Chapter 6: 
End of War and the Jewish Exodus

Whereas the war in Europe ended with the German capitulation in May 1945, Asia and Shanghai did not see the war’s conclusion until August. By then Japan had suffered the experience of the catastrophe of the atom bomb, and Shanghai and Hongkou – the latter unexpectedly – had not escaped one last disastrous bombardment by American planes.

The end of war in August was greeted with jubilation by the refugees as well as the Chinese. Whether the men who had cooperated with the Japanese for more than two years were concerned about their future is not known. It is to the credit of the refugees that they did not initiate reprisals against members of the several wartime organizations. New worries, however, surfaced immediately. There were the problems of how to continue feeding the destitute thousands and how to keep soup kitchens going. Slowly news about the Nazi crimes began to appear in Shanghai. Then lists of survivors were posted and the desperate search for loved ones and friends began. Anxieties mounted as the months went by: Where to after Shanghai? Return to Germany? Or Austria? Or Poland?

Fig. 13: Refugees check lists for names of survivors. Courtesy H. P. Eisfelder Photography Collection (4801-4648). Now housed at Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.

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Most had reconciled themselves to there no longer being a “home” – so, if one cannot return home, where else can one go? Would the gates of countries that had once been closed now be open? Remain in Shanghai perhaps, where after the war greater opportunities beckoned?

But when the Chinese civil war between the Communist and Nationalist forces spread after 1945, the latter was no longer an option and Jews, old-timers as well as refugees, tried to leave China as quickly as possible. Today the erstwhile Shanghailanders are spread over several continents. Increasingly, some of the older, but mostly the younger generation that grew into teenage and young adulthood in Shanghai are writing memoirs to tell how they remember their lives in the great metropolis. Over the years a number of documentaries have been produced relating the memories of their experiences. These documentaries, but especially memoirs, are useful materials because they give us glimpses not only of past events, but also of how the memoirist thinks about those events years later. Events experienced in youth, they had been for many of the memoir writers, are often fondly remembered and integrated in various ways in adult life.

The Disaster of July 1945

Air raid alerts in and around Shanghai had been frequent as the war neared its end, but occurred more often in July 1945. Air raid shelters were few and far between due to ground water which was only 1 or 1½ meters below street level. Whenever an alert was sounded, the population usually went into the streets. July 17 was a Tuesday, a hot and humid day, as described by Ernest Heppner. He worked at a bakery in a crowded lane and decided to go home at noon. As it turned out, this saved his life when the American bombs started falling at about 2 pm. In the lane where he and his wife lived, fronting Dongshan Road, houses collapsed and were burning as they ran outside. Casualties were heavy and the bakery was completely demolished. The eyewitness, Hugo Burkhard, reported that what occurred during those terrible hours is difficult to describe in words. Body parts, legs, arms, hands, could be seen everywhere in the streets. It was an unbearably hot day, and weeping and screams were

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1 Arthur Kornik, “Das Rettungswerk,” Juedisches Nachrichtenblatt, Vol. 6, no. 29 (July 27, 1945), pp. 3–4
heard from all sides. The help of physicians to alleviate the human misery was exemplary.³

Shoshana Kahan was in the French Concession on that fateful day, where she was having lunch with friends. When she heard of the catastrophe, she rushed home in a rickshaw. “The whole way from the Bund to Hongkou was in a terrible [state, clogged] with the wounded ... passes were not controlled at the [ghetto] entrance.” Fortunately, her husband was unharmed, but bombs continued to fall on Shanghai, though not on Hongkou, even on subsequent days.⁴ Thousands of Chinese were killed in the bombing raids. Among the refugees were 31 dead and 190 wounded; 703 persons were left homeless. Thirty-four homes were completely destroyed and 180 damaged.⁵ Were the American bombs dropped on Hongkou inadvertently or by design? It was generally believed that a Japanese radio transmitter close to Dongshan Road was the reason. There may also have been ammunition factories in Hongkou, as Shoshana Kahan claimed.⁶

After the tragedy came the funerals. Shoshana has left a moving description of one of these.

The heat was terrible. Awful lamentations began when the trucks carrying the dead bodies arrived. They were covered with bloody rags and swarms of flies crawled on the bodies on which the blood had dried. The trucks had left the synagogue quickly because the bodies were already becoming bloated. Mrs. Kushnir was given an injection before going to the cemetery [and as a result] she had absolutely no idea what was happening. When her husband and son were lowered into the double grave, the poor woman watched as if it had no connection to her. People wept uncontrollably and the woman just stood there nonchalantly, not aware of her misfortune. Tired and broken-hearted we returned from the cemetery.⁷

There was sorrow, but also anger. A German Jew confronted Meir Birman on a walk to the ruins and accused him of being a mass murderer. “The Jewish organizations are responsible for this misfortune,” said the German Jew, “because they did not give any money toward emigration.” Yehoshua Rapoport, who accompanied Birman on the walk, agreed with this accusation. He and

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⁵ “The Bombed Out,” _Our Life_, no. 136, October 26, 1945, p. 3.
⁶ Kahan, _In faier un flamen_, entry for July 17, 1945, p. 337.
his family could have left for Burma, a country for which visas were not required, but Birman would not permit it. Now he understands, writes Rapoport, because three tickets for ship passage would have been required. Still, other events soon overshadowed the tragedy that had occurred. Gradually, the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis became known in Shanghai, quite likely by means of Soviet reports. The first article mentioning death camps and Treblinka (though not gas chambers) appeared in Our Life on June 22, 1945. Rumors began to circulate about Japan’s defeat and surrender even before emperor Hirohito capitulated on August 15. It is doubtful that many people paid much attention to the Japanese proclamation issued on the same day that warned the population to maintain peace and order and cooperate with the Japanese forces in “view of the new situation.” The end was greeted at first with disbelief, then with jubilation.

Crowds gathered everywhere. Practically nobody stays at home, can stay at home. Discussing, shouting, howling. Songs are springing up, German, Jiddish, Polish, Russian. Sights experienced once or twice in a lifetime … complete strangers congratulating, embracing each other. Spontaneous celebrations …

In her diary Shoshana Kahan wrote, “One is drunk from the mere word peace! We have waited so many years for this one small word: peace. Dreamt about it in our sleep … breathed ‘peace’, and now I hear the word from all sides.”

The euphoria of peace did not vanish, but after some time a new set of concerns was felt. Among these were questions of whether and how to mete out justice to those who had been in power during the war years; whether to leave Shanghai; and where, finally, to end the years of exile. Above all was the need to rid the community of the dishonest and corrupt elements who had assumed leadership positions while the Japanese were in power. Calling them yes-men and lackeys, Philip Kohn demanded ridding the administration of the Jüdische Gemeinde of these men and for arranging for new elections. Similarly, the Kitchen Fund came under attack and the Polish refugees demanded
that the responsible Japanese be prosecuted as war criminals.\textsuperscript{14} Apparently no further steps were taken and aside from naming the Japanese, the writers of articles generally abstained from naming people they believed had worked together with the Japanese.

Nonetheless, it was easier to get rid of the culprits (although by January 1946 Ghoya was still wandering around freely)\textsuperscript{15} than to establish a viable administration that would see to the daily needs of the refugees, especially in the shelters. Inflation was catastrophic and finding capable managerial staff was a herculean task. Between the summer of 1945 and spring 1946, committees came and went, until finally the Joint took over directly. Manuel Siegel, newly released from the internment camp, summarized the situation for the New York office. “Selfishness, suspicion, personal enmities and hostility characterize the whole mentality of the refugee community.” Cliques had formed that did not have good words for one another.\textsuperscript{16}

In view of these and other difficulties it is perhaps not surprising that the Jewish press showed no particular interest in the Nazi trial taking place in 1946 in Shanghai. An additional reason may have been that the so-called Bureau Erhardt ring was only charged with continuing spying activities against the Americans despite the German surrender months earlier. Thus the ring still furnished the Japanese with military intelligence between May 8 and August 16, 1945.\textsuperscript{17}

It should be mentioned also that, the war having ended and Chinese rule re-established, the refugees became aware of the ambiguity of their legal status. The Chinese government had published an announcement in November 1945 which called for the repatriation of all German and Austrian nationals as enemy aliens, regardless of their refugee status. “So the incredible has happened ...” was the horrified response, “the victimizers and the victimized, the robbers and the robbed are being meted out the same treatment.”\textsuperscript{18} Although this may have been an inadvertent slip-up by the Chinese government, to the

\textsuperscript{14} The Speaker, “Kitchen Fund Presidium Must Go!,” \textit{Our Life}, no. 134, September 21, 1945, p. 3 and “Polish Refugees Demand Punishment of Kubota, Okura, Ghoya and Kano as Chief War Criminals in Shanghai,” \textit{Our Life}, no. 134, September 21, 1945, p. 4, signed by The Executive Committee of Polish War Refugees in Shanghai.


\textsuperscript{16} YVS, reel 16, 11.728, M. Siegel to Leavitt, August 26, 1945, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{17} See United States Army, Military Commission, “Review of the Record of a Trial by a Military Commission, U. S. Army, of Lothar Eisengraeger [i.e. Eisenbraeger], alias Ludwig Erhardt,” Shanghai 1947. The accused were sentenced January 1947.

refugees it was a clear sign that they were no longer welcome in China. A subsequent announcement was less strongly worded, stating that each case will be dealt with individually. Should continued residence be useful to China, a person can remain and acquire Chinese citizenship.$^19$

**Leaving China**

Leaving China was not a simple matter. On the one hand, ships for civilian transport were simply not available at the end of war. Nor did diplomatic representation get under way immediately. The American Consulate General, for example, did not open until December 1945, and the American quota system continued in force, although people of any nationality could apply. On the other, was the dilemma of the refugees expressed succinctly in German “weiterwandern oder zurückwandern” (continue emigrating or return). Many of the older generation, the forty to sixty group,$^20$ were reluctant to move on to a third country to begin life anew, believing that it might be easier to rebuild their lives in familiar surroundings. This despite the warning of the widely read *Shanghai Echo* that conditions were not all that marvelous elsewhere. Germany was in ruin and America was troubled by strikes and unemployment.$^21$ In addition there was the rather complex situation of the approximately 4,780 Austrian refugees. After the 1938 incorporation into Germany, Austrians had become German citizens and in 1941 they became stateless, together with the German Jewish refugees. At the end of war, not wanting to be stateless any longer, they were anxious to reclaim their Austrian citizenship, possibly unaware that for those who wished to emigrate to the United States, the Austrian quota was nearly nonexistent.$^22$

Those who under no circumstances wanted to return to Austria, like the De- mans, became increasingly desperate. In response Deman founded an Association of Small-Quota Committee, which included in addition to Austrians also Hungarians, Rumanians, Lithuanians, Yugoslavs, and Turks – all nationalities for which the American quota was very small.$^23$ Meanwhile those counted within

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$^20$ “The Case for the Middle Aged,” *Our Life*, no. 144, March 1, 1946, p. 3. This age group, the article stated, was disproportionately high, which presented a unique problem in arranging emigration.


$^23$ Ibid., p. 201.
the German quota continued to leave and Deman noted with considerable dis-
may the changes in Hongkou. Rickshaws and pedicabs filled with luggage now
crowded the streets. All were headed toward the Hongkou wharves where the
giant American steamers of the “President” line were waiting. Hongkou was
gradually emptying out and the Gregg business school that had assured many a
young person a livelihood now stood empty. Both students and teachers had
either already left or were about to depart.24 Their feelings of being stranded,
hopeless, and abandoned were expressed in a poem by Alla Maria Maass:25

Song of the 5000
Ten years we stood and minutes three
on river’s bank a homeless army
while yellow Wangpoo’s waves they roll
into the unconcerned sea …

Ten years of typhus and malaria misery
and on Point Road a grave so cold
while yellow Wangpoo’s waves they roll
into the unconcerned sea.

Although the America quota for Germans was more favorable, some families
did decide to return to Germany, perhaps not fully realizing the extent to which
exile had estranged them from their native country. No longer were there
homes to return to. These had vanished together with their families and their
possessions. If they had fled to Shanghai with teenage children, these had
grown into young adults abroad and their formative years had been spent in
the metropolis. Upon returning they were not always welcomed with open
arms, either by the new government or by the population.26

Aside from the refugees, the Baghdadis and Russians too had to make hard
decisions. This was especially true for the Russian Jews who owned properties
and businesses and who had not suffered confiscations of their assets by the
Japanese as had the Baghdadis. Many waited, even after Mao’s armies marched
into Shanghai in May 1949. But the hoped for accommodation did not material-
ize under the new regime. Private property ceased to exist and heavy taxes
were levied that had to be cleared before a family could leave China. The

24 Ibid., p. 208.
25 Ibid., p. 202. These are the first two verses of a longer poem.
26 Gabriele Anderl, “Der Weg Zurück,” Zwischenwelt, Vol. 18, no. 2 (August 2001),
p. 50. This was especially true of the reception in Austria.
process might take several years and many Russian Jews did not leave until the early years of the 1950s. The Moshinsky family, for example, was finally able to depart in 1952.  

For the Baghdadis, Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the subsequent occupation of Shanghai by the Japanese, and the internment in 1943 of numerous British passport-holding Baghdadis signaled the beginning of the end of the Jewish diaspora. Sassoon Jacoby summed it up well when he said that he did not doubt that both Germany and Japan will be defeated. But Shanghai then must again become Chinese as it should be. What options would be open to Jews when that happened? According to Jacoby, only Zionism. “I started reading Jabotinsky and a lot of things began to make sense and fall into place,” he said.  

When the state of Israel was established in May 1948, Jacoby and many Russian Jews, especially those who had been strongly pro-Zionist earlier, took advantage of the new opportunity. If they had hesitated to emigrate to

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Palestine before, they felt now that the time had come. Unlike the refugees, those with money and connections simply got on a plane and came to the newly established state. Although accurate figures are hard to come by, according to one estimate as many as 10,000 Jews went to Israel from Shanghai and other Chinese cities in the second half of 1952.

Some refugees, like the Eisfelders and Charles Bliss, considered Australia a viable option, and were encouraged to think of emigrating to that country, since a group had been able to sail on the Javanese Prince as early as March 1946. At the end of the year a much larger group departed for Australia on the Hwa Lian. Although not very seaworthy, the ship arrived without serious mishaps. However, the hoped-for breakthrough did not occur and in subsequent years anti-refugee sentiments prevailed. In the end only about 2,500 Shanghai refugees were able to get Australian visas.

Shanghai Remembered

The memory of Shanghai is expressed in many different ways. The children or teenagers from Central Europe, adults today, remember Shanghai differently from those who were born in Shanghai of Russian or Baghdadi parents. Religious youngsters and rabbis experienced the city still differently, and those who came as adults and had to cope with life’s vicissitudes saw even something else in the city. Memories of Shanghai are preserved in various kinds of writing: a small number of diaries, mostly unpublished; journalistic reports of persons who lecture about their experiences; collections of articles based on interviews, autobiographies and memoirs.

How to distinguish between the latter two? James Cox reminds us that the term autobiography emerged only recently and began to be used widely only

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toward the middle of the nineteenth century in place of memoir. Yet the two
terms, autobiography and memoir, are not interchangeable and in discussing
one or the other the literary value of either must not be neglected. Cox suggests
that a memoir does not allow the imaginative to obtrude, whereas autobiogra-
phy will relate to the “inner world of self-reflection.” We might also consider
that some memoirs are largely autobiographical and that there is a memoir-
mode of writing autobiography as well. This brief digression is relevant to
our enterprise below to show not only the relative complexity, if not ambiguity
of the subject, but also to define my own usage. When a narrative is largely
concerned with exploring the self, or presenting a certain kind of self, in refer-
ence to external events, I shall use the term autobiography and in some cases
autobiographical memoir. When, on the other hand, a narrative is more con-
cerned with external events, placing the self in reference to them, as need be,
I shall call it a memoir.

Compared to German and Austrian writers, Russians in Shanghai and their
descendants have barely tried their hand at autobiographical accounts. The
autobiographical memoir by Judith Ben-Eliezer, *Shanghai Lost, Jerusalem Re-
gained* (1985) is a rare exception. Born in Shanghai of Russian parents, she
describes her charmed childhood in an opulent household against the back-
ground of the turbulent events then occurring in China. Her father lost his
wealth and she had to take a job instead of being able to attend university. In
due course, Judith became a successful businesswoman dealing in coal. In
addition, throughout this 445-page account her activities in the Zionist Revi-
sionist Party in Shanghai and in Betar are documented in detail.

The Sino-Japanese War of July 1937 and the outbreak of the Pacific War in
December 1941 did not end her activities either in business or in the Party. She
carried on despite close brushes with the Japanese authorities. Subjected to
unpleasant interrogations, she reproduces these verbatim and affects a cinema

34 James M. Cox, “Recovering Literature’s Lost Ground Through Autobiography,” in
35 Ibid., pp. 125, 143.
Ibid., p. 280. He uses the latter phrase in juxtaposition to the memoir-prone
autobiographer.
37 Full bibliographical data is supplied in Appendix 4, where additional works not
discussed in the text are also listed.
38 The Revisionist Party refers to the party founded by Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1925,
which was opposed to the official Zionist policy. It eventually seceded from the World
Zionist organization. Among Russian Jews in China, theRevisionist Party was singularly
successful. Betar was the youth organization of the Revisionist Party.
style description that has the Japanese interrogators sputter and lose their composure while she remains cool and collected.

She deals briefly with the crucial war period between 1942 and the summer of 1945 and devotes most of the second half of the book to her business, the American suitors who court her, and Zionist activities, which culminate in the organization of an Irgun branch in Shanghai.\(^{39}\) The establishment of the state of Israel is the decisive moment in her life and she realizes she can no longer remain in China. Judith and her mother depart for Israel where at last she meets the love of her life. The book ends with her marriage to Aryeh Ben-Eliezer.

The kind of self the narrator seeks to present is that of an idealist and a committed person. Her idealism is, however, not devoted to China's struggle with the Japanese invader, though she works briefly on behalf of the Chinese underground. Her commitment is to Zionist goals and to contributing in whatever way she can toward the establishment of a homeland. What she would have said of herself, she puts in the mouth of one of her American admirers. “You have always lived in two worlds. Physically you are still in China but spiritually and mentally you have completely drifted away. That tiny spot on earth ... has drawn you like a magnet” (p. 369). Born in China and yet not part of its destiny, only a small handful of Jews identified their fate with that of the country of their sojourn. For Shanghai, although she was born there, Ben-Eliezer expresses no special attachment. The emphasis in this autobiographical memoir is on the political activity on behalf of Zionist goals, rather than on the rare opportunity Shanghai offered to carry on such activity. Her work thus differs markedly from those of the exiles discussed below, who tended to underscore Shanghai’s uniqueness, either positively or negatively.

In his autobiographical memoir Yaakov (Yana) Liberman, *My China, Jewish Life in the Orient, 1900–1950*, (1998), also born in China, explains that to him China is a milieu and not a second country. He never made an attempt to become part of China. Nor would the Chinese have wanted him to. He attributes this to the fact that “we were living in permanent exile separate from the centers of Jewish life” (p. 11). Therefore, unlike Judith Ben-Eliezer, he does not see himself as having lived in two worlds.

Born in Harbin, he was early attracted to Revisionist Zionism and became an active member in the Betar movement with its athletic activities, and in time assumed a leadership position. His parents were determined to give him a good education, meaning a foreign education, and the young Liberman at-

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\(^{39}\) The full name is Irgun Ztevai Leumi, National Military Organization, which was founded in 1937. During the war years, the organization attempted to organize illegal immigration into Mandatory Palestine. The organization was dismantled in 1948.
tended an English school in Shanghai, a foreign school in Korea, and Sophia University in Japan where he earned both a BA and an MA degree. Thus in his adult years he manifested the kind of cosmopolitanism, so characteristic of a large segment of upper class Russian Jews in China, that made their existence pleasant and comfortable in Shanghai. Liberman’s life from Harbin to Shanghai, furthermore, demonstrates the extent to which Shanghai’s Russian Jewish community had ties to Harbin, as mentioned earlier.

Unlike the refugees who suspected Japanese involvement in Shanghai affairs and even rumored that the Germans together with the Japanese were plotting their demise, discussed in an earlier chapter, Liberman makes no such mention. Indeed, he remembers not being affected by the war in Europe. In 1941, dog racing and horse racing alike drew crowds, cinemas and nightclubs were filled to capacity, and the local theaters offered outstanding Russian and English plays and musicals, operas and ballets (p. 132). Even after Pearl Harbor and the start of the Pacific War as well as internment of friends considered “enemy nationals” by the Japanese, Jewish life retained surprising strength. In Hongkou, he reminds us, European Jews built a haven no longer in evidence in Europe.

Finally the day came for Liberman and others with a commitment to Zionism to leave for the new state of Israel. He tells the reader that people left China not under threat to their lives. They were leaving a diaspora voluntarily, dismantling their institutions, synagogues, and schools. “Jews could leave or stay, the choice was theirs.” (p. 226) A unique chapter of Jewish wandering was closed.

Liberman realizes in this memoir that he and other upper-class Russian Jews occupied a privileged position in Shanghai. To them the Chinese did not matter, were hardly noticed except as servants. He and Judith Ben-Eliezer wanted to be perceived as idealistic young people, committed to the establishment of the State. His idealism, like hers, did not extend to the Chinese and their aspirations, despite the fact that even under Japanese occupation they enjoyed a degree of freedom not possible anywhere else at the time. The reader will not find in Liberman’s pages a nostalgic backward look to Shanghai. It was a good place to be for a time, but his sojourn there had ended and, now that the Zionist dream was realized, it was time to move on.

Although members of several rabbinic seminaries (yeshivoth) landed in Shanghai, only the Mir Yeshiva managed to arrive intact with its rabbis and students. According to Rabbi Elhanan Yosef Hertsman’s memoir, *Escape to Shanghai* (1981) the hand of the Almighty guided the rabbis and students the

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entire way. Sugihara was dispatched to Kovno only in order to save the yeshiva students (p. 29). That the rickety boat on which they crossed from Vladivostok to Tsuruga did not sink is seen by Hertsman as another miracle. They escaped “in the grace of Torah and with the force of Torah” (p. 51). They ended up in Shanghai’s Beit Aharon Synagogue that had not been used before because no Jews lived in that area. The magnificent building waited just for them for fifteen years. But there were dangers, and Rabbi Hertsman repeats the well-known story about Germans trying to persuade the Japanese to exterminate the Jews. “A great miracle” saved them from the gas chambers (p. 105). In Shanghai the students studied and engaged in doing good works, bringing Yiddishkeit (Jewishness) to the refugees and establishing a chain of Torah institutions. Unlike others, the Mir Yeshiva students had no difficulties getting passes to leave the ghetto after moving to the Ohel Moishe synagogue. Indeed, a Japanese brought the required passes to the yeshiva (p. 96). Dr. Cohen of SACRA was not regarded with suspicion. To the contrary, he was “a special messenger of G-d sent to be at our side in a time of crisis.” (p. 97)

Shanghai or the Chinese barely figure in this narrative. The yeshiva might have been anywhere in this world because what mattered ultimately was a life of study and the existence of Jewish life in this far flung place. Shanghai is remembered as another one of the Almighty’s miracles, “It is G-d’s wonder that in the farthest corner of the Far-East existed a vibrant Jewish community ...” (p. 86)

Sigmund Tobias’s autobiography, Strange Haven (1999) also deals with the Mir Yeshiva, however, as a student and as an adolescent. He arrived with his Polish-born parents from Germany in 1938 as a six-year old and left when he was not quite sixteen for the United States. Of the ten years he spent in Shanghai, four were in the Mir Yeshiva, and the reader must perforce assume that these years had a formative role in his future life.

His memory of Hongkou, the lane houses, and the tradesmen-letter writers, shoe repair men, who plied their trade there is sharp. He first attended the Kadoorie School where he was quite unhappy and received poor grades. Despite his parents’ objections, he switched to the Mir Yeshiva and the warm friendships the religious students offered him there. He was not the only one to do so. Some of his friends, Tobias tells his readers, also decided on the change and, “Those of us who dropped out of the Kadoorie School and switched to the yeshiva full-time received some money every two weeks ...” (p. 79). The school routine, Shabbat prayers, holiday celebrations, all these are described in considerable detail. Talmudic studies gave him confidence in his intellectual capabilities that he so obviously needed and had not received in the Kadoorie School. Like others, he remembers the Hongkou bombing of July
17 and the end of war soon thereafter. The joy over Japan’s surrender is soon dampened, however, by the tragic news from Europe.

The Mir Yeshiva departed for the United States in mid-1947 leaving him at loose ends. When criticisms began to be heard about the yeshivoth, namely that they lived well while others starved and were ill, the teenager became increasingly confused. He felt ashamed, but also angry with the critics. “Now it became even more difficult to remain religious when I heard what was being said about the people I had admired so much” (p. 113). It comes as no surprise that ultimately he decided not to return to the yeshiva after arriving in America, and instead embarked on a successful academic career.

The years he spent studying in the Mir Yeshiva may have been no more than an interlude in a long and productive life that followed. Nonetheless, it was an important interlude – a haven in a world of shifting sands in which a sensitive youngster looked for and found stability and an anchor. In 1988, Tobias returned to Shanghai to give a series of lectures. And it was during the journey to familiar places he had once known that he began drafting this autobiography. The Shanghai he encountered was vastly changed, yet in some ways the same, he tells his readers. But then, he too had changed, yet remained the same person. To be sure, Shanghai was a way station, but undeniably one that played a major role in his life. Tobias’s parents cushioned the hardships of those years and, therefore, his fond recollections of Shanghai are understandable.

The autobiography of Ellis Jacob, The Shanghai I Knew (2007) is a very different kind of work. It does not deal with catastrophes or major cataclysms. The author, about the same age as Tobias, did not suffer major displacement at a young age. Born of Iraqi parents, Jacob wrote this book, as he tells in the introduction, “from the point of view of a young boy and then a teenager” as well as a person raised in a cosmopolitan environment. (p. 17). His was a happy childhood in a large family. Like the narratives described earlier, the outbreak of WW II in Europe did not affect the nine- year-old boy and he continued to attend the cosmopolitan British school until the outbreak of the Pacific War. As Iraqi subjects were not at war with Japan, his and other Iraqi families were not interned, and he switched to the Shanghai Jewish school. To be sure, there were “shortages, [but] life went on pretty much as usual during the war” (p. 85). The major change in his life occurred when the Red Army arrived in Shanghai in May 1949. It was then that an anti-foreign attitude in the Chinese population became dominant and he and his mother left China.

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41 My thanks to Dr. Maisie Meyer for making this work available to me.
Almost wistfully, he concludes his account, “But in a sense I will always be a Shanghailander – it was my home town, and it was part of me ...” (p. 130).

Shanghai is remembered as variously by the refugees as the narratives described so far. There are those who, like Ursula Bacon, think of Shanghai as an “unforgettable experience,” whereas to Franziska Tausig in *Shanghai Passage* (1987), who was over forty years old when she came to Shanghai, these were “bitter years.” The age a person was when he or she came to the metropolis determined in large measure what the experience would be like. In addition to memories that reflect the direct experience, there are also “second hand” memories, as it were, by children too young to remember experiences and who, therefore, narrate their parents’ memories.

An example of the latter is Vivian Jeanette Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles* (2002). Kaplan was born in Shanghai after WWII and left at two years of age. Although a first person account, the book is based on her remembering her mother’s stories, and she calls it a memoir “in the creative non-fiction genre.” The book begins like most memoirs of this kind with a happy childhood of the author’s mother. By the time of the Austrian Anschluss, she is a young adult and, after encountering great difficulties, the family leaves for Shanghai. Life is not treating them too badly; the author’s mother is married to her sweetheart from Vienna; they take a partnership in a bar. After the war ends, they open a fur salon, but by 1949 it is clear they should leave China. “The sights and smells have become familiar, but we were never a part of this land ...” (p. 277).

The self that emerges in this book is a daughter’s perception and understanding of her mother and her memories. In these, Shanghai is a grim place; even the good times are soon submerged under the dread of the everyday. The author conveys the mother’s fearfulness of what happens and what may yet happen. But this, the reader must remember, is written by the daughter, who has never experienced war and its terrors.

Like Kaplan’s *Ten Green Bottles*, Evelyn Pike Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai* (1993 and 2nd edition, 2000)\(^42\) is a tribute to her mother. Her happy childhood changed at once with Kristallnacht when her father was arrested. As soon as he was released the family left for Shanghai. The father died soon thereafter leaving her mother to support herself and her young daughter. Rubin writes on the last page, “She [her mother] demonstrated monumental fortitude and ingenuity in keeping the two of us alive during our years of deprivation” (p. 199). For these mothers no sacrifice was too great to give their daughters some semblance of normalcy.

\(^42\) The German edition, published in 2002, is a shorter version and includes an account of her return visit to Shanghai.
Ursula Bacon’s *The Shanghai Diary* (2002) is an autobiography that tells a rather different story. With a Chinese partner her father started a painting business that provided the family with income and with contacts among Chinese. Thus she meets sing-song girls when she helps her father get painting estimates, and they teach her how to count in Chinese and how to eat with chopsticks. She gives English language lessons to three concubines of a Chinese general. When the family has to move into Hongkou, she writes “and in between all the misery, I [nonetheless] managed to have a good time.” (p. 164)

Ursula Bacon is a person who finds a positive side even in the most unpleasant of situations. Above all she is interested in the people around her, an interest confirmed by her friendship with Yuan Lin, a Buddhist monk with a Chinese father and an English mother and an Oxford degree in economics. “Life was not about events, but about people,” (p. 228) he tells her. The book seems to assert that the Shanghai years are not lost years – a past to be regretted. Rather they were an “unforgettable experience,” Shanghai was a safe haven, “exotic, eccentric, and exciting,” as she tells the reader in her foreword.

This brief survey of memoirs and autobiographies reveals the various kinds of responses and destinies of those born in China and those who came there as refugees. Some struggled against all odds to make a living, to pursue a religious life; others found romance and married or strove to live up to political ideals. Writers of fiction have as yet barely appropriated the richly woven fabric of these lives to further transform rapidly fading memories. Among novels, I might briefly mention the German novel by Alfred W. Kneucker, *Zuflucht in Shanghai* (1984), who completed this fictionalized account toward the end of his China years. When he passed away in 1960 it was found among his papers and was published posthumously. The novel by Jerome Agel and Eugene Boe, *Deliverance in Shanghai* (1983) is by two authors who were never in Shanghai. They make use of the rich refugee materials by weaving together many different and disparate lives. Finally, there is a recent Chinese novel by Bei La, *Mozhou gangqin* (2007, A magic piano, the Chinese translation is “Jewish Piano”). This is a love story between a Polish-Jewish pianist and a Chinese Red Army orphan. Unlike other novels, Bei La’s extends into the 1980s. But are novels important? And need they be considered by the historian? I cannot but agree here with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, who writes that the image of the Holocaust (the Shanghai exile included) “is being shaped, not at the historian’s anvil, but in the novelist’s crucible.” 43

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These final years of euphoria over the end of war, then mounting grief, and finally anxieties as to their uncertain future are little understood. The American Hongkou bombardment was soon eclipsed by information about the monumental catastrophe of Jews murdered in Europe. But there was little time for mourning and often illusory hope co-existed with despair. Meanwhile decisions had to be made and, while some might have preferred remaining in Shanghai, the threat of yet another war convinced all but the few to leave. Return to Europe was not an option for most, yet countries like America or Australia were not exactly eager to throw their gates open. By the beginning of 1948 only a little over half of the Central Europeans, Baghdadis, and Russians had left. Jews of all persuasions were not unaware that the Chinese communist armies were scoring one victory after another and would soon approach Shanghai. Indeed, by May 1949 Mao Zedong’s army had entered the metropolis. Like the European Holocaust survivors, it took several decades before Shanghai refugees were able to translate experience into memory and write memoirs and autobiographies. They do not yet tell us enough about how those years of another time and place are remembered.
