghai’s Judenschaft,” Shanghai Woche, no. 9, August 1, 1942, p. 1.
inform its readers about Chinese culture and China’s political situation. There were articles, for example, about the Jews of Kaifeng, Chinese peasants, the warlord Wu Beifu, how to translate Chinese poetry, and the nature of Chinese music.92

Poetry was featured in a number of papers. These might be pious verses around holiday time, poems composed as a nostalgic look backward, or poems depicting the local scene. A satirical touch was not lacking such as in the long poem by Egon Varro, “Well, That is Shanghai.” I translate one verse below.

At the Bund they ask: “parlez vous Francais?”  
Around the corner a Berliner yells: “Ach nee!”  
The press greets us: “How do you do?”  
Uncomprehending the coolies look to.  
In the bus, that’s bursting full  
a voice is heard: “hablo Espanol?”  
At last come three Viennese  
they want to know from an Italiens  
if the Chinese post office is nearby.  
Well, that is Shanghai.93

Whereas in Varro’s German poem the Chinese are only silent background against Shanghai’s wild cosmopolitanism, in Yosl Mlotek’s Yiddish poem they become the subject of a bitter outcry.

Shanghai –

The city beckons  
with a thousand passionate eyes.

Neon lights dazzle  
a marvellous rainbow.  
Changing colors, moving  
glittering mercury.  
Up and down, down and up –

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92 Gelbe Post, no. 1, May 1, 1939; no. 3, June 1, 1939; no. 5, July 1, 1939; no. 6, end July, 1939; no. 7, November 1, 1939.
93 Egon Varro, “Ja, das ist eben Shanghai,” Shanghai Woche, no. 1, March 30, 1939, p. 3.
an electric thunderstorm.
“Buy, buy these cigars
the brand ‘Two times F’!
Women don’t be fooled
silks, socks, the brand ‘Blef’.”

On houses
roofs
chimneys
and still higher
Buy! Buy!
Signal lights,
message,
call and pull, allure
remind and caress
Buy! Buy!

And at the side
runs
a man in harness – a horse
feet barely touch the ground.
Behind him – hauling, hundreds more
run, hurry, noisily.

* * *

And outside
“Merciful Sir
we have not eaten so long ...”
They stand at the wall:
“Master, food ... food ...”

Above – jazz music
and drunken laughter.
Below a tight cluster
China’s daughters.

Stand at the wall
together with their mothers.

* * *
Shanghai
Nanking Road
the city screams
from thousand throats
and from thousand eyes.
Ever louder, shriller
shouts resound
Scream China! Scream Shanghai!94

An angry poem by E. Simkhoni (Simkha Elberg) expressed his dismay about landing in Shanghai after fleeing his native Poland. In his poem, “Three Countries Spat Me Out,” he wrote that first Poland spat him out, then Lithuania,

As one who is tubercular spits
his last drop of blood.

Finally:

On a humid day,
when Japanese tie up their nose
and step with wooden feet
Japan spat me out
into Shanghai.95

Book publishing was not as vigorous, nor was there a large book-buying public. Nonetheless, books in Russian and Yiddish and especially Hebrew religious works for the students of the rabbinic schools who had arrived from Japan, appeared in print. Prayer books, Talmud portions and Bibles had deteriorated from heavy use and there were not enough to go around. A Chinese printer who was able to reproduce books by lithography was found, causing Undzer Lebn to jubilantly report that, “Shanghai will enter history together with such


cities as Amsterdam and Vilna. For the first time a Gemarrah [book of the Talmud] is printed here ..."96 The number of religious books reprinted by lithography or otherwise is uncertain. These included books of the halakha (law), portions of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, Mishnah, the Shulchan Aruch, philosophical treaties, and Hasidic works.97 A later writer compared the volume of Shanghai publishing with that undertaken in Europe after WWII.98 Whereas most religious books were reprinted, at least one was written in Hebrew by Rabbi Layzer Briks of the Pinsk Yeshiva and was a collection of articles on Talmudic themes.99

The Jewish Book Publishing Company, located in the French Concession, began its work in the spring of 1942, bringing out books for the most part in Russian and also some in Yiddish. J. Rapoport (1895–1971), for example, was particularly eager to see works by major Yiddish writers in print and as soon as a year later, five books had appeared with stories by such great writers as Sholem Ash, Sholem Aleichem, and I. L. Peretz, and poetry by N. Bialik.100

Selected Short Stories of Jewish Authors was published in English with an introduction by J. Rapoport, and E. Simkhoni published a Yiddish collection of his poetry entitled Vander Veg (Journeys).101 Apparently few if any novels were written in Shanghai, and the novel, Schutzhaftjude 13877 (Jewish prisoner 13,877), by Mark Siegelberg, which appeared in 1940, is a rare exception.102

96 “Shanghaiyer Yidn drukn a Gemarrah – a matanah fun di yeshivot (Shanghai Jews print a Gemarrah – a present from the Yeshivoth),” Undzer Lebn, 52, May 1, 1942.
97 Over one hundred volumes (and “Periodicals”) appear on a list by Fishburn Books, London. Many were printed during the war years by the printing establishment of J. M. Elenberg, 718 Avenue Joffre. I thank Dr. Maisie Meyer for making the list available to me.
99 “First Talmudic Book Published in Shanghai,” Nasha Zhizn, no. 23, October 10, 1941, p. 8.
100 A.G. [Anna Ginsbour], “Jewish Authors in English,” Our Life, no. 34, February 12, 1943, p. 1.
101 A.G. [Anna Ginsbour], “Know Thyself,” Our Life, no. 50, June 18, 1943, p. 1, and “A ney zamlung lider fun Dr. E. Simkhoni dershaynt in Shanhai (A new collection of poems by Dr. E. Simkhoni appears in Shanghai),” Undzer Lebn, no. 56, May 29, 1942.
Another such rarity is the woodcut collection, *Huangbaoche* (Rickshaws), by David L. Bloch, published by Taiping Shuju in 1942.\(^{103}\)

Further research is needed to do justice to Shanghai’s publishing activities. Nonetheless, the market for books on Jewish subjects was clearly circumscribed. Also the writing of longer works was a luxury few could indulge in. Siegelberg was able to publish a novel in Shanghai because he wrote it (or the bulk of it) in the course of his ocean voyage to China. Shorter pieces that could be dashed off, published quickly in newspapers or journals, and bring in money were, therefore, preferable. For those who craved reading among the German-speaking refugees there were lending libraries – nine of these during wartime in the designated area that had English and German books. Most had existed since 1939, the largest being the “Lion” at 381 Ward Road. One of the most popular was the “Travelling Bookcart” at 139 Ward Road.\(^{104}\) Of course, these too would have had limited reading matter, being mainly dependent on books refugees had brought along and now sold, rather than the latest works of popular authors. These were, furthermore, business establishments, lending books for money, not public libraries.

Aside from a practically non-existent book market and the straitened circumstances of would-be authors, one other limitation on the writing of longer works must be mentioned. This is that German-speaking intellectuals, uprooted from the cultural world they knew and confronted by the radically different Shanghai environment, were traumatized by this experience. Is it that they had neither distance nor perspective to deal with or to take stock of this new place and themselves as part of it? On the other hand, why was it that no major writer or novel emerged from within the Baghdadi and Russian communities? Were both so divorced from the Chinese intellectual scene, caught in a kind of colonial provincialism, and therefore unable to see the creative potentials of their existence? Where Chinese writers in the 1930s, before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, explored the infinite variety that was Shanghai,\(^{105}\) Baghdadis and Russians were for all practical purposes silent.

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\(^{105}\) To mention only two, several of Mao Dun’s (Shen Yanbing, 1896–1981) novels have Shanghai and its middle class as their setting. Before departing for Yanan and beginning a different literary life, Ding Ling (1904–1986) wrote a number of well known short stories on Shanghai and its middle class.
Institutional Development:
Synagogues, Burial Societies and Cemeteries, Hospitals and Schools

Cultural institutions, theatre and publications as well as religious institutions, cemeteries and burial societies (hevra kadisha) separated the Jewish communities one from the other. Each community maintained its own institutions and comingling occurred to some extent only in schools. The Baghdadis established their first synagogue, Beit El, in 1887 on Peking Road and a splinter group founded Shearit Israel in 1900 on Broadway (now Dong Daminglu). The temporary prayer houses on rented premises were eventually replaced by two beautiful structures: Ohel Rachel in 1920 on Seymour Road (now Shanxi Beilu) and Beit Aharon in 1927 on Museum Road (now Huqiu). Sir Jacob Elias Sassoon financed the first, Silas Hardoon the second. At first the Russian congregation used the Shearit Israel premises, but in 1927 the Ohel Moishe congregation moved to its own premises on Ward Road in Hongkou. There it remained until 1941 when a splendid new structure was built, the New Synagogue, on rue Tenant de la Tours (now Xiangyang Nanlu) in the French Colony.

In congregational life Baghdadis, being Sephardic Jews, and Russians and Central Europeans, as Ashkenazi Jews, did not mix. The latter consisted of Jews whose religious persuasions can be characterized as conservative, orthodox, or liberal. To these should be added the various religious schools (yeshivas), ultra-orthodox rabbis and students, who arrived from Japan and who kept apart from the (merely) orthodox. A generally conservative congregation came into being in 1939, celebrating its first holiday at the Broadway Theatre at Shavuoth (Weeks) in spring 1939. By mid-1940 the liberal Jewish congregation was founded, at first as a private undertaking, which used instrumental music and a mixed choir. This congregation had its Friday evening and Saturday morning services at various restaurants, until able to rent a hall on the first floor of the Broadway Theatre. Aside from these two, weekly services were conducted at the Ward Road shelter until the fall of 1941 when the first refugee synagogue was founded on MacGregor Road (now Dong Yuhan Lu) in Hongkou, receiving the name Emet Ve’shalom. Both this synagogue and Beit Aharon were demolished in 1985.

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106 Tess Johnston, “Jewish Sites in Shanghai,” March 15, 1990, unpublished ms. states that the original congregation was founded in 1907 at an unknown location.
107 According to Kranzler, Japanese, Nazis and Jews, pp. 414–415, this congregation ceased after the outbreak of the Pacific War.
108 Ganther, Drei Jahre Immigration, pp. 49, 52.
It was not always easy to find rabbis for the Sephardi and Russian communities who were familiar with their respective liturgies and languages. Moreover, a rabbi would have to come from abroad as there were no rabbinical schools in China that offered rabbinical training and ordination. The Baghdadis never solved their problem satisfactorily, and eventually the Rev. Mendel Brown was recruited to serve as unofficial rabbi of the Ohel Rachel Synagogue. He was active in various capacities, especially educational matters, but was not empowered to make halakhic (legal) decisions. The Russian Jews were luckier. In 1926, they recruited Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi who had served in Vladivostok, and he became the Russian community’s spiritual leader for the next twenty-one years. Although several refugee rabbis arrived in Shanghai, the religious divisions created complexities in forming congregations. Rabbi Willy Teichner (died 1942) was a popular educator and orator, but he was liberal and did not attract the several factions.

Most important among communal organizations were burial societies. The earliest was the Baghdadi one, established in 1862, probably at the same time as the cemetery on Mohawk Road (now Huang Beilu). The Russian community organized its burial society only sixty years later, using throughout the years a separate section of the Mohawk Road cemetery and later one on Baikal Road (now Huiming Lu). The refugees organized their burial society in 1940 and that same year acquired their own cemetery on Columbia Road (now Fanyu Lu). Due to the high mortality rate among the refugees it was necessary to add a second cemetery in 1941 on Point Road (now Li Ping Lu). Unfortunately, the Chinese authorities moved the four cemeteries between 1957 and 1959 and they have since disappeared.

109 The problem of Sephardi rabbis is discussed in detail by Meyer, From the Rivers of Babylon, pp. 100–108.
110 Kranzler, Japanese, Nazis and Jews, p. 60.
111 Ibid., p. 413.
112 Ibid., p. 425. According to Kranzler, the Baikal Road cemetery was Ashkenazi. It would, therefore, be a cemetery of the Russian and not the Baghdadi Jews.
113 However, according to Johnston, “Jewish Sites,” the Columbia Road cemetery was acquired in 1926.
114 I thank Ralph B. Hirsch for making available the list “Central European Refugees Who Died in Shanghai, 1940–1945.” The list consists of 1,433 names. See also YVA, 078/96, list of correspondence between December 1939 and March 27, 1941, concerning Jewish cemeteries. These are letters between Ellis Hayim and the Council and Health Commission and a Dr. Jordan about burial of indigent Jewish refugees. The last letter is dated July 24, 1942 about rights to cemetery lands to be transferred from the Jewish Refugee Committee to the Jüdische Gemeinde.
Chinese and foreigners alike were susceptible to illnesses prevalent in Shanghai. Extremes of temperature, intense heat and humidity in summer, cold in addition to rain and flooding in winter, were difficult even for the most robust persons. Not only the climate, but also the crowded and largely unsanitary conditions under which large segments of Shanghai’s population lived, together with vermin and mosquitoes that spread disease made escaping illness difficult. Not enough is known about epidemics, such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid, or malaria that threatened Shanghai’s population, especially in summer. Vaccines against typhus and cholera were available, but the population apparently was not routinely vaccinated. Added to this were the deplorable practices of unscrupulous fruit vendors who, according to Samuel Didner, injected oranges and watermelons with river water so that people were imbibing polluted water, even though they boiled drinking water.116

Shanghai had several hospitals for its Jewish and non-Jewish population. Under ordinary circumstances, the B’nai B’rith Polyclinic run for Sephardi Jews

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and the Shanghai Jewish Hospital in the French Concession had a sufficient number of beds. There was also no scarcity of doctors, especially after 1933 when German-Jewish physicians opened practices in Shanghai. However, once the large influx of Central European refugees, who rapidly succumbed to all sorts of infectious diseases, began, available hospital facilities proved soon inadequate.

A clinic was set up at the Ward Road shelter as early as January 1939 and outpatient clinics were set up shortly thereafter at the various dormitory facilities. But the outbreak of scarlet fever among the refugees in May 1939 alerted both the Public Health Department of the SMC and the International Committee to the threat of a widespread epidemic. In a meeting of May 11, 1939 with officials of the SMC, Komor said, “that the disease had fallen like a bombshell with no previous warning” and that on the suggestion of the Public Health Department an isolation Hospital had been created on the premises of Medhurst College on Chaoufoong Road. Eventually that facility, said Chief Inspector Self, would be able to accommodate 300 patients. During a subsequent meeting on May 25, it became clear that the epidemic had been contained with 124 cases under treatment by May 22.

Due to the small number of cases reported among the Chinese population and the large number among foreigners, it was assumed that the disease was introduced into the treaty port by European arrivals. The recently docked Biancamano was held responsible, but Triestino agents hastily denied these allegations, claiming that sanitary regulations were observed aboard ship. Be that as it may, the scarlet fever scare brought into focus the importance of sufficient hospital facilities. These were eventually created when the Emigrant Hospital was established in the summer of 1940 in the Ward Road Heim with 100 beds, in place of the Whashing Road hospital which had only sixty beds. Surgical cases continued to be referred to the Shanghai General Hospital and some emigrant doctors were able to send patients there as well as to care for these in the hospital. Howard Levin, for example, who had an extreme case of pleurisy and emphysema, was taken at once to the Shanghai General Hospital in the International Settlement for an emergency operation.

Not everyone among non-surgical cases, however, opted for an emigrant or Jewish hospital. Annemarie Pordes contracted polio in Shanghai and was

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118 YVA, 078/85, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Shanghai Municipal Council to Members of Council, Report, May 19, 1939, p. 2. There is no cover letter for the second report.
120 YVA, 078/72, Howard (Horst) Levin interview with I. Eber, October 14, 1988, p. 28.
moved to the isolation ward in the Russian Hospital in the French Concession. The care she received there was probably as good as any she might have received elsewhere. Yet, the nurses were all Russian speakers and Annemarie did not know that language at all. Layzer Kahan, the actress Shoshana’s husband, took out a loan in order to go to the hospital in the French Concession (she does not say which) where he expected to get better care. Difficult as the situation for the ill apparently was, it became much worse during the Pacific War, especially after February 1943 when the stateless Jews had to move to the designated area in Hongkou.

Turning now to elementary and high school facilities, there were no major problems until the arrival of the refugees. In the early years of the Baghdadi community more affluent parents tended to send boys to the secular British public schools. Religious instruction was generally provided by home tutors, but a Hebrew School (Talmud Torah) was established as early as 1902. This school developed rapidly and the Shanghai Jewish School, as it was called, in time became an institution for children of both the Baghdadi and Ashkenazi communities, serving mainly the less prosperous segments of Jewish society. Its curriculum included religious and secular subjects; instruction was in English.

Initially refugee children attended the Shanghai Jewish School, but overcrowding soon made it imperative that a school be provided for their use. Attendance had rapidly increased when numerous refugee families arrived, and the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association, S. J. Y. A. or Kadoorie School, began to function in October or November 1939 with 280 children at the Kinchow Road shelter. Lucie Hartwich was the headmistress and Horace Kadoorie supplied the financial backing. By mid-1941 the school had more than 700 pupils. Problems developed, however, in 1940. Since the building had been originally a Chinese school and had been leased by the SMC to the Committee, the facilities had to be returned when the Chinese returned to the area. This is indeed what happened when the lease was terminated by summer 1940. Attractive new premises were eventually found in January 1942 on Chaoufoong Road (or East Yuhang Road).

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121 YVA, 078/105, Memoir of Annemarie Pordes, p. 42.
123 Meyer, From the Rivers of Babylon, pp. 118–130.
124 JDC, RG 33–44, file 459, Speelman to Troper, February 21, 1940, and file 460, Secretary of SMC to Ellis Hayim, May 30, 1940.
Like in the Shanghai Jewish School the language of instruction was English and both secular and religious subjects were taught. While the school was located on Kinchow Road, the Demans ran a popular “Vocational Training Center and Junior Club” in the school, also sponsored by Horace Kadoorie, that Deman believes was the forerunner of ORT, discussed in the next chapter.  

Twelve-year-old Peter Witting’s report from December 1940, for example, shows that he received grades in Hebrew, composition, recitation, dictation, arithmetic and history. He was also learning to write Chinese and Japanese in transliteration. Mrs. Hirschberg was quite satisfied with the progress her daughter Lilly was making in English and wrote to her son, “In any event, she speaks English very well and reads English books as easily as German ones.”

Despite the enthusiastic essay about the Kadoorie School, published in December 1940, not all the children, now adults, have fond memories of their time there. Peter Eisfelder thinks that neither the teaching nor the discipline was great, and he writes, “I cannot claim to have derived any benefits by the time spent at this school.” Sigmund Tobias remembers how as a ten-year-old he pleaded with his reluctant parents to allow him to drop out of the Kadoorie School to attend the Mir Yeshiva where he felt accepted and more comfortable.

Not much is known about several other educational establishments. The Freysinger Jewish Elementary and Middle School founded in April 1941, by Dr. Ismar Freysinger, was a small private school, catering no doubt to the more affluent. It functioned throughout the war years. There were several kindergartens, some or all private, including one in the French Concession, run by Mrs. Pordes, who even received permission from the Japanese authorities in 1943 to continue outside the ghetto area. This kindergarten catered most likely to more prosperous foreigners rather than refugees.

Religious instruction for boys who attended secular schools was provided in the afternoon by the Talmud Torah in the Ohel Moishe Synagogue. For boys

See also, Ganther, Drei Jahre Immigration, p. 67, according to whom the new school building was on Chaoufoong Road.

127 YVA, 078/15, Shanghai Jewish Youth Association School, Peter Witting Report, December 25, 1940. For Chinese and Japanese he had a special exercise book.
128 Mrs. Hirschberg’s letter to her son, Hans, May 25, 1941. Courtesy Mrs. Lilly Fleese.
129 “Die Kinder von Hongkow,” Der Mitarbeiter, no. 5, December 20, 1940, p. 11.
131 Sigmund Tobias, Strange Haven, A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Shanghai, Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, p. 56.
133 YVA, 078/105, Annemarie Pordes Memoir, p. 76.
of the Russian community a Talmud Torah was at last established in October 1942 on Avenue Joffre, in the French Concession. A year earlier, in May 1941, a Yeshiva was opened for the Baghdadi community in the Museum Road Synagogue. The festivities were attended by many personalities. Religious refugee girls could receive instruction in a Beit Ya’acov school, though it is not clear whether this was only an afternoon or a full time school. In addition, the several rabbinic schools that had arrived in Shanghai from Kobe continued educational work for their members. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing how many boys, girls, or older students were enrolled in the various religious institutions. But clearly, illiteracy was non-existent among the Jewish population. Whether religious or secular, youngsters did receive a basic education. Opportunities for vocational training too were had in Shanghai. But the major and most popular institution, ORT (Society for the Encouragements of Handicraft), only developed during the war years.

To Leave Shanghai

It would be erroneous to assume that leaving Shanghai prior to and at the beginning of the Pacific War was impossible. To be sure, it took luck, ingenuity, and enterprise, but some individuals did manage to travel to Tianjin and Qingtao, others ended up in Australia, and still others were on their way to Palestine via India.

Apparently refugees were settling in Tianjin illegally and the Tientsin Hebrew Association wrote to Birman not to allow refugees to go to Tianjin without explicit permission from the local authorities. This had not always been the case. Until spring 1940, at least holders of a Da Dao passport (actually a Russian Emigrant passport), which some refugees had managed to obtain, could go to Tianjin without a special permit. But Rudolf Hennenfeld who had been

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135 CAHJP, 86.2, Tientsin Hebrew Association to All Shanghai Committees, December 8, 1940.
136 CAHJP, DAL 86, Birman to Tientsin Hebrew Society, May 1, 1940. For the short lived Da Dao or Great Way government, see Timothy Brook, “The Great Way Government of Shanghai,” in Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., In the Shadow of the Rising Sun, Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 157–186. The Great Way puppet government was inaugurated December 5, 1937 and ceased April 28, 1938, though its name continued in popular use for some years thereafter.
a medical student in Vienna, sailing via Marseille to Shanghai in March 1939, chose a rather original path to leave Shanghai. Unable to make a living, he joined the Foreign Legion in Saigon, Vietnam. In May 1941, he returned to Shanghai, having received a military passport and, provided he could obtain a work contract, the Japanese authorities were willing to give him a visa to Tianjin. 137

In fact, permission had to be obtained from the Japanese authorities for settling in all areas of North China under their control, which is probably the reason why only between ten and fifteen immigrants were actually in Qingdao138 – and these might have come earlier, in 1933 or 1934. As early as February 1939, Daljewcib in Harbin had indicated that it was not easy to relocate from Shanghai to other places. “With regard to Tientsin and Tsingtao [Qingdao], in order that refugees may enter, our representatives there have to solicit the local authorities for special entrance permits.”139

Leaving Shanghai for destinations abroad was a different matter. How the journalist and publisher, A. Storfer, and the playwright, M. Siegelberg, sailed to Australia at the end of 1941 is unclear, as is the question of whether other Shanghai refugees were booked on the same ship. Tadeusz Romer (1894–1978), the Polish ambassador to Japan who, having closed the Polish embassy in Tokyo, had come to Shanghai with his staff at the end of October, was probably the source of the Australian visas.140 But by November 1941, which is the approximate time they left, only Dutch liners were able to sail to Australia via Batavia.141 This may have been the reason that the sixty-five Australian visas he had been promised were reduced to forty-five and finally to eighteen.142

To leave Shanghai by sea for other countries required proper papers, a visa, and money. Most refugees lacked one or all of these. Still, some Polish

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137 CAHJP, DAL 99, Birman to Valentine, 128 Victoria Road, Tianjin, July 25, 1941.
138 CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reich Association of Jews in Germany, November 12, 1940.
139 CAHJP, 76.1, from Daljewcib, Harbin, February 20, 1939.
140 CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to HIAS, New York, November 19, 1941. See also NAC, Manuscript Division, reel C-10451, File 1. Romer, Shanghai to London, November 5, 1941. Romer states in the telegram that he has made arrangements to obtain Australian visas for the refugees. See also file 19, Romer, Tokyo to London, October 26, 1941, in which he informs the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London that he has finished liquidating the embassy and is leaving for Shanghai with his personal archives and complete codes, and October 4, 1941, where it is stated that the Japanese embassy in Warsaw is closed as of October 4.
141 CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to Polish Relief Committee, Melbourne, November 6, 1941.
142 NAC, MG 31, 0–68, Vol. 2, file #3, 3 pp., reel C-10451. Tadeusz Romer, “Uchodzacy zdowscy z Polsku na dalekim Wschodzie (Jewish refugees from Poland in the Far East).
Jews arrived from Kobe with Palestine Certificates and these people Birman tried to dispatch as quickly as he could, even if they had to sail on Chinese ships as far as Bombay or Calcutta. According to Birman, by mid-November 1941 he had sent seven groups of pioneers (halutzim) to Palestine, although they were apparently stranded in Bombay and unable to continue their voyage. It is not clear whether they remained in India until the end of the war or were able to leave earlier. In any event, the distraught Polish consul in Bombay wired both London and Shanghai, pleading for an end to the emigrant flood.143

To his friend in Tianjin, Birman confided his distress. War was looming and it was imperative to send out from Shanghai as many people as possible, especially those who had visas for the United States. But at that point it was the JOINT representative in Shanghai, Laura Margolis, who refused to accede to his request.144

Finally a group of Polish refugees was able to leave Shanghai, apparently with Romer’s help, after the start of the Pacific War. Shoshana Kahan had hoped that her husband Layzer would also be among the fifty places reserved for Poles on the evacuation ship Kamakura Maru. Regretfully this did not happen, she noted in her diary.145 The ship sailed August 17, 1942 for Lorenzo Marquez (in Portuguese South Africa) with several Jews aboard, among them, at least, one student from the Mir Yeshiva.146

Baghdadis, Russians, or Central Europeans, all were strangers in Shanghai. But, for that matter, so were many, if not most, Chinese who hailed from various provinces and who considered their native villages or towns home. Yet

143 CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to HICEM, Lisbon and HIAS, New York, November 17, 1941. Sometimes there were also stowaways on these ships. Szepsel Lewin and Gerszel Apfelbaum were caught on the “Hunan” and handed over to the Hong Kong police.
144 CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to Sam Bleviss, Tianjin, November 27, 1941. The letter is in Yiddish.
145 Kahan, In fajer un Flamen, pp. 294–295, entries for July 20 and July 25, 1942. She noted that already April 16, 1942, p. 292, Layzer went with a delegation of writers to Ambassador Romer who told them that he hoped to bring about an evacuation of writers.
146 Undzer Lebn, 15 (67), August 14, 1942, and no. 17 (46), October 16, 1942. A cable was received on the latter date that the ship had safely reached Lorenzo Marquez from where the refugees traveled on to several destinations. The HICEM official, Layzer Epstein, wrote a long letter on board the “Kamakura Maru,” in which he stated that among the British, Dutch, Norwegian, and Belgian passengers were also 43 Polish citizens. I assume that most of these were, however, not Jewish. YIVO Institute, MKM, 15,57, XV, 26, Epstein to HICEM, Lisbon, September 1, 1942, 4 pp. Arc. 4, 410. Yehoshua Rapoport Diary, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, entry July 23, 1943. Rapoport mentions yet another evacuation that was to take place at the beginning of October. Apparently it never took place.
despite China at war, Shanghai crime, the pervasive opium problem, abject poverty and ostentatious wealth, the strangers in Shanghai were not solitary and alienated urbanites. Individuals were part of groups – be they ethnic, cultural, linguistic in origin – made possible by the mosaic nature of Shanghai. Added to this was the absence of a unified political authority capable of enforcing uniformity on the polyglot population, at least until the outbreak of the Pacific War and the occupation of all of Shanghai by Japanese forces.

The cultural and institutional life of the several Shanghai Jewish communities, and especially of the refugee community, described in these pages, obscures to a large extent the real misery, destitution, and abject loneliness experienced by many. I have highlighted the success stories of adjustment of the very few. I have also tried to show, however, that despite sudden poverty and dislocation from a known into an alien environment, some people coped remarkably well. How much help the established Jewish communities extended to the newcomers, to what extent individuals or groups furnished models for emulation, are and will remain subjects of controversy. That the Central European refugees were not welcomed with open arms seems in retrospect only natural. At the time though, it was clearly one more insult added to their battered sensibilities.

Although the British and others probably identified them (and one would like to know more about that) as “co-religionists,” the fact is that neither Baghdadis nor Russians had much in common with the newcomers, except that they were all Jewish. But the Judaism of the Jews, as I tried to point out, was by no means monolithic, and the Baghdadis had not much in common with the Russians either. All the same, to both groups Shanghai had become home, whereas to the Central Europeans Shanghai was a way station to elsewhere, a temporary and often none-too-friendly haven. Another major difference between the Baghdadis and Russians, on the one hand, and the Central Europeans, on the other, was the latter’s status as expellees, of people driven out from their native homes. “Once we were somebodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends ...” wrote Hannah Arendt, and “Man is a social animal and life is not easy for him when social ties are cut off. Very few individuals have the strength to conserve their own integrity if their social, political and legal status is completely confused.”¹⁴⁷ During the war years the confusion of status would become even greater.
