Chapter 5:
Years of Misfortune: 1941–1945

For Shanghai 1941 was not an auspicious year. The economic recovery, which had followed the outbreak of war in 1937 and the abandonment of Chinese Shanghai to Japanese occupation, was winding down. Although it seemed like business as usual in the foreign settlements because many Chinese businessmen had fled there, bringing their business with them, rampant inflation and the increasing scarcity of raw materials resulting from the Japanese army’s restrictions on the movement of goods, were increasingly felt. Moreover, in July 1941 the British and American governments froze Japanese assets in their countries and terminated commercial relations with Japan and the territories under its occupation. When the Japanese banned the export of products considered essential to the war effort, foreign currency coming into Shanghai was much reduced.¹

Fig. 9: “Wood carburetor and manpower.” From Barbara Hoster, Roman Malek, Katharina Wenzel-Teuber, eds., David Ludwig Bloch, Holzschnitte, Woodcuts, Shanghai 1940–1949, Sankt Augustin–Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1997, p. 36. Courtesy Lydia Abel. Used by special permission of David Ludwig Bloch / Lydia Abel; all rights reserved.

The economic problems, ever more obvious in 1941, were exacerbated by energy shortages. Due to the Japanese invasion, Shanghai could no longer rely on domestic coal from North China, and the growing imports from Southeast Asia dwindled after the summer of 1941.\(^2\) As emphasized by Henriot, Shanghai’s existence was dependent on foreign markets for selling manufactured goods and on its hinterland for obtaining raw materials. This was still possible in 1940, yet during 1941 – and certainly after Pearl Harbor – both the foreign markets and the hinterland were no longer viable.\(^3\)

The Jewish population, old-timers and refugees alike, may not have been aware of the dire economic situation, but businessmen like Michel Speelman or Ellis Hayim could not ignore the warning signals. Their problems were compounded by the thousands of Jewish refugees in Shanghai who had to be housed and fed and the fact that more were on their way from Kobe Japan. These were not the pliable, if not docile, German and Austrian refugees. They were for the most part Polish Jews who had fled to Lithuania when the Germans marched into Poland in September 1939 and among them were quite a few demanding and rebellious individuals. How to maneuver between the ever growing demands of the refugees, maintain their respected positions in Shanghai’s commercial world while not antagonizing the Japanese conqueror had become a major though unspoken consideration for these wealthy businessmen.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 38 and n. 98.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 41.
Some twenty rabbinic schools (yeshivoth), among them a small number of secular Yiddishist intellectuals, had fled to Vilna at the outbreak of war, where they were supported by the American Joint Distribution Committee. After the Soviet army marched into Lithuania, most of these managed to arrive in Kobe, as discussed earlier. They might have hoped to remain in Kobe for the duration of war, but in the early months of 1941 it became clear that their journey had not ended. The next destination was Shanghai. As Inuzuka Kiroshige explained some months later, the Japanese authorities were forced to evacuate the Jews because (1) they had remained in Kobe far too long on transit visas, and (2) as a result of the freezing of currency the Joint had ceased sending funds to Japan for their upkeep.

In response to this new situation the Committee for Assistance of Jewish Refugees from Eastern Europe (Eastjewcom) was organized March 14, 1941 by Layzer Szczupakiewicz and Zorach Wahrhaftig for the purpose of raising additional funds to support the refugees. At the beginning of April the two men came to Shanghai, ostensibly to inform the Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees (CAEJR) that the Polish refugees would be arriving from Kobe. Speelman did not entirely trust them, believing that the two men were not “very reliable,” trying to bring refugees to Shanghai without observing the necessary formalities and creating difficulties for refugees already in Shanghai. By formalities Speelman was referring to the fact that the Kobe refugees had neither permits for Shanghai, nor show money as required by the Municipal Council. Indeed, he was quite annoyed because apparently Szczupakiewicz and Wahrhaftig had first gone to Boris Topas, chairman of the Russian Ashkenazi Community, and it was from him and Bitker that Speelman learned of the impending Polish problem, and that the refugees had permits to leave Kobe, but had none allowing them to land in Shanghai. Clearly expressing his frustration with this new development, Speelman wrote to Troper in New York:

“You cannot imagine how we are troubled with this Polish question and we have enough troubles already as it is with the Austrian and German refugees. There is

4 JDC, RG 33–44, file 739, “JDC Aid to Refugee Yeshivoth Students and Rabbis from Poland.”
6 JDC, RG 33–44, file 462, letter from A. Oppenheim to Speelman, October 2, 1941.
7 JDC, RG 33–44, file 461, Speelman to Troper, JDC, April 5, 1941.
8 JDC, RG 33–44, file 461, Speelman to Troper, JDC, April 7, 1941.
great dissatisfaction at present among these people ... Now on top of all this comes the Polish problem.9

Unlike Speelman, the Kobe refugees were not concerned with Shanghai’s problems. Their major concern was twofold: they absolutely refused to live in the shelters (Heime) as did most of the German and Austrian refugees. Secondly, they rejected (particularly the large group of 451 yeshiva students and their rabbis) eating the food prepared in the shelter kitchens as it was deemed not kosher. In short, they demanded separate accommodations and sufficient funds for preparing their own meals,10 and they insisted on preferential and better treatment than was accorded the other refugees.

Their demands were not entirely unreasonable. Letters that they had received from Shanghai described the deplorable conditions there. R. Shoshana Kahan wrote after four days in the city in her diary:

Now I understand why everybody has fought with all their strength to remain longer in Japan and not to go to Shanghai ... now I understand the terrible letters that we received from those that had the misfortune to be sent as the first to Shanghai. A dirty, disgusting city ... Hongkou [where most of the refugees lived] is the poorest and dirtiest part of Shanghai.11

Unlike Shoshana Kahan, Yehoshua Rapoport did expect Shanghai to be an improvement over Kobe. After all, he wrote, there was a Jewish community. But it took no more than the reception in Shanghai to shatter his illusion:

We arrived in the middle of the night ... without having had warm food, and the Jewish community in Shanghai did not even receive the fifty refugees in their homes. They took us to the Jewish Club where we spent the night on chairs. The rabbi arranged a place for the Yeshiva students and the rabbis, but for the Jewish writers and the simple Jews there was no room. The next day we were thrown into the Pingling shelter; a pigsty, without tables or chairs ... It was difficult to get a few dollars for rent. The Jews [of Shanghai] were upset: why are you better than the German Jews? They can live in the shelters and you can’t?12

9 Ibid., April 5, 1941.
10 JDC, RG 33-44, file 461, a flurry of telegrams were dispatched between March 22 and March 25, 1941 from Kobe to New York, signed by a number of dignitaries and demanding “minimal human living conditions.”
11 R. Shoshana Kahan, In fajer un flamen, tagebukh fun a Yidisher shauspilerin (In fire and flames, diary of a Yiddish actress), Buenos Aires: Central Publisher of Polish Jews in Argentina, 1949, p. 283, entry for October 26, 1941.
12 Yehoshua Rapoport, Diary, Arc. 4°, 410, Jewish National and University Library, entry for May 12, 1941. I thank Dr. Shalom Eilati for preparing a typed copy of Rapoport’s Yiddish handwritten diary.
An outsider, J. Epstein of Hias-Hicem, wrote, “There are no words which would describe the very bottom of misery that these people [the German refugees] live in. It is simply horrible.” And elsewhere he wrote in rather quaint English:

> It is difficult to state what are these sad conditions accounted for. As a matter of fact, our refugees fear to go to Shanghai in the most panic way which does not seem unreasonable especially as the possibilities of earning for the life in Shanghai are also not easy ones.

And even the generally understated *American Jewish Yearbook* declared that “The situation of the refugees there is deplorable.”

Considering the amount of correspondence between New York, Kobe, and Shanghai, in addition to the Japanese refusal to permit the Polish contingent to reside in Hongkou, one would be led to assume that several thousand Polish refugees were about to descend on Shanghai. This was, however, hardly the case. Although accurate figures are hard to come by, according to one report, 4,664 refugees came to Japan between July 1940 and the end of May 1941. The report lists 1,962 as having come from Poland, 2,498 from Germany, and 204 from various other countries. Of these 2,797 left Japan; 1,563 went to America; and approximately 1,000 went to other countries. By June 1941 there would have been 1,867 refugees in Japan who were candidates for Shanghai. Another report mentions the arrival of 4,413 refugees between July 1, 1940 and June 1, 1941. Of these, 3,092 departed, leaving 1,321 in Japan. The latter figure seems more plausible, and we may assume that a little over one thousand Polish refugees eventually came to Shanghai.

In New York the Joint worried about having to deal with two committees, Eastjewcom and CAEJR; in Shanghai the CAEJR was concerned with where to

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13 YIVO, Hias-Hicem, I, MKM, 15-57, 15-B24, J. Epstein, The Jewish Community of Kobe, Committee for Assistance to Refugees, Kobe, to Lisbon, August 18, 1941.
14 Daljewcib, 72-4, J. Epstein, Hicem to Polish Jewish Relief Committee, East Brunswick, Vic. Australia, June 4, 1941.
17 The report by J. Epstein, 15-B24, cited above. See also JDC, RG 33–44, file 462, “Summary of Important Recent Communications Regarding Overseas Developments.” However, according to the Polish Ambassador, Tadeusz Romer, 950 Polish refugees remained in Shanghai. Tadeusz Romer, “Uchodzy Żydowscy z Polski na Dalekim Wschodzie (Jewish refugees from Poland in the Far East),” National Archives of Canada Reel C-10451, MG31, O-68, Vol. 2, file #3.
put the Polish Jews once they started arriving; in Kobe the Polish refugees wondered how to resist living in the shelters. Meanwhile the Joint was preparing to dispatch Laura Margolis (1903–1997), a social worker, to Shanghai. Her task, as defined by the U.S. State Department was to obtain American visas for would-be immigrants. The emigration task seems not to have taken much of her time and she was, therefore, increasingly involved in refugee affairs, feeling profoundly sorry for the treatment they received from the committee in charge. Her letters, regularly dispatched to Robert Pilpel at the Joint, express not only her growing frustration – indeed, futility – with the Shanghai refugee situation, but also with most of the men in charge. In a long letter which she wrote before leaving the quarrelsome Shanghai scene for a rest in Manila, she described each of the men in rather unflattering terms. Speelman, she believed, was becoming senile; Ellis Hayim was sadistic; Mr. and Mrs. Abraham are nice enough, but absolutely blind where Jewish religion was concerned. Despite being thoroughly discouraged about being able to make a contribution to both U.S. visa problems and refugee relief, Margolis returned to Shanghai from Manila in September 1941, and from then on the Eastjewcom problem began to be discussed in her letters.

A cable from Robert Pilpel had informed her that the Joint could not possibly deal with two committees as well as preferential standards for the Kobe refugees. To this Margolis responded by stating that there was no way Eastjewcom and the CEAJR could work together. Nonetheless, money should not be disbursed to the former directly, but channeled through the latter. As to equality of maintenance that was of prime importance to the Joint, she seems to have preferred evading the issue, writing merely that there were inequalities of treatment within Eastjewcom also, some being more kosher and others less so. The following month she wrote again complaining this time that the CEAJR had made absolutely no arrangements for housing the Kobe refugees, and she was especially incensed about the treatment accorded the yeshivoth group together with their rabbis. She declared categorically that the Mir Yeshiva (238 persons) must be housed together; the Klecker (22), Telser (12), Lublin (35), and Lubow (29) groups could be housed in a smaller building. For the remaining 73 persons individual accommodations could be found.

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19 JDC, RG 33–44, File 462, Margolis to Robert Pilpel, August 11, 1941.
21 JDC, RG 33–44, file 462, Margolis to Robert Pilpel, October 26, 1941. Margolis's figure of 409 for the religious group is probably fairly accurate.
Appended to Laura Margolis’s long letter was a “Memorandum” by Inuzuka that he had sent to Captain Herzberg, as the latter had been entrusted with the business management of all refugee affairs. (Margolis respected Herzberg, but did not like his German manner or the way he spoke to the refugees.) The Memorandum is a plaintive sort of document, complaining that the Japanese have treated the refugees very generously, allowing them to reside in Hongkou, yet the Jewish authorities have always refused to cooperate with the Japanese authorities. Indeed, some Jews have “openly engaged in anti-Japanese activities. The Japanese authorities have now a very bad impression of the Jewish people.”22 Although Inuzuka’s memorandum was not all that strongly worded, he clearly indicated that a further influx of Jewish refugees into Hongkou – after all, to a large extent populated by Japanese – was not desirable. Places elsewhere would have to be found.

From the correspondence it emerges that apparently the Joint had not given Margolis the authority to deal with refugee relief when she first arrived in Shanghai in 1941. After she returned from Manila in summer 1941, however, matters were entirely different and by October she was fully in charge. Now she was the one who determined how Joint funds would be allocated. The men of both committees understood this soon enough and apparently the relationship between them and Margolis improved. It is difficult to know to what extent she was being manipulated by one side or the other for, above all, it was important to preserve a façade of equanimity in Shanghai. By October, Speelman reported to New York that the Polish problem had been settled. The Polish refugees will receive US $ 5.00/month, whereas the German and Austrian refugees will be fed on US $ 3.00/month.23 In short, the CEAJR and Joint were led to accept unequal treatment, no doubt, because of Margolis’s intervention, who, as was shown above, was not troubled by inequality.

However, her important role as conduit to American money was short lived. On December 8, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the Pacific War broke out. All remittances from the United States ceased, and funds to feed the refugees had to be found locally. Throughout 1942, Margolis and her assistant, Manuel Siegel, who had arrived from the U.S. in November 1941, brought ingenuity and inventiveness to the problem of raising funds. By the time both were interned at the beginning of 1943, food for the refugees – even if hardly adequate – was available. It is to the war years that we must turn next in order to understand the vast changes experienced by Shanghai’s Jewish communities.

22 JDC, RG 33–44, Ibid., September 17, 1941, handed to Herzberg September 22, 1941.
23 JDC, RG 33–44, file 462, Speelman to the secretary of the American Joint, October 4, 1941.
The Pacific War and the Jewish Communities

On December 8, 1941 (Pearl Harbor time it was December 7), at about 3:30 a.m. a huge explosion was heard. As noted by John Potter,

There on the river stretch just before the [American] club was a vivid scene of war. Along the Bund just under the window were brilliant explosions as field pieces fired and shells struck their target up the river. Reddish streaks made by tracer bullets chase one another in low curves. Then came the bursts of flame from the target.

The target, the British gunboat Petrel, “Quickly ... burst into flames, was battered to pieces. She sank. Her lifeboats drifted away, afire, and floated downstream.”

Thus began the war in Shanghai.

But it did not last long. Proclamations went up everywhere that business was to continue as usual. And while Japanese troops poured into the International Settlement, shopkeepers gradually opened stores, trams and buses began to run, rickshaws appeared as usual. The outbreak of war led to the occupation of the International Settlement, but not of the French Concession. There a council appointed by the Vichy government ruled until July 1943 when the Concession was handed over to the Wang Jingwei government, ending extraterritoriality at the same time.

Whereas, on the one hand, war put an end to the fragmentation of Shanghai when first the International Settlement and then the French Concession were abolished, the British and French influence and presence, on the other, did not end all at once. Throughout 1942, until their internment in February and March 1943, the British continued to run affairs in the International Settlement and they continued actively in the Shanghai Municipal Police. As Robert Bickers observes, “Wartime relations in the International Settlement between national communities did not necessarily mirror the political alliances operating worldwide.” It seems hardly a coincidence that the Japanese did not arrest the British at once, but began to intern them about a year later, ordering

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26 Wang Ching-wei (1883–1944) established his Japan sponsored puppet government in Nanjing in 1940.
28 Ibid., p. 243. The SMC functioned until August 1943.
stateless persons confined to a specific area in Hongkou at the same time. Throughout 1942, however, life in Shanghai seemed almost normal.

Yet, for many refugees the Pacific War was the final blow. Their sense of isolation and of abandonment deepened. Now, it was felt, they were truly cut off from all contact. Shoshana Kahan wrote in her diary:

What will be now? We are again in the fire of war. God in heaven, haven’t we suffered enough? The Pacific War... began today in the morning. No longer can one find a piece of earth in God’s world where there is peace. All our friends are running around like poisoned mice ... The last hope has disappeared, [we are] without any help. Abandoned in an Asian country, who knows what will now happen to us ...  

The theme of abandonment predominated also in Simcha Elberg’s (E. Simkhoni) poem,

“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me.”
Why God, have You abandoned me
And extinguished Your light.
Rain outside
and all rooms are locked with no key
if not You, who can answer me outright?
When night fell
you and all others mocked me.

In back of the book the mite eats till full.
The worm sleeps quietly in its terrestrial bed.
To me You gave as a friend the street
where it is dark, full of sleet.

In Your holy books it is written:
“Heaven for God, earth for men.”
So why must I remain forsaken?

All doors are closed now, says the poet in despair, God has abandoned the unfortunates, indeed, makes fun of their misery. Only worms still exist in peace, for others darkness has fallen. Interestingly, an announcement of the

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29 Kahan, In fajer un flamen, p. 289, entry December 8, 1941.
war did not appear in the official publication of the German refugees. Instead they had a warning. The Jüdische Gemeinde, it stated, requests that all immigrants obey the directives of the Japanese authorities and refrain from public discussions because quiet and discipline are the foremost requirements at this time. Whoever goes against these basic principles injures our community.31

Perhaps it was just as well that the refugees did not know how grim the situation was in Shanghai. Since money was no longer arriving from America, Shanghai’s local Jewry was reluctant to assume responsibility for those refugees who had no incomes of any kind. A revealing report about events in 1942 by Laura Margolis tells a distressing tale of hardships exacerbated by petty animosities.32

One major problem that Margolis and the CEAJR had to face after Pearl Harbor was that without American money the problem of refugee maintenance would have to be solved locally. Authorized by the New York Joint to arrange for loans in Shanghai, to be redeemed whenever this became feasible, Margolis and Manuel Siegel pursued this course energetically, keeping Inuzuka Kore-shige informed about their activities. The latter had demanded that loans should be only from neutrals and not from “enemy nationals.”33 Where money matters were concerned, Margolis had high praise for Joseph Bitker and his astute financial advice; he was especially helpful in averting a financial catastrophe in June 1942. At that time the Nationalist currency (fabi) was withdrawn and CRB notes (Central Reserve Bank of the Nanjing government) were put in circulation at a rate of two to one.34 The loss would have been horrendous had purchases of goods not been made before the devaluation.

Another major problem concerned the reorganization of existing committees. The CEAJR was for all practical purposes defunct by the early months of 1942; members had either resigned, were arrested, or, except for Michel Speelman, were unacceptable to the Japanese. Anyone serving in a public capacity had to have the stamp of approval of the Japanese authorities.

The “Kitchen Fund” was formed in August or September 1942 with the aim of raising money on the so-called “Patenschaft” basis, regular monthly

31 Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt, no. 25, December 19, 1941.
32 JDC, RG 33–44, file 463, Margolis, “Report of Activities in Shanghai, China, from December 8, 1941, to September 1943,” is not dated. It can be assumed, however, that it was written shortly after her release from Japanese internment and repatriation to the United States in September 1943. I thank Bernard Wasserstein for making the “Report” available.
contributions by Russian Jews and refugees who had arrived with money. In addition, a local Joint Distribution Committee was set up to act as a controlling body. When it was suggested in the spring of 1942 that the Russian (Ashkenazi) community also use the Patenschaft plan to support German refugees, a violent quarrel broke out between those who were for helping the German refugees and those who were against it. This led to the appearance of yet another committee, Centrojewcom (Central European Refugee Committee) in favor of aiding the German refugees, in distinction to Eastjewcom, which did not want to have anything to do with them. Finally – although this is getting somewhat ahead of the story and will be discussed in greater detail below – because the Japanese authorities only wanted to work with members of the Russian Jewish community, SACRA (Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association) was organized in February 1943. The Japanese were in contact with SACRA, and SACRA dealt with the Kitchen Fund and the Shanghai Joint.

In an attempt to clarify the relationship among the various committees to Edward Egle of the International Red Cross Committee, members of the Shanghai Joint wrote that: The Joint is an independent organization. Its function is to carry out relief work among the refugees. The Kitchen Fund is a local organization that administers refugee camps and is supervised by the Shanghai Joint. SACRA is a separate organization established in connection with the February 18 Proclamation. Not stated in the letter was the obvious fact that through SACRA the Japanese controlled both the Kitchen Fund and the Shanghai Joint and that, in fact, none of the three organizations was independent.

Laura Margolis and Manuel Siegel were arrested and confined to internment camps at the beginning of 1943. But the fundraising and the organizational framework that they had set up continued to function throughout the war years. Several major figures, long time Shanghai residents, played an increasingly prominent role in refugee affairs, among them a Mr. Brahn. Perhaps because of his connection to highly placed persons in the Japanese army, or

35 YVA, reel 16, 11.728, M. Siegel to Leavitt, August 26, 1945, pp. 4–5; Margolis, “Report,” pp. 12, 15; YIVO, XV, C-10, Birman to Hicem, Lisbon, November 12, 1942. Birman apparently sent reports regularly to neutral European destinations like Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland. Unfortunately, the reports are mostly illegible; they were typed on poor paper with worn typewriter ribbons.


38 YVA, reel 16, 11.728, D. M. and Gluckman, Shanghai Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to Edward Egle, International Red Cross Committee, Shanghai, September 14, 1944.
the fact that he had a Japanese friend, a Mrs. Nogami, who was an interpreter in the Gendarmerie (the military police), Margolis decided to appoint him chairman of the Shanghai Joint. Although feared and considered sadistic, he kept his position until asked to resign in August 1945.  

Shanghai in 1942 was, however, not like Warsaw or any other wartime European capital. To be sure, the Japanese presence in the International Settlement and in the Chinese portions of the city was apparent to all. There was real hunger and the Chinese refugee problem was all too obvious. Nor could the rampant inflation be ignored. By 1943 prices of consumer goods had risen approximately forty-five times above what they had been in 1940. Nevertheless, refugee restaurants continued to do business. There were the Taverne; Kuenstlinger, and the famous Roy Roof Garden on Wayside Road; the Café Eastern Garden on Ward Road; Café Gloria at 321 Kungping Road; and others along the main roads of Hongkou.

Art exhibits and theatrical performances, even if reduced in number, continued. Between May 31 and June 15, 1942, for example, the gifted painter-poet, Yoni Fayn (b. 1914) from Poland, exhibited 53 paintings at the Jewish Club. The paintings were divided into four themes: Japanese, Bible, Jewish subjects, and terrible times. Canvas or paper and paints were expensive and one wonders how Fayn raised the money to purchase these. Theatrical performances and variety shows were popular. A benefit program for the Shanghai Joint was featured in the Doumer Theatre on January 25, 1942, and there were benefit programs with such well known performers as Gerhard Gottschalk (1899–1974) and Raja Zomina July 19, 1942 and August 2, 1942. A light opera (with music by popular composers), Hänsel und Gretel, was performed at the Eastern Theatre on March 18, 1942. Comedies were, however, more in demand than serious theater, and two by Hans Schubert (1905–1965) were performed in December.

39 Margolis, “Report,” p. 15 and YVA, reel 16, 11.728, M. Siegel to Leavitt, August 26, 1945, p. 5. According to Margolis, Mrs. Nogami was “sympathetic to the refugees, and she was Mr. Brahn’s “personal friend,” p. 3.
41 Advertisements in Shanghai Woche, no. 12 (August 29, 1942), and no. 17 (October 3, 1942). The last has a list of Shanghai restaurants and cafes together with brief biographies of their owners.
42 YIVO, (no catalogue no.), “Exhibition of Paintings” by J. Fein, Catalogue, 1942, Shanghai, 31, 5–15, 6, Jewish Club. For a brief biography of Yoni Fayn, see Eber, Voices from Shanghai, p. 98.
43 Handbills of these performances are reproduced on the Rickshaw Express Web.
1942 and January 1943.\(^{45}\) Performances might take place in movie theaters like the Eastern or Doumer, but more often than not they were staged successfully in the shelters.

Yiddish theater was, as in previous years, performed in the Jewish Club. Shoshana Kahan describes an extremely successful performance of *Mirele Efros* on February 18, 1942.\(^{46}\) *Tevye, the Milkman* was equally successful on May 10\(^{th}\). She writes that she played Golda to a full house, despite the fact that she and her husband Layzer had to write the script, there not being one available in Shanghai.\(^{47}\) Shoshana Kahan also performed in a variety show, written and performed by the refugees and called “Hamentashen with Rice.” As always, they played to a full house, but she remarks regretfully that the Japanese censor cut many numbers.\(^{48}\) Yiddish theater declined after the Jewish Club was taken over by the Japanese authorities at the end of November 1942, as noted above, and the facilities were moved to a different location.

There were, of course, also concerts, considering the large number of refugee musicians and conductors in Shanghai. But, as the editor of the *Almanac, Shanghai 1946–47*, Ossi Lewin, perceptively remarks, “Operetta performances enjoyed far more popularity than concerts ... For after the daily grind, the emigrants ... longed for humorous fare and a number of excellent artists did their part to enthrall their audience.”\(^{49}\)

### Anti-Semitism, The Proclamation, and The “Designated Area”

At the beginning of August 1942, an article appeared in *Nasha Zhizn*, written by the editor, David Rabinovich, warning against the spreading of rumors. He

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46 Kahan, *In fajer un flamen*, p. 290, entry for February 20, 1942. The “Mirele Efros” script was written by the playwright Jacob Gordin (1853–1909). It was performed a second time after the war and received a glowing review from Alfred Dreifuss, “Mirele Efros, von Jacob Gordin,” *The Shanghai Herald*, May 7, 1946, p. 3.


48 Ibid., p. 291, entry for March 8, 1942. Hamentashen are a kind of filled cookie (literally: pockets of Haman), usually poppy seeds, and eaten for the Purim festival. Here rice signifies China.

49 YVA, 078/54, Ossi Lewin, ed., *Almanac, Shanghai 1946–47*, Shanghai: Shanghai Echo, n. d. See also, Xu Buzeng and Tess Johnston, “The Legacy, the Influence of
did not say what these rumors were, but he reminded his readers that the Japanese authorities had given the refugees asylum in Shanghai and that they were the recipients of an “exceptionally humane attitude.”

Was Rabinovich’s rumor the same as that mentioned by Shoshana Kahan July 20, 1942, in her diary, namely that the refugees were to be incarcerated in a concentration camp? According to Laura Margolis’s “Report” of about one year later, “something was brewing among the Japanese authorities with regard to ‘segregation’ plans for the refugees.”

Sometime later, Margolis does not specify exactly when, a meeting took place at Michel Speelman’s house at which Ellis Hayim, Fritz Kaufmann, Boris Topaz, Joseph Bitker, Robert Peretz, and Shibata Mitsugi (Margolis mistakenly wrote Mr. Katawa) were present. The meeting presumably was called by Peretz and Shibata to inform the others of Japanese plans to segregate the Jews and to consider steps to dissuade the Japanese from undertaking such a move. (Margolis believed, however, that the men met in order to decide how to pay the Japanese off. Peretz and Shibata were planning to earn a percentage from the payoff. It was decided to have Fritz Kaufmann get in touch with Mr. Brahn and have the latter verify the story with army authorities. Brahn did, indeed, do as he was charged and told all he knew, whereupon all seven men were arrested and imprisoned in the notorious Japanese jail, the Bridge House.

Margolis’s account is the earliest mention of this episode. It would surface time and again in subsequent accounts with various accretions and embellishments.

Thus, for example, Fritz Kaufmann, one of the participants in the meeting, blames the arrests on the Gestapo and, in particular on the Gestapo agent, Joseph Albert Meisinger (1899–1947), who, according to Kaufmann’s account, had arrived in Shanghai in a submarine. All Japanese authorities, said Kaufmann, came under Gestapo influence thereafter. The German plan was to load the 40,000 Shanghai Jews on old ships and sink them in the open sea, or to unload them on Chongming Island, a large island located at the mouth of the

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Jewish Refugees on the Musical and Intellectual Life of Shanghai,” The Rickshaw Express Web, p. 2.


53 Margolis, “Report,” pp. 14–15. Aside from Shibata, the six men were leaders in the Baghdadí community, the Jüdische Gemeinde (Jewish Community of Central European Jews) and the Russian Ashkenazi Community.

54 Meisinger is also known as the “butcher of Warsaw” for his part in the German occupation of the city in 1939.
Yangzi, where they would starve to death. It was Shibata who had gotten wind of the plan and had prevailed on Ellis Hayim to call the emergency meeting. Kaufmann, according to his account, was charged with contacting the Japanese military through Brahn, which he did. But Brahn confessed all and the seven were arrested. After the war, added Kaufmann, documents were found in Japan that showed that Shanghai Jewry was to be exterminated. The protest of the seven men prevented the tragedy from occurring.55

Rather than Kaufmann, according to Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz, the real hero of this episode was Shibata Mitsugi, vice-consul at the Shanghai Japanese consulate, who informed the Jewish leaders of the plans the Gestapo had in store for them. He had participated in a meeting in the course of which Meisinger outlined three possible solutions to Shanghai’s Jewish problem. One was to load them on unseaworthy ships, to set these adrift, and to have the Jews die of hunger and thirst. The second solution was to put them to work in salt mines where they would not last long. And the third solution was to build a concentration camp on Chongming Island where the Jews would undergo medical experiments. Shibata was horrified upon hearing this and asked Ellis Hayim to call a meeting. This Hayim did, and it was decided to inform the chief of the Japanese military police (the Kempeitai) through Brahn’s very close Japanese lady friend. Presumably Tokyo would then have to be involved, and Tokyo would not want such a plan carried out. The men also proposed having Boris Topaz get in touch with Dr. Abraham Cohn, who knew Kubota Tsutomu, director of refugee affairs.56

Increasingly, we see, the villain of this story becomes the evil Meisinger and the Gestapo, whereas Shibata is intent on saving the Jews. According to Alfred Dreifuss, a refugee in Shanghai, plans were afoot to erect gas chambers on Pudong Island. Humanitarian reasons did not prevent the Japanese from carrying out the evil designs of the “Butcher of Warsaw.” Rather, it was fear of American revenge against the Nisei (Japanese) population in the United States.57

Finally, Ernest Heppner’s memoir indicates that even Zyklon B, the gas used in the gas chambers of the extermination camps, was available in Shanghai. Presumably, Meisinger together with Hans Neumann and Adolph Puttkammer, traveled to Tokyo, trying to convince the Japanese to exterminate the Jews. As they did not find a receptive hearing, they went by submarine to Shanghai carrying the Zyclon B canisters. After the war the gas canisters were found in the warehouses of Shanghai’s Siemens and Bayer firms. After he had attended a meeting at the Japanese consulate where the three Germans had outlined their plan, Shibata, in a hastily convened meeting in July 1942, alerted the Jewish community leaders to the danger facing them. Heppner’s information about the Zyclon B canisters is based on a 1946 article by M. Elbaum, who does not mention the submarine journey, but instead suggests that extermination camps had been readied. Chinese partisans, writes Elbaum, had seen suspicious buildings being erected on Pudong and Jiangwan. Strange machinery was brought to these buildings, and the buildings were visited daily by Japanese and civilians. “Were these work – or extermination camps? Who can ascertain this definitely?” asks Elbaum.

Most likely we shall never know exactly what took place in Shanghai in the summer of 1942; why a meeting of Jewish community leaders was called; what role the Gestapo had in these events; or why the participants at the meeting were arrested. I cannot but agree with the Japan expert, Gerhard Krebs, that the documentary evidence is too flimsy for concluding that Meisinger and others came to Shanghai to convince the Japanese authorities to construct installations for Jewish extermination. What seems certain is that Meisinger and six other Gestapo agents arrived in Japan early in October 1941, and that later in the month Meisinger was in Shanghai. Was he also in Shanghai one year later?


There can be no certainty regarding these issues, nor can there be any certainty about plans for the Jews the Japanese authorities may or may not have had. It can be assumed, however, that the decision to concentrate stateless Jews in one part of the Shanghai area was not hastily undertaken and seems to have evolved over a period of time, as will be suggested below. The Proclamation of February 1943, announcing its implementation, was, furthermore, issued in conjunction with other events, most notably with the internment of British and American civilians.62

But were the confinement and subsequent acts anti-Semitically motivated? Were the Japanese naval authorities or the notorious secret military police anti-Semites? A clear cut answer is impossible. In 1939 and 1940, as was shown above, a number of anti-Semitic articles appeared in the Japanese-censored newspaper, the Xin Shenbao. Furthermore, “Jewish experts,” like army colonel Yasue Norihiro (1886–1950) and navy captain Inuzuka Koreshige, were cultivated, and their views were enlisted on various occasions. But Yasue and Inuzuka “combined an ideological anti-Semitism with a practical friendship for Jews.”63 The anti-Semitism that they expressed and accepted in others differed from German anti-Semitism; it warned of Jewish power; it believed in Jewish plans for world domination; it was certain about Jewish aggressive aims.64 But it did not advocate ridding the world of Jews, annihilating or exterminating them. Following the outbreak of war, on the occasion of a banquet for both Yasue and Inuzuka, the former indicated what the nature of the Japanese relationship to the Jews was. Jews “will not be persecuted for being Jewish” as long as they are loyal to Japan and do not act contrary to Japanese interests. If, however, the Japanese authorities will have to undertake measures against the Jews, these “measures [will have been] caused by the Jews themselves.”65

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65 “Banquet in Honor of Colonel N. Yasue and Captain K. Inuzuka in the Shanghai Jewish Club,” *Nasha Zhizn*, no. 34, December 26, 1941, p. 1,3,5. No doubt to demonstrate their loyalty, the Jewish Harbin community and the Shanghai Ashkenazi community donated sums of money to the Japanese cause. See *Nasha Zhizn*, no. 36, January 2, 1942, p. 4 and no. 37, January 16, 1942, p. 1.
In Shanghai, neither before nor after the outbreak of the Pacific War, was there an official anti-Semitism, despite the sporadic publication of anti-Semitic articles, similar to earlier ones. The fact that anti-Semitic incidents were certainly not the order of the day can be seen by the brief articles in the China Weekly Review, which noted the sudden occurrence of anti-Semitism when propaganda leaflets denouncing local Jewry were released in the vicinity of Bubbling Well Road.\(^6\) Like an ominous sign of things to come, two days before the Proclamation, on February 16, 1943, an especially virulent article appeared in the Shanghai Times. Written by Wang Jingwei's staunch supporter, Tang Leangli (1901–1970), the Jews were said to strive for "world domination and world rule." Having lost their own culture as well as moral scruples, he said, Jews are associated with anarchism and communism. Their nefarious activities began in Shanghai long before the arrival of the "latest horde" and, therefore, the most immediate problem is how to prevent the Jews from getting Shanghai into "Jewish clutches."\(^6\)

No doubt, the plan to confine the Jews was taken for political considerations. But to the refugees it was the final blow. "That which has frightened us, has now finally happened. Today the official notice appeared that all who came after 1937 must move into a special area." We are about to be locked up in a ghetto, wrote Shoshana Kahan bitterly, and for this "we had to run thousands of miles to fall into a ghetto here."\(^6\) Only "stateless refugees" were mentioned, not Jews, and they were ordered into the area by May 18. The Proclamation was signed by the Commander-in-Chief of the army and his counterpart in the navy.

As indicated earlier, concentrating the Jews in a specific area in Shanghai was not a spur of the moment idea. The establishment of a "special zone" had been discussed in 1939 and 1940 in Tokyo as well as in committees in which Yasue and Inuzuka were participants.\(^6\) Despite the fact that German authorities noted apprehension among Russian immigrants about possible confine-
ment of stateless Russians as well, it was felt that the Proclamation was the first Japanese anti-Jewish measure. Not taken because of military necessity (as claimed by the Japanese), its purpose was to combat foreign influence. But concentrating a troublesome segment of Shanghai’s population in a specific area was also a means of controlling them. Moreover, that American and British citizens were finally interned at about the same time was not a coincidence. Lest the Japanese be accused of anti-Semitism, Kubota Tsutomu, Chief Director of the Shanghai Bureau for Stateless Refugees, reiterated in April 1943 that because “certain elements of the stateless refugees hampered the Japanese in conducting the great East Asian war” this measure had, regrettably, to be taken.

For many refugees who had established businesses in parts of Shanghai, the order to move into Hongkou was a catastrophe, especially when they had to sell their businesses for a pittance. Although the Eisfelders were able to open a second Café Luis on the ghetto’s Ward Road, for example, they had to hand over their thriving establishment in the International Settlement for a small sum of money. Dr. A. Cohn, the recipient, gave it to a Japanese person. Al Zunterstein’s father was fortunately contacted by a Chinese man willing to exchange houses. His father paid a small sum and acquired a house on Tongshan Road that even had an indoor toilet.

Refugees could petition to remain outside the Hongkou designated area, or they could request remaining outside past the deadline. It is impossible to know how many requests were granted or what reasons may have been claimed. It seems, however, that people moved, but slowly, into the ghetto and by the end of April there were still 7,352 persons outside. Three weeks later only 90% had moved.


German General Consulate Shanghai, to the German Embassy Nanking, March 10, 1943, signature illegible, and YVA, 078/73A, telegram, Fischer, Shanghai, February 20, 1943.

Nasha Zhizn, no. 100, April 2, 1943.


See YVA, 078/64. Lipot and Elisabeth Kardos claimed they had identity cards issued by the Royal Hungarian Legation in Tokyo, Eva Hamburger wrote that her husband, Otto Hamburger, was a Chinese national and had lived in China since 1934. Dr. Bernard Silberstein had permission to practice medicine as of April 22, 1935 from Tianjin.

The Polish group gave the most trouble, claiming that they were not stateless and had, in fact, a government in London. They were supported in their refusal by the General Council of the Polish Residents’ Association in China, which submitted a list of names in April 1943 certifying that all were Polish citizens and, therefore, exempt from the Proclamation. Of the 932 Polish refugees, 400 – less than half – had moved to Hongkou by August 1943. Kubota did not mince his words when he stated in a public address that the Polish refugees are all lawbreakers. They are most certainly stateless, he added, “since they actually have no state,” otherwise they would be enemy nationals and their property would be confiscated. Although the Japanese authorities treat them most leniently, their conduct is most unsatisfying.

The Polish group’s rebelliousness was, however, not politically motivated. Whatever political activity there was – and there was precious little – seems to have been mostly among German-speaking leftist-oriented persons and communists. Of the latter there were very few in Shanghai; according to Alfred Dreifuss, perhaps fifty party members in all. He, Dreifuss, believes that there were more, but that many did not want to admit membership for fear of arrest. Whether before the move into the ghetto or after (roughly the area called Tilanqiao), the major function of the small group of party members was to explain to themselves and to others what was happening, to somehow convey to the refugees not to lose hope. Thus political activity seems to have consisted mainly of discussions and was the work of a man named Grzyb (1896–1941), who had come to China in 1925 and again in 1932 as a Comintern delegate.

Al Zunterstein describes a Shanghai underworld that seems to have been similarly inactive. Their work consisted in “observing the success of air raids,

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76 YIVO, Y2300–1854.1–10, folder 40, letter from Dr. Stan. Tomaszewski, Chairman and Marian Krzyżanowski, secretary, April 9, 1943.
77 Central Zionist Archives, 1225, Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs to I. Schwarzbart, August 20, 1943.
78 “First General Meeting of the Reorganized SACRA Committee, Important Speech by Mr. T. Kubota,” Nasha Zhizn, no. 152, May 5, 1944, p. 2.
80 Ibid., p. 477. See also Gerd Kaminski, General Luo Genannt Langnase, das abenteuerliche Leben des Dr. med. Jakob Rosenfeld, Vienna: Lücker Verlag, 1993, p. 48, who mentions that the German speakers met once a week to discuss political issues.
81 Günter and Genia Nobel, “Als politische Emigranten in Shanghai,” Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Vol. 21, no. 6 (June 1979), p. 886. According to Kaminski, p. 46, Grzyb’s first name was Gregory, and in China he was known as Heinz Schippe. Actually, Grzyb went by several names. He was probably born as Moses Wolf Grzyb. I thank Yitzhak Shichor for the information about the man.
reporting parachutists, committing sabotage as well as guerilla tactics, coordination with other resistance groups ...” Presumably, various nationalities had such resistance groups, but he cannot say much about them. After the war, non-Jewish Germans too claimed to have organized a “Free German Movement” (Frei-Deutschlandbewegung) in 1940. Under the leadership of Karl Heinz Hinzelmann, they produced anti-Nazi and anti-Japanese flyers and posters. This group was, so they claimed, instrumental in having Meisinger arrested after the end of war.

The outbreak of war created a new situation for the foreign and Jewish communities. The Chinese population was, of course, affected as well. But by that time, we must remember, it had been under Japanese occupation for more than four years. During those years and thereafter economic problems mounted, in addition to political difficulties under successive Chinese puppet governments. Japan was not at war with Russia so that the Russian Jewish community did not have to be concerned about possible moves against it. However, by 1943, as we shall see, the Russian leadership, would be forced to become a puppet governing body for the Central European refugees. Although the small Baghdadi community, many of whom were British passport holders, was at first left alone, by the time the Proclamation was published most had been rounded up and interned. But those who had passports of neutral countries continued normal lives. For all practical purposes, the Baghdadi community ceased to exist during the Pacific War. Between February 1943 and the end of war the major concern of the Japanese in Shanghai would be how to create organizations for controlling the refugee community, and the concern of the refugees would be how to make a living and live as normally as was possible under wartime conditions.

**Life in the Ghetto**

The occupation of large parts of China and of Shanghai by Japanese forces, however, did not lead to active and universal Chinese resistance. Quite the

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83 “Untergrundarbeit in Shanghai,” Aufbau, May 17, 1946, p. 29. Five months earlier, another German group had surfaced, calling itself “Association of Democratic Germans in Shanghai” (Gemeinschaft der demokratischen Deutschen in Shanghai), Aufbau, January 11, 1946, p. 28.
84 Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), DAL 83, Birman to Hicem, Paris, January 31, 1940. According to Birman, Russians without passports are helped by the Russian Emigrants’ Committee together with the Jewish Communal Association. Among Baghdadis, Sassoon Jacoby, for example, had a Portuguese
contrary as Lloyd Eastman points out, along with a strong nationalism among intellectuals, there was also “an astonishing degree of peaceful interaction” with the Japanese, and there were day-to-day relations. Trade, moreover, was carried on between ports and was in most cases controlled by Chinese agents who acted for the Japanese.85

The relatively smooth functioning of the economy and society were by no means due to the benevolent rule or the pervasive control of the Japanese authorities. No doubt, the fact that puppet agencies, loyal to the conqueror (and concerned, of course, with their self-interest) came into existence, must have accounted in large measure for the Japanese “success.” The experiences the Japanese had gained in other parts of China and in Shanghai after July 1937 were now also applied to control the refugee population. In addition to concentrating the Jewish refugee population in a roughly forty block area, or

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one square mile of Hongkou, the Japanese created new Jewish organizations for carrying out their directives. Thus a situation came into being that minimized direct contact between the refugees and the occupation authorities and maximized the control of proxy organizations, including the control of funds needed to keep the shelters functioning and the destitute refugees alive.

The major organization created – quite probably together with the appearance of the Proclamation – was SACRA (Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association), headed by Dr. A. J. Cohn, a Rumanian Jew who was fluent in Japanese. Honorary chairman of SACRA was Kubota Tsutomu and in this capacity he presided over the newly appointed committees. Consisting of eighteen members, each with a specific function, SACRA’s immediate task was to speed up the move into Hongkou, thus assuring SACRA’s bad reputation. Shoshana Kahan noted in her diary that SACRA was hated by all the refugees for assuming this ugly job of forcing the refugees into the ghetto. SACRA, however, did not work directly with the refugees either. For this the help of the Jüdische Gemeinde was needed. By order of the Shanghai Bureau for Stateless Refugees the Jüdische Gemeinde was dissolved because its work in connection with the Proclamation was unsatisfactory, according to Cohn. A new organization was created, headed by L. M. Rogovin, a Russian emigrant and chairman of Centrojewcom. The new organization was announced on the front page of the *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt*, April 17, 1943. The reorganization was clearly aimed at creating a centralized command and ending the process of decision making by several bodies with no clear distinction of hierarchy. A similar process of centralizing command was also carried out on the Japanese side. In 1940, before Inuzuka was transferred, he had set up the Bureau for Jewish Affairs, but left Shanghai in March 1942. (He was temporarily replaced by Captain Saneyoshi.) When Kubota was appointed in his place, the Shanghai Bureau for Stateless Refugees was transferred to the Ministry for Greater East Asia, thus becoming subordinate to the Japanese Consulate General, as well as to both the military and naval authorities.

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88 YIVO, RG 243, Shanghai file 13, “Minutes no. 7,” April 1, 1943 and YVA, 078/78A, April 12, 1943, added note to “Report,” April 5, 1943. The Community of Central European Jews had begun unofficially in June 1939. In elections held July 29, 1941, twenty one representatives were elected and a board of seven representatives was created. See Anna Ginzburg, “Activities of the Jewish Community of German Immigrants in Shanghai,” *Nasha Zhizin*, no. 23, October 10, 1941, p. 10.
In addition to a police force, the organizational structure on which the Japanese authorities could rely was now in place. The police force was important because it would prevent the refugees from leaving the area without passes and would enforce law and order within the area. Called Foreign Baojia, perhaps “auxiliary police force,” it had been organized already in September 1942. Starting October 1, 1942, all males between the ages of 20 and 45 were required to serve. The episode was considered a shameful chapter in refugee life. After the war Elbaum called it a blemish on refugee history.90

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A major function of this police force was to guard the exits of the designated area and to ascertain that everyone leaving had a pass and that those who returned did so at the time specified by the pass. Passes to leave the ghetto were apparently considered of major importance by the Japanese authorities and provided the only instance (other than arrests) in which direct contact between the refugees and the occupying power occurred. The person in charge of issuing passes was the infamous Ghoya Kanoh who, without exception, earned the hatred of all the refugees. He was apparently a brutal and sadistic person, a man given to psychotic behavior, who arbitrarily issued or denied issuing a pass and who used physical violence whenever it suited him. Ghoya’s colleague, Okura, also in charge of issuing passes, was equally if not more sadistic. Both men seemed to take special pleasure in the long waiting lines formed by the refugees requiring passes. As described by Shoshana Kahan,

I and Layzer stand already the second day in line [waiting] for the murderer Okura in order to get special permission to travel to the city. Today I came at six in the morning to get a number [to see Okura]. At 12 o’clock we were notified that we can go home, Okura will not receive anyone before afternoon. I again stood, but I did not even receive a number.

But why were the refugees in need of passes? In 1943 and thereafter people continued to transact business in the International Settlement or French Concession. Others may have been employed outside the designated area. Often visits had to be made to acquaintances who had not had to move into the ghetto. Hospital visits were sometimes necessary. Musicians tended to play outside; Shoshana Kahan performed at the Jewish Club, which was not in the ghetto. But aside from the unpleasant business of obtaining a pass, as remarked by Siegel after the war, “The Japanese Authorities apart from segregating and issuing passes did very little else to regulate refugee life in the district or to interfere with the refugees managing their own affairs.”

Turning now to what life was like in the ghetto, it was clearly difficult, unpleasant, pervaded by hardships; the ghetto was unbelievably crowded, and people lived under conditions that in many cases bordered on inhuman. Hunger, starvation, vitamin deficiencies, and decline in caloric intake that brought

91 The actor Herbert Zernik composed a long satiric poem in 1945 about Ghoya. For the English translation of Zernik’s poem see Eber, Voices from Shanghai, pp. 104–106.
93 YVA, reel 16, 11.728, M. Siegel to Leavitt, August 26, 1945, p. 3.
on various illnesses were common occurrences. There was the ever present fear of infectious diseases. No matter how hard people tried to keep surroundings clean, wash food, boil water or purchase boiled water, diseases that had been brought under control in Western European countries lurked everywhere. Hospital facilities that at first suffered the lack of money when American funds ceased to arrive, eventually had to close down, and medicines were always in short supply.

Anxieties took their toll. News was nearly impossible to come by, the many newspapers that had appeared before the Pacific War had closed down. There was still the highly censored *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle*, the *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt*, or *Nasha Zhizn* for Russian readers and, for those who had connections to the non-Jewish Russian community, news about the war raging in Europe could be obtained from the Russian news services. The absence of information about the course of war and about the fate of the families left behind, together with the unrelenting struggle for existence, must have created a sense of insecurity hard to imagine.

Yet, despite the enormous hardships, life went on, and places of entertainment and restaurants, even if fewer, continued to attract clientele. As before, there was the Taverne at 291 Wayside Road, Café Gloria, Café Atlantic and Eastern Garden, as well as Café Roy and Café Ohio Bar on Ward Road. *Zum Weissen Roessl* continued to serve lunch and dinner with dance music featured Sunday evenings after relocating to the corner of Ward and McGregor Roads.

Although far fewer now, theatrical performances and concerts could still be attended. According to Alfred Dreifuss, the Japanese censor forbade altogether thirty-three plays, among them a number written by playwrights in Shanghai. There is no evidence that Chinese theatergoers came to see plays performed in German, except for a brief mention by Dreifuss that a Chinese


95 Aid was requested from the SMC and was granted when it was decided that the Jews “must now be considered to be permanent residents.” See YVA, 078/97, Speelman to SMC, May 15, 1942, SMC, Circular no. 253, and J. H. Jordan, Commissioner for Public Health, May 26, 1942.

96 Advertisements in *Shanghai Woche*, no. 12 (August 29, 1942). See also list of restaurants and brief biographies of some of the café owners in *Shanghai Woche*, no. 17 October 3, 1942. Also *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt*, Vol. 5, no. 40 (November 12, 1944) and Arthur Kornik, “Interview with Hans Zelinka, Chairman of Proprietors of Bars, Cafes and Restaurants’ Association in Designated Area,” *Our Life*, no. 58, August 12, 1943, p. 8.

public also came to the performance of Franz Molnar, *Delila.* Performances were staged at the shelters and at the Eastern Theater on Muirhead Road, or at the Broadway Theater. Light operas were favorites and Shaw’s *Pygmalion* and *The Merry Widow,* for example, received glowing reviews.

Charity performances were popular and Raja Zomina, a dancer and Yiddish folksinger, was a favorite. Even the predominantly German-speaking refugee population in the shelters apparently liked an evening of Yiddish humor and cheerful sketches. At these, not only Zomina but also Shoshana Kahan (using the name R. Shoshano) would perform. Not as often as in previous years, Kahan also performed at the Jewish Club. On November 21, 1943, for example, she had a highly successful evening in the Sholem Aleichem play *Competitors.* A gala concert attended by the Japanese dignitaries, Kubota, Ghoya, and others was presented by the Foreign Baojia at the Eastern Theater. It received, as one might expect, raving reviews. Mention should be also made of the two art exhibits held in 1944 by the Artists’ Association at which members of the Japanese authorities put in an appearance.

Yet the importance of restaurants, performances, and exhibits must not be exaggerated. There remained a semblance of cultural life; it had not ceased altogether with the establishment of the ghetto, but it was minimal. Still, there is much we don’t know. For example, were the performances sold out? How many people did the theaters hold? How much did tickets cost? Who could afford to attend performances? What kind of audience appreciated *Pygmalion,* for example? Was it an intellectual elite that attended?

Whereas it is not easy to discuss the performing arts in terms of success or failure, the matter is quite different where three educational institutions are concerned: one of these is Willy Tonn’s Asia Seminar, the other is ORT, and the third is Gregg Business College. All three must be considered supremely successful during the cruel weeks and months of the war. Willy Tonn (1902–1957) was a remarkable individual, the son of a well-to-do German Jewish

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99 *Our Life,* no. 72, November 26, 1943; no. 78, January 7, 1944, p. 2; no. 85, March 3, 1944.
102 “Gala-konzert der Foreign Pao Chia,” *Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt,* Vol. 4, no. 44 (December 3, 1943), p. 2.
family. He had studied Chinese and other Asian languages in Berlin and had published works on Chinese history while still in Germany. Tonn arrived in Shanghai in April 1939, not so much as a refugee fleeing from the Nazi regime but “driven by a longing for the East,” as he put it. Weiyan Meng, who has written a brief biography of the man, states that, “No one seemed to equal Tonn in bridging the cultural gap between the Jewish refugees and the Chinese environment. In his writing he endeavored to draw profound impulses from the immediate Chinese world and to incorporate, with great subtlety, the Chinese culture into the Western culture ...”

Although Tonn began planning the Asia Seminar as an adult education “People’s University” in 1939, the project did not get under way until September 1943, after the establishment of the ghetto. Initially the students met in totally inadequate quarters, but in fall 1944, he was able to use the facilities of the S.J.Y.A. school. His lecture courses and seminars were taught by about thirty lecturers and offered such language courses as Japanese, Sanskrit, and Hebrew, aside from Chinese. The last included Chinese for doctors and Chinese for lawyers. Lectures on the Vedas and Upanishads were held as well as on Chinese history and culture. Nor was science neglected, and in 1944 there were courses on the sociology of medicine and the science of atoms. Courses were well attended, and the Asia Seminar continued to function for five years, until 1948, when the refugee exodus from Shanghai was well under way. Not only an imaginative teacher, Tonn was also a skillful and tireless writer. Although he was unable to publish much during the war years because there were not many papers left during the Japanese occupation, the Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury, Shanghai Sunday Times, and Shanghai Jewish Chronicle carried dozens of his articles in 1941 and 1942. Tonn came to Israel in 1949. Unfortunately, the young country, refuge of the remnants from war torn Europe, was not ready to receive hospitably the talented man whose longing for the east had brought him to the shores of China. Tonn died eight years later.

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104 The impressive bibliography of Tonn’s writings was compiled by Hartmut Walravens, “Martin Buber and Willy Tonn und ihre Beiträge zur Kenntnis der chinesischen Literatur,” Monuments Serica, 42 (1994), pp. 465–481.
107 E. Lebon, “Refugee University,” Our Life, no. 125, December 22, 1944, p. 2; no. 112, September 18, 1944; no. 87, March 17, 1944, p. 2.
108 The other lonely genius at the time in Israel was Martin Buber. For the brief collaboration of the two men in the 1950s see I. Eber, “Martin Buber and Taoism,” Monuments Serica, 42 (1994), p. 450.
ORT (initials for the Russian Obshtchestvo Remeslenovo Truda, Society for the Encouragement of Handicraft), or trade vocational school, was established comparatively late, but flourished during the war years.\(^\text{109}\) Toward the end of April 1941, an ORT delegate had arrived in Shanghai with the aim of organizing a training center. Before it could actually begin to function properly, however, the Pacific War broke out and funds from the American JDC were no longer available. Until remittances via Switzerland began to arrive again in mid-1944, the school nonetheless continued to function and did not close its doors until 1945. In the four years of its existence 1185 students attended. Its beginnings were modest; for men courses were offered in locksmithing, carpentry, electrofitting; for women there was machine knitting and dressmaking. Engineering courses were offered in the evening including civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering.\(^\text{110}\)

The largest group attending ORT was between the ages of 21 and 35, and was equally divided between those who had finished elementary and those who had completed secondary school.\(^\text{111}\) Both the ages and education may indicate that young people believed that acquiring a skill – whether it would be used in Shanghai or elsewhere if and when the war ended – offered some security that they could make a living. It is doubtful whether anyone in their early twenties thought about a university education then. Although there was at least one foreign university in Shanghai, St. John's, few if any could aspire to an university education in wartime.

The Gregg Business College came into being when the Deman family was evicted from their premises on 9 Monkham Terrace where they had run a successful business school until September 1942. The relocated College on 369 Kwenming Road offered, among others, courses in shorthand, typing, languages, and bookkeeping.\(^\text{112}\) After the war ended in 1945, the skills acquired were usefully applied in employment with the American army.

Actors and actresses contributed to raising flagging spirits in performances in the shelters and in the few theaters in Hongkou. Tonn's Asia Seminars helped maintain a semblance of intellectual life. The possibility of acquiring a useful skill in the ORT program and Gregg College provided hope that someday the war would end and life would be resumed in Shanghai or elsewhere.

\(^{109}\) ORT was founded in Russia in 1880. A network of vocational schools was created in many countries thereafter.


\(^{111}\) Ibid., p. 81.

The spiritual dimension was not neglected and, no doubt, rabbis and religious students saw themselves as those who made sure that Jewish spirituality would not disappear entirely even in Shanghai. Rabbi Mandelbaum expressed this idea forcefully:

A Yeshiva in Shanghai! Museum Road is an oasis in the Shanghai spiritual desert. When one enters there, one stops in deferential astonishment at that mighty forge of Judaism called the ‘Mirrer Yeshiva’ which stands iron-strong on its post. [For] indeed, it will be marked with golden letters in the Jewish history of the present
period, that the spiritual giant called ‘Mirrer Yeshiva’ has undergone and survived the fire-test of today’s world-cataclysm. [And] Happy is the nation, that has such a youth ... 113

Rabbi Mandelbaum had good reasons for expressing positive if not optimistic views. In Shanghai, between the years 1941–1946 (with the exception of 1944), the rabbis were able to make lithographic prints of 104 different titles important for study in the rabbinic schools. These included prayer books, books of the Bible and of law, and rabbinic writings. Such books were hardly available in Shanghai and had to be reproduced from volumes the students and rabbis had brought with them. 114

Like most of Shanghai’s Chinese population, the refugees suffered great hardships during the years of war. The leadership selected and approved by the Japanese authorities was not always able to work in the best interests of the refugees. However, it is doubtful that most were aware of the pressure these men were subject to under the Japanese occupier. Nor would many have been aware that to the Japanese authorities the refugees were merely another group of foreigners that had to be controlled and kept in check by men deemed reliable. That many of the leaders were unsuitable and not equal to their assigned tasks goes without saying. Yet, the communities, Russian, Central European, and Polish, even if divided against one another, carried on, attempting to maintain a semblance of cultural life. We cannot help but admire the strength of spirit that many among them maintained and manifested. The end of war came late to Shanghai, following Japan’s capitulation in August 1945, and presented the refugees, as well as the other Jewish communities to whom Shanghai was home, with new and complex choices.

113 YIVO, Y2003, 1854.7.B. Mandelbaum, “The Mirrer Yeshivah in Galuth-Shanghai,” The Jewish Almanac, Dedicated to the Jewish Religious Thought (Der yiddisher almanakh, 194–7, zamelheft farn religyezn gedank), pp. 13–14. [In Yiddish, Russian, and English].
114 Avishai Elboim, “Defusel Shanhai ve’she’arit ha’plitah [Printing in Shanghai and the refugee remnants [Holocaust survivors],” Ha’ma’ayan, 1999–2000, pp. 75–86. Elboim’s comparison volume by volume of those printed in Germany after WWII and during the war in Shanghai is instructive.