Chapter 3:
“To Suffer a Martyr’s Death Rather than Perish in Shanghai” or to “Die as Free Men in Shanghai”

Fig. 3: Yuya Ching Road in the 1940s. Courtesy of H. P. Eisfelder Photography Collection (4801-4648). Now housed at Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem.

Until October 1939, when the Permit System was instituted (the revised system went into effect in July 1940), arrival in Shanghai by ship required no more than a valid passport, the price of a steamship ticket, and a visa from the...
Chinese authorities. In the absence of passport controls at the port of entry, the latter was not always a requirement and depended on the steamship company’s insistence to produce a visa before issuing tickets.

Five phases in the refugee exodus by sea, the subject of this chapter, can be distinguished. (1) The slow beginning of mostly German professionals who, deprived of their livelihood after Hitler came to power in January 1933, decided to start new lives in China. (2) Increasing numbers left after the Austrian Anschluss in March 1938, together with German Jews when a concerted anti-Jewish economic campaign began and when decrees, including those against professionals, were enacted. (3) The actual flood of German and Austrian refugees leaving for China occurred between November 1938 and September 1939, when probably something under 20,000 refugees arrived, of whom the vast majority remained in Shanghai for the duration of WWII. (4) Smaller but still considerable numbers of refugees left Europe for China after the outbreak of war until June 1940, when Italy entered the war. (5) Flight by ship nearly ceased thereafter, and only a very small number of refugees were still able to sail from Marseilles. In this chapter I will discuss the refugee flight by sea and the difficulties which the refugees eventually encountered. The special concern will be with their reception in Shanghai by the Jewish communities, the attempts by the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) and the Japanese authorities to stem the influx of the destitute refugees, and the creation of the permit system.

The Journeys

As mentioned earlier, a number of physicians had already come to China in autumn 1933. They were joined by others in 1934. Until December 1933, Jewish

2 The decree against physicians dates from July 25, 1938, the decree against lawyers was enacted September 27, 1938. The addition of Sara and Israel to first names dates from August 17, 1938, and on October 5, 1938 Jews were required to turn in their passports in order to receive the large "J" (Jude) in new ones. Martin Broszat and Norbert Frei, eds., Das Dritte Reich im Überblick, Chronik, Ereignisse, Zusammenhänge, Munich-Zurich: Piper, 1989, pp. 246–247. See also, Saul Friedländer, Nazi Germany and the Jews, Vol. I, The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939, New York: HarperCollins, 1997, pp. 257–263. The "J" requirement was instituted at the request of the Swiss on October 4, who wanted to limit the influx of Jewish refugees, p. 264. See, however, also Reinhard Wolff, "Hässliches Mobiliar im schönen Volksheim, Taz-mag (Tageszeitung, Berlin), February 5/6, 2000, pp. 4–5, who writes that the "J" was instituted at the request of both the Swiss and Swedish. I thank Professor Wolfgang Kubin for this reference.
physicians were able to obtain visas from the Chinese embassy in Berlin upon presenting a recommendation from the German Foreign Office. Although after that date the Foreign Office no longer made such recommendations, Chinese consulates outside Germany made visas available to anyone wanting to emigrate, and the Witting family, for example, obtained its visa for China in London. As He Fengshan (1901–1997), Consul General in Vienna in 1938, wrote in his memoir, China did not have a uniform policy toward issuing visas to Jews even in 1938. Indeed, he received instructions at the time from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Waijiaopu) not to refuse issuing visas. Meanwhile, recommending Jews, or vouching for their professional competence once they had arrived, continued to trouble German consulates in China, since Jews as German citizens, apparently turned to German consulates for such documents. Even in spring 1939, the German Foreign Office still considered it necessary to send a letter to consulates and missions warning them not to recommend Jewish physicians, pharmacists and lawyers, and not to help them when they encountered difficulties. Not all the doctors, dentists and other professionals who came singly or in small groups to China after 1933, remained in Shanghai. Two partial lists show that they also went to Guangzhou (Canton), Tianjin (Tientsin), Nanjing, Central China (which may have been Wuhan) and Qingdao (Tsingtao). China’s interior did not hold out much promise for European medi-

3 YVA, 078/83, Foreign Office, signed Oster, to German Embassy Peping (sic), June 22, 1934. The Foreign Office claimed to have written only twelve recommendations.
4 YVA, 078/1, Annie Witting letter, May 1939, on board the “Conte Verde”, p. 3.
5 He Fengshan, Waijiaopu shengya sishi nian (My forty year diplomatic career), Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1990, p. 75. Douglas Davis, “Ho Fengshan: The Chinese Oskar Schindler”, The Jerusalem Post, February 20, 2000, p. 2, seems to have gotten matters confused when he writes that Chen Jie, ambassador to Germany, ordered He to stop issuing visas. His reason was, according to Davis, that to continue would damage Chinese relations with Germany. Chen did not present his credentials until November 16, 1938, and by then Sino-German relations were already in cold storage, a fact that Chen Jie would surely have known. It is, therefore, highly doubtful that Chen ordered He to desist.
6 YVA, 078/83, list of physicians for whom the Foreign Office wrote recommendations, and 078/73A, attachment to Beijing report, no. 259; Bracklo, German Consulate, Jingtao to the Foreign Office, April 14, 1934. This communication concerned Dr. Rosemarie Pfeil, a dentist and married to a non-Jew, and Wolf Dubinski, a medical doctor. The three decided to settle in Qingdao after not finding anything suitable in Shanghai. See also, CAHJP, DAL 86.4, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, November 12, 1940, according to whom only ten to fifteen immigrants were able to settle in Qingdao. See, however, also the list compiled by Professor Wilhelm Matzat, according to which there were 18 families in Qingdao in 1939. Several single people still arrived in 1940 and 1941. Personal communication to Avraham Altman.
cal practitioners, however, and Dr. Richard Mayer, who was active at the Guangxi Provincial Medical College (Guangxi xian li yixueyuan) in Nanning, would have been among a mere handful in such far flung regions. Most seem to have remained in Shanghai, however, and a later account mentions eighty refugee physicians, surgeons and dentists, who had arrived by spring 1934. But refugees other than these professionals began to arrive as well, usually in small groups, in which men predominated and in which there were very few children. One such group, on October 18, 1938, for example, had nineteen men, five women and one child. By November 26, an estimated five hundred refugees were in Shanghai alone, all having arrived before Kristallnacht. A sharp increase occurred when the Conte Verde, a Lloyd Triestino luxury liner, brought 187 refugees on November 24. It was this and the following month’s even larger contingent that began to worry the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMP) and that led the council and others to search for means to limit or stop the influx, as will be discussed later.

What was a sea voyage like for these travelers? The Eisfelder family – Hedwig, Louis and their two sons – was among the Conte Verde passengers who landed in Shanghai on November 24. Mrs. Eisfelder’s letters, written on board ship and posted along the way, allow us glimpses of their journey. Traveling economy class, the family boarded the ship on October 29, in Trieste, where they had spent a few days sightseeing. The following day, in Venice, they went to San Marco, looked at palaces and marveled at the city’s beauty. Once on board ship, Hedwig gradually became acquainted with her fellow passengers, most of whom were from Berlin and Vienna, with a few Indians, Japanese and Englishmen among them. In Brindisi she saw her first palm trees, but found the city unimpressive. On November 2, they reached Port Said. There, despite it being night, stores were open and they went shopping in a large department store, their baggage not having yet caught up with them. It began to get warmer in the Suez Canal and became oppressively hot as they

7 CAHJP, Dal 24a, Mayer to Far Eastern Jewish Central Information Bureau, Harbin, January 26, 1936. Mayer’s letter is in response to an inquiry from Harbin about employment for Jewish physicians in South China.

8 CP, November 26, 1938, p. 3. According to a German account, Shanghai by mid-1939 was “inundated” with physicians, dentists, and chemists. YVA, 051/050/41, Security Service Leader of the SS Oberabschnitte North-West to Sicherheitshaftamt, Zentralabteilung II/1, Re: Jewish Emigration to Shanghai, June 21, 1939, signature illegible.

9 “More Jewish Refugees Reach Shanghai from Germany and Austria”, CP, October 19, 1938, p. 3.

10 “Reich Emigres in Shanghai Placed at 500”, CP, November 26, 1938, p. 3.
sailed into the Red Sea. After Suez, where she admired the gardens and a spectacular sunset behind a mountain range, the journey became tedious. But entertainment was provided on ship (movies, a concert, a fencing match) to relieve the boredom. On November 6, they arrived in Aden and small boats took the Eisfelders ashore. It was their first encounter with heavily veiled women, “I realize increasingly”, she wrote, “that we are making a ‘world journey’”. The shock of reality reached them in Bombay on the 12th while reading in the newspaper about Kristallnacht. “Only now are we completely aware how fortunate we are to sail on the ocean and we say to ourselves, no matter what may await us in the new world, we are lucky to be outside”, she wrote to her family. Although worried about those left behind in Germany, and increasingly suffering from the unaccustomed heat in economy class, they nonetheless enjoyed Colombo on November 16, its grand buildings; mosques; and the banana, pineapple and rubber trees in Victoria Park. With a keen eye for feminine attire, she noted that European women were elegantly dressed but were not wearing hose. The following day they would be in Singapore and eight days later in Shanghai, where the temperature of 53°C would strike them as cold and where, she noted in her last letter, “the seriousness of life begins again.”

At a time when Jews were increasingly excluded from contact with non-Jews in public places, ship space was not always considered a problem and discrimination was rare. Ernest Heppner sailed on the *Potsdam* on March 3, 1939. He recalls in his memoir that “no sooner would I pick a deck chair to sit in for a moment than a steward would be at my side, offering hors d’ouvres and drinks.” Mrs. Annie Witting, sailing on the *Conte Verde* May 9, 1939, reported at length from on board ship:

> Our ship is ... many stories high. The director of the ship received us and led us to our cabins, where he handed us over to the cabin steward. We are in a luxury cabin with private bath and a first class cabin with shower for our children. Our cabin has wall-to-wall carpeting and white wood walls; beds, closets ... all are white lacquer; there is direct and indirect lighting, two windows, a large mirror ... After a bath, we were taken to a wonderfully appointed dining room, where we had our welcoming dinner... We have our own table steward who served us especially attentively, we have our room steward and stewardess, and a Chinese boy.

Like Hedwig Eisfelder, Annie was enchanted on seeing Suez and like Hedwig experienced the tedium of the hot journey via the Red Sea. Although not al-

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11 YVA, 078/20, Annie Witting letter, 10 pp. Her account breaks off in Colombo and there are no further letters.
ollowed to leave the ship in Bombay, they made up for it with sightseeing in Colombo. Unable to take money out of Germany, the Wittings were virtually without funds, however she quickly learned that items like watches or cameras could be sold. When they arrived in Singapore on May 29, the sale of a Swiss watch allowed them to rent a car for sightseeing with another family. It was the zoo and the botanical garden in particular that caught their attention, “Everything is so different”, she wrote, “and perhaps therefore so uniquely beautiful and unforgettable for us”. The journey was like a dream and, like all dreams, she knew that it must end. Yet, she was optimistic. Somehow they would manage in Shanghai, their new home.13

But Wilhelm Deman, in his memoir, remembers a decidedly unpleasant crossing. Sailing on the *Guilio Cesare* in second class accommodations, the Deman family and the 450 passengers – nearly all Jewish – were treated with contempt by the crew, who had dubbed the liner the “criminals’ ship” (Verbrecherschiff). The Demans had crossed the Austrian border April 12, 1939, on their way to Genoa, where they boarded the ship April 20. Similar to the recollections of others, they had few complaints until they sailed into the Red Sea. Thereafter, the extreme heat, the tedium of the journey and, especially on the *Guilio Cesare*, the meals increasingly deteriorated. Meat was no longer served when the cooling system broke down and the ship sailed directly to Shanghai without stopovers, arriving May 15.14

As is obvious from the accounts cited, ship routes varied little. Italian ships sailed from either Trieste or Genoa and, with brief stopovers in Venice or Naples and occasionally in Brindisi, sailed on to Port Said and the Suez Canal. The ships might anchor briefly in either Masawa, Aden, or both on the way to Bombay, and from Bombay generally sailed to Colombo, Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong and Shanghai. German ships left from Hamburg and might take different routes to Genoa via Bremen, Rotterdam and Southampton. Some German ships stopped at Antwerp, others at Barcelona. Japanese ships sailing from Hamburg took various routes until Port Said, stopping over generally in Antwerp, London, Gibraltar, Marseilles and Naples. From Port Said the route was the same as that of Italian and German ships.15 But after September 1939 German ships, of course, no longer sailed to Shanghai and Italian shipping ceased as well in June 1940 when Italy joined the war.

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13 YVA, 078/1, Annie Witting’s letter on board the “Conte Verde”, May 1939, pp. 1–5.
15 Ship routes were detailed in the *CP* together with the announcement of the ship’s arrival.
The Refugee Flood and its Cessation

According to the Nazi regime, encouraging Jews to emigrate by curtailing or depriving them of their livelihood did not have the desired results. Jews were unwilling to depart voluntarily in sufficiently large numbers. The solution, short of outright expulsion, was forcing their emigration, which was made possible by two major events in 1938: the annexation of Austria in March and Kristallnacht in November.

While the Nazis were readying the organizational structure for their version of “ethnic cleansing” in Germany and Austria, concern turned to near panic in Shanghai’s SMC when on December 20, 1938, 524 refugees arrived among the Biancamano’s 767 passengers. Now there were over one thousand refugees in Shanghai alone and more were said to be on the way by month’s end. For the next eight months Italian, German and Japanese ships continued to arrive at an alarming rate – as many as three and four, and in the end even eight per month – each bringing hundreds of refugees. In January 1939, the German luxury liner Potsdam and the Italian Conte Rosso, Conte Verde and Victoria docked with approximately 1,100 refugees. The Biancamano arrived in February with 841, and the Conte Rosso and Oldenburg brought over 400 in March. The numbers increased as spring turned to summer; between July 3 and 31 alone, eight ships docked – four Japanese, one Italian and three German – with 1,315 refugees. In August eight more ships arrived, among them two from Marseilles, bringing the number of refugees in Shanghai to 17,000. According to police reports, between April 24 and September 12, 1939, thirty-five German, French, Japanese, and Italian vessels arrived in Shanghai carrying 7,097 refu-

16 “562 German Emigres Due in Port Today”, CP, December 20, 1938, p. 1, and “524 German Emigres Land in Shanghai”, CP, December 21, 1938, p. 1, which describes the refugees as a “cheerless group.” The 562 in the December 20 issue was a misprint. 526 persons had actually sailed, but two left ship either in Manila or in Hong Kong. See also CAHJP, DAL 76, Birman, DALIJEWCIB to Hilfsverein, January 16, 1938, who had estimated the number of refugees in Shanghai between 1,300 and 1,400 at the beginning of the year.
17 “1,400 Emigres to Greet New Year in City”, CP, December 31, 1938, p. 2.
18 “New Emigre Group of 400 Arrives Here”, CP, January 1, 1939, p. 1; “250 Jewish Emigres Due Here Today”, CP, January 15, 1939, p. 1; CP, January 31, 1939, p. 2; CP, February 23, 1939, p. 3; CP, March 6, 1939, p. 2.
19 Reel 17, SMP D54422 (c), Police reports dated July 3, 7, 9, 15, 24, 31, 1939. Japanese ships usually brought anywhere between 60 and 80 refugees.
20 CAHJP, DAL 86.4, Birman to HIAS, Warsaw, February 5, 1940. This figure is corroborated by reel 17, SMP, D5422 (c), Police report, August 12, 1939.
gees, and the German General Consulate in Shanghai, which monitored the Jewish influx, noted that after a brief hiatus in fall 1939, Jews continued to arrive in Italian, Dutch, and Japanese ships throughout the spring of 1940. But there were far fewer now, and by June only 1,900 Jews had arrived. The splendid luxury liner Conte Verde docked on June 6 at the Shanghai Hongkou Wharf with 586 passengers, among them 263 refugees. It was also her last journey. Unable to return to Italy, the crew eventually scuttled the ship September 9, 1943. The Conte Biancamano, having sailed from Genoa August 16th, brought the last large contingent of German Jewish refugees to Shanghai on September 12. The passengers did not seem overly surprised by the outbreak of war in Europe, reported the China Press, and were probably much relieved to have at last reached the safe haven of Shanghai. After neither German nor Italian ships any longer sailed to East Asia, Jews fleeing Europe increasingly used the land route via what was then the Soviet Union to either Dairen or Vladivostok and then made their way by ship to Shanghai. Some refugees, after managing to reach Moscow overland, apparently sailed on Japanese steamers from Russia. Unfortunately, the correspondence only supplies the names of the ships and does not specify the ports of departure. Although thoughts were enter-

21 Reel 17, SMP D5422 (c), Police reports dated April 24 through September 12, 1939. The Shanghai Municipal Police apparently dispatched men to the docks to take a head count.
22 YVA, 078/73B, German General Consulate, Report to the Foreign Office, June 30, 1940, and Report to the Foreign Office, February 2, 1940. See also, for example, “Emigre Colony Entertains New Arrivals” CP, February 23, 1940, p. 4, among the Biancamano’s 720 passengers were only 65 German and Austrian refugees; “Latest Batch of 100 Jewish Emigres Lands on Conte Verde”, CP, April 5, 1940, p. 3, among its 900 passengers were only 100 refugees. CAHJP, DAL 87, Birman to Speelman, May 30, 1940, 163 refugees arrived on the “Conte Rosso”.
23 CP, June 7, 1940, p. 2. A number of refugees almost did not make it when they were turned back at the Italian border due to Italy’s preparing to join the war. “Jew Arrivals Describe Detainment”, CP, June 8, 1940, p. 3.
25 “Last Group of German Jewish Refugees Brought to Shanghai”, CP, September 13, 1939, p. 3.
26 CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, October 7; October 14; October 21; December 16, 1940.
tained of having refugees sail on Soviet steamers bound for Shanghai – either bringing Soviet officials or anchoring there for repairs – the scheme never materialized.27

Finally, considerable numbers of refugees took the French Messageries Maritime line from Marseilles, either directly to Shanghai or, more frequently, via Saigon, especially after German and Italian ships were no longer available. Moreover, by the end of 1940, French vessels apparently no longer sailed to Shanghai28, and refugees had no choice but to travel via Saigon. By summer 1941 this route too became uncertain and Meir Birman reported in September that very few French steamers were still going to Saigon.29 But in the summer of 1940, when the Germans invaded France, the journey became an odyssey for some. Josef Schwarz with his wife and son left from Marseilles June 7, 1940. Five days later France fell, and the ship was ordered to remain in Equatorial Africa. For the next seven months they sailed to Dakar, Casablanca and Madagasgar, eventually reaching Saigon. From there via Manila they made their way to Shanghai, arriving January 28, 1941.30 Probably among the very last refugees to reach Shanghai by way of Saigon were Edgar Rosenzweig and Dr. Michael Langleben who landed in Shanghai November 26, 1941 on the Marchal Joffre.31

Timing – how to keep ahead of events that forever threatened to overtake a person – was crucial. Decisions had to be made hurriedly; their consequences unforeseeable. One example will illustrate this. Käthe Keibel’s Jewish husband had sailed ahead of her to Bangkok. She had an entry permit for Siam (Thailand), a Japanese transit visa and, as a non-Jew, a passport without a “J”. Käthe got as far as Japan, but in the spring of 1940 could go no further. Ships to Bangkok stopped at French or British ports where she, as an enemy national, would have been interned.32

Factors Limiting Sea Travel

That no more than approximately 20,000 refugees were able to reach Shanghai is due to a variety of factors in which both political events and the German

27 CAHJP, 95, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, March 27, 1941. The letter was not sent.
28 CAHJP, DAL 93, Birman to HICEM, Lisbon, December 20, 1940.
29 CAHJP, DAL 99, Birman to International Migration Service, Geneva, July 28, 1941, “However, in view of the present situation we doubt whether this will be possible in the future”, wrote Birman; Birman to HIAS, New York, August 13, 1941; Birman to International Migration Service, Geneva, September 5, 1941.
30 CAHJP, DAL 94, Birman to HICEM, Marseilles, February 6, 1941.
31 CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to HICEM, Marseille, November 28, 1941.
32 CAHJP, DAL 86, Birman to Jewish Community in Kobe, May 9, 1940.
conquests that increasingly engulfed Europe had a role. Before discussing these together with the major reason – lack of ship accommodations – let us briefly consider who these refugees were and why they came. Some were well-off families, such as the already mentioned Wittings or Eisfelders, who decided that the time had come to pull up stakes and leave. Families were, however, far fewer than single men and women, and men outnumbered women. The reason for the preponderance of men is close at hand: Jewish men, as family providers, were increasingly eliminated from both Austrian and German economy. In Austria, even before Kristallnacht, between April and September 1938, more than 4,000 men were sent to the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps. This number increased massively during the November 1938 pogrom when thousands more were incarcerated. The release of these Jewish men was ordered in January 1939, if they were in possession of emigration papers, which could be either a visa to another country or a ship booking.

Obviously the scramble for visas and tickets by the desperate families of the incarcerated men helped to disseminate information about China as an option for gaining their freedom. No doubt the grapevine, rather than an organized information campaign, most likely increased awareness of Shanghai as a destination. Conversely, lack of information, unfortunately, may have contributed (though it was not a major reason) to limiting the number of Jewish arrivals in Shanghai. Wilhelm Deman, quite by chance, heard about Shanghai from a woman who came to his office. Convinced that Jews would be allowed

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33 For example, YVA, 078/73B, German General Consulate Shanghai to Foreign Office, Report, January 11, 1940, p. 2. The report has a figure of approximately 10,000 people between mid-August 1938 and May 1939, among them 5,200 men, 3,800 women and 1,000 children. Telling figures are also, for example, “Biancamano with 841 Jews Due Tomorrow”, CP, February 21, 1939, pp. 1,4, where 532 men and 263 women are listed. See also Appendix 6, which briefly analyzes the composition of the Jewish population of one police precinct.


36 Where figures of emigrants and their destinations are available, they are revealing. See, for example, 300 Jahre Juden in Halle, Leben. Leistung, Leiden, Lohn, Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1992, pp. 235–249, which lists 584 emigrants from Halle, 93 of whom went to Shanghai.
neither to remain nor to work in Vienna, she was about to depart for Shanghai.37 Alfred Dreifuss was told by a fellow Buchenwald prisoner that a Vienna branch of a Dutch organization was managing immigration to Shanghai.38 On the other hand, when the Eisfelders turned to the Jewish organizations for information about Shanghai, which was certainly available by autumn 1938, they were unable to obtain much-needed facts about the metropolis.39 Many, like Inge Deutschkron, did not consider going to China – about which she knew nothing except that it was a country always at war and a place of “indescribable poverty.40” Others felt that the Shanghai option was not the worst. Günter and Genia Nobel, Communist Party members, were arrested in a Gestapo sweep in 1936 and jailed for three years. When released on August 1, 1939, they were given the choice of leaving Germany within four weeks or being taken to a concentration camp. But with a criminal record, the only places they could go to were Palestine or Shanghai. According to the Nobels’ account, they decided on Shanghai for ideological reasons because they opposed the establishment of a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian people.41

The Nazis had many complaints about the quality of the work of the Jewish organizations and “the lack of popular and impressive propaganda” that would induce Jews to emigrate.42 In June 1939 the suggested German remedy was to imprison in concentration camps all Jews whom the Jewish authorities considered undesirable for one reason or another. Because Jewish organizations made special efforts to have prisoners released and on their way across the German border, or so the argument went, these “undesirables” would have no choice but to emigrate.43 Indeed, a somewhat similar method was tried when Jewish

41 Günter and Genia Nobel, “Erinnerungen, als politische Emigranten in Schanghai”, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung, Vol. 21, no. 6 (June 1979), pp. 882–894. This in retrospect; the term “Palestinian people” did not come into general use until sometimes in the 1960s.
42 YVA, 051/050/41, “Toward Jewish Emigration”, undated and unsigned document.
43 YVA, 051/050/41, SS captain of the Security Main Office to Section II, 112, June 2, 1939, signature illegible. The letter, in fact, accuses the Jewish organizations of sabotaging emigration.
men who had police records, even for the most trivial reasons, were rearrested and sent to concentration camps. In June 1939, the police netted some 10,000 to 15,000 prisoners, according to one account, and arrests were made even in almshouses. The prisoners were released from concentration camps only upon showing documents for leaving Germany. But clearly the Jewish organizations had no way of taking charge of emigration. Many, if not most, of those who landed in Shanghai had gone there on their own. As stated succinctly by Horwitz of the Relief Organization (Hilfsverein) in December 1938, “You must consider that especially from Berlin a large number of emigrants undertake the journey to the Far East without our support”. We have only control, he wrote, over those who need support from us, or who require our help.

The organizations that handled emigration were not to blame for the fact that Jews did not go to Shanghai in greater numbers. To be sure, if given a choice most Jews would have preferred to depart for the United States. People feverishly searched for long-out-of-touch American relatives who might be willing to send the much coveted affidavit, vouching for their financial solvency. And William Shirer, American correspondent in Berlin, learned in February 1939 that 248,000 names – fully half of Germany’s Jewish population – were on the American consulate’s waiting list. Still, unable to enter the U.S., many were prepared to go to any country that would have them and Jewish leaders in Berlin argued that whatever colonization schemes were being studied in London “might come too late for a very great part of German Jewry”. “Please trust us”, stated a letter of February 1939, “when we tell you that we are unable to diminish the emigration from Germany ...” More telling even than this letter is the report of a secret conference Pell had with Berlin’s Jewish leaders:

44 YVA, 078/40, “Germany no. 2 (1939), Copy of Papers Concerning the Treatment of German Nationals in Germany, 1938–1939”. Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament by Command of his Majesty, 1940, pp. 27–36. Rearrests also occurred in February 1937. See Friedländer, Nazi Germany and the Jews, p. 204.
45 CAHJP, DAL 76, Arnold Horwitz, Hilfsverein to DALJEWCB, December 20, 1938.
47 JDC, 33/44, file 457, from Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland to JDC, Paris (forwarded to JDC, New York, by Morris Troper), February 10, 1939, signed A. Prinz, F. Bischofswerder, V. Loewenstein. Copy in CAHJP, DAL 76.1, sent to HICEM, Harbin.
48 This is, no doubt, Robert T. Pell, who handled State Department issues connected with the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, established by the Évian Conference in 1938, See David S. Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews, America and the Holocaust 1941–1945, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 137.
They are, of course, very nervous and jumpy ... They are quite frank about the shiploads of their co-religionists which they are heading in various directions such as Shanghai ... They said that they had to get their people out, whether there was an easing of tension or not. At any moment an incident might occur which would endanger the very lives of their people. They could not afford to take chances, with the consequence that they were ready to yield to the pressure of the secret police and enticements of the shipping companies ... I pleaded with them that they were doing more harm than good ... that they were defeating our efforts to open up places ... but they laughed in my face. After six years of dealing with the problem they are very hard. They do not believe in promises.49

But, as the Evian conference had clearly demonstrated, few countries were willing to open their gates to the masses of desperate people.50 Thousands more would have gladly left for Shanghai, not because of its desirability, but out of necessity. Unfortunately, they were prevented from doing so by the lack of available ship space.

The difficulty of securing bookings was frequently mentioned. Bookings on German and Italian liners to East Asia were completely sold out as much as six and seven months in advance as early as January 1939.51 Bribes or connections sometimes helped to obtain bookings. Ernest Heppner, for example, mentions that his mother turned over two Impressionist paintings to the shipping agent in return for two tickets on the Potsdam.52 Willy Frensdorff, who had designed the Scharnhorst’s electrical installations, used his connections to get four tickets for the ship’s last sailing on July 10, 1939.53 Obviously, in their eagerness to expel as many Jews as possible in the shortest time possible, the Würzburg district authorities (and possibly others) were authorized to permit the use of non-German shipping lines. These included several Dutch, Nor-

49 JDC, RG 33/44, file 457, letter from Theodore C. Achilles, Chairman, Departmental Committee on Political Refugees, Department of State, to George L. Warren, March 31, 1939. Pell’s letter is dated March 8.
52 Heppner, Shanghai Refuge, pp. 28–29.
wegian, Swedish, Japanese and U.S. lines. Meanwhile, the Gestapo urged the local authorities to pursue Jewish emigration even more vigorously, despite the war.\(^\text{54}\) Of interest here is the degree of control the Gestapo exercised over the ousting of Jews and, notwithstanding assumptions in other German quarters, the Jewish organizations responsible for emigration had a limited function.

Lack of ship space was thus a major factor in preventing more refugees from reaching Shanghai. Attempts by Schlie of the Hanseatic Office to charter additional ships after the *Usamaro* came to naught, as we saw in the previous chapter, over the issue of foreign currency. Although it may indeed have been too late in summer 1939, clearly I cannot help but conclude that a singular opportunity for saving lives by major organizations in the democracies was lost earlier, in spring 1939, when the Nazis searched for ways and means to ship out large numbers of Jews. Nor was the ship charter plan a secret. Men at the British Embassy in Berlin were well aware of the attempts to charter ships and it was conjectured that one would sail from Danzig as well.\(^\text{55}\)

As pointed out earlier, the Nazi policy had been from the start to cleanse Germany and, after the *Anschluss* in March 1938, Austria of its Jews. Therefore obtaining a passport presented no special difficulties. Aside from the passport, a “statement of good conduct” (Führungszeugnis) was required from the police. It stated that the emigrant had no police record, had not offended social order, is not abnormal and is not a beggar.\(^\text{56}\)

Concerning Chinese visas, as far as can be ascertained, some emigrants made efforts to obtain them while others did not, the still prevalent view being that a visa was not required for Shanghai. The facts of the case were, however, somewhat different. Despite the political changes in China due to the Sino-Japanese war and the Nationalist retreat to China’s interior, embassies and consulates of the Nationalist government continued to function throughout

\(\text{54}\) YVA, M.1 DN221, Administrative District President to the Administrative Authorities, including Police, Würzburg, December 13, 1939, January 6, March 11, July 17, 1940, and letter from the Würzburg Gestapo to the police, various mayors, other Gestapo offices and the Security Service, May 4, 1940.


\(\text{56}\) I thank Peter Witting for furnishing a photocopy of his father’s conduct statement. He also had a “Heimatschein”, which was valid for one year and which testified to his being a German citizen. An additional document from the Jewish community stated that he did not owe them money. It is not clear whether all the refugees were required to obtain these three documents. Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, p. 27, mentions needing only the conduct document.
Europe, issuing visas to refugees planning to settle in Nationalist controlled areas and to those who went to Shanghai.57 Indeed, the *Shanghai Times* stated quite clearly, “Chinese consulates in Europe are granting visas to all those applying with their passports for permission to come to Shanghai ...” This was in accordance with the agreement between China and the Powers whereby Shanghai had become a treaty port.58 Moreover, a letter to Lisbon and New York mentions clearly that the Chinese consul in Stockholm is granting visas without difficulties.59 But there is much confusion regarding this question. Some booking agents but not others may have required a Chinese visa, or there may have been rumors of a sudden visa requirement. An article in the *China Press* of February 26, 1940, for example, stated that visas were now required for Shanghai, implying that none had been earlier. Memories are uncertain here. What is certain, however, is the absence of passport control upon docking in Shanghai.

Because of the unique political situation in Shanghai, neither the Chinese nor any foreign country was sovereign in the metropolis after 1937. While Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government was in power, the Chinese controlled passports at the port, although it was a mere formality (more a source of revenue than anything else) since Chinese officials had no jurisdiction over extraterritorial foreigners. Still, as long as there was a legal Chinese government, British subjects were advised to obtain visas from Chinese consulates as a courtesy60, and quite likely other nationals followed the British example. But after the 1937 hostilities, the Nationalist passport office ceased to exist. The British ambassador in Shanghai, Sir Neville Henderson, explained to the Foreign Office that in the changed circumstances, the Japanese could not very well be asked to assume this function for the benefit of British interests. “And

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57 According to his daughter, Chen Jie presumably believed that He Fengshan, who was appointed to Vienna in May 1938, was issuing too many visas in Vienna. Rumor had it in Berlin, furthermore, that he was selling them which turned out to be groundless. In his memoir, He explained that he had instructions from the Chinese Foreign Office not to refuse visas to Jews. He, *Forty Year Diplomatic Career*, pp. 75–76. Chen Jie was new to the job, having replaced the previous Chinese ambassador in November 1938. Misgivings by the Chongqing government about the Shanghai destination, mentioned earlier, may have been fresh in Chen Jie’s mind. The visas which I examined were for Shanghai only, and not for China. Yad Vashem named He a “Righteous Gentile” in February 2001.


60 PRO, FO 371/24079 W8663, from Sir Neville Henderson to Foreign Office, May 31, 1939.
in any case we would not wish to encourage the institution of passport control measures by the Japanese and so add to the many vexatious restrictions under which our people are already suffering.\(^61\) Using even stronger language, Michel Speelman, the important Shanghai businessman and Jewish community leader, wrote that the Japanese “could do so [exercise passport control] only at the unanimous request of the whole Consular body. Such a request is entirely out of the question.”\(^62\) Thus it was unrestricted entry due to the absence of passport control, rather than a visa non-requirement, that enabled refugees to land without difficulty.

Preservation of the status quo seemed the best policy in order not to give the Japanese authorities an excuse for assuming passport control functions. When in June 1940 officers of the SMP, acting on a tip received from the Hong Kong police, boarded two British vessels, the SS Santhia and the Ming San, to inspect passports of refugees, there was an immediate outcry. The Japanese Harbour Master, Y. Sugiyama objected, stating that his office should have been notified. And the River Police accused the SMP of usurping the function of a Passport Bureau.\(^63\)

Neither passports, nor legal documents, nor visas limited travel to Shanghai. But was money – the cost of ship fare and expenses – added on later? Figures are hard to come by, but one that was mentioned is 2,000 RM on a German ship. A more reliable sum is recorded by Willy Frensdorff, who paid 6425,70 RM for four tickets on the Scharnhorst.\(^64\) It is not clear whether these were first class tickets, because another source mentions over 2,000 RM for a first class ticket.\(^65\) If it is true that the North-German Lloyd line also required a money deposit in case a person had to return, the price of a ticket could certainly skyrocket.\(^66\) Still, as long as tickets could be purchased with RM, they were affordable by many. The problem became formidable when, beginning


\(^{63}\) Reel 18, SMP D5422 (c), W.C. Woodfield, Chief of Police, June 27, 1940; Report, D. S. I. Pitts; Special Branch, letter, signature illegible, July 3, 1940. The SMP’s justification was that incoming refugees supplied the police with valuable information.

\(^{64}\) Cornwall, Letter from Vienna, p. 63.


\(^{66}\) PRO, FO 371/24079, L. M. Robinson, British Consulate General, Hamburg, to Ogilvie-Forbes, January 10, 1939. See also YVA, 078/73B, German General Consulate, Shanghai, Report, June 30, 1940, p. 2, signature illegible, where, in comparison, the cost of 2nd class overland travel, Berlin–Shanghai, is given as 490 RM.
on June 1, 1939, passage on Italian, Japanese, Danish and Norwegian lines had to be paid in foreign currency. But there was another factor that no doubt limited refugee flight: the so-called permits, or immigration certificates instituted by the SMC in early fall 1939 as a response to the refugee influx between December 1938 and August 1939.

Responses in Shanghai

The first group of fifteen Austrian refugees, victims of the Anschluss, arrived on the Biancamano early in September 1938. They were soon followed by increasingly larger groups. The reporter who covered the arrival of 187 refugees on the Conte Verde was moved to write, “Everywhere the tragedy of people torn out of their familiar setting and removed to a remote, strange country thousands of miles away is apparent.”

The SMC response to this new Shanghai crisis was less charitable, especially when 524 more refugees arrived on December 20, again on the Biancamano. Initially, the SMC asked the Jewish organizations in Europe, England and America to prevent refugees from coming to Shanghai in view of the many Chinese refugees already being sheltered there. G. Godfrey Phillips, SMC secretary cabled the JDC in New York,

Municipal Council of International Settlement Shanghai is gravely perturbed by abnormal influx of Jewish refugees. Shanghai is already facing most serious refugee problem due to Sino-Japanese hostilities. It is quite impossible to absorb any large number of foreign refugees. Council earnestly requests your assistance in preventing any further refugees coming to Shanghai ...

But a threat was appended, namely that the “Council may be compelled to take steps to prevent further refugees landing in International Settlement.”

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67 PRO, FO 371/24079, F. Foley to the Chancery, May 26, 1939.
69 IM, Vol. 35, no. 6 (September 20, 1938), p. 6; CP, November 26, 1938, p. 3.
How to maintain the refugees was an issue, but so were housing and employment.\textsuperscript{73} The newly created Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai (CAEJR) was, however, also concerned about the influx. Its honorary treasurer, Michel Speelman, acknowledged to the SMC and French Concession authorities the “danger of an unlimited influx of refugees to Shanghai.”\textsuperscript{74} Exactly what he meant by “danger” is not clear, but the fact was that Speelman and the committee suddenly confronted the monumental task of having to feed and house hundreds of destitute refugees. That his and others’ anxieties were real is beyond doubt. Shanghai winters are unpleasantly damp and chilly. Daytime temperatures hover in the mid-thirties to mid-forties Fahrenheit in January and February. Europeans, for the most part from more than comfortable circumstances, would have been unable to endure hardships similar to those of Chinese refugees who crowded the International Settlement and the Chinese areas of Shanghai. The two Jewish communities, the Baghdadi and the Russian, had neither the organizational framework nor the experience needed to care for large numbers of destitute persons after the outbreak of hostilities in the summer of 1937.

The SMC had made it quite clear that it would not contribute any funds whatsoever toward maintenance of the refugees. “There is no Poor Law or public system of relief in China, and consequently none in the International Settlement”, the SMC minutes stated. Relief has always been a private affair. Therefore, the burden cannot be assumed by the Shanghai ratepayer and the Jewish organizations must deal with it.\textsuperscript{75} Funds for caring for the refugees had to come from Europe and America and, Speelman wrote, unless they were received he would have to tell the Municipal Council and the Consular body of “our inability to continue to succor refugees.”\textsuperscript{76} The implications of the sentence were clear: an admission of this sort by a successful and respected businessman would cast a bad light not only on Shanghai Jewry but on British

\textsuperscript{73} YVA, 078/85, Shanghai Municipal Archives, December 23, 1938; December 25, 1938; December 31, 1938.

\textsuperscript{74} JDC, RG 33–34, file 457, “Report on Jewish Refugee Problem”. Speelman’s communication does not have an exact date. It is, therefore, not clear whether it preceded the SMC’s December 23 communication or followed it. For the organization of this and other charitable Jewish bodies, see Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{75} PRO, minutes, first page missing.

\textsuperscript{76} YVA, 078/85, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Speelman cable to ?, January 6, 1939. It must be remembered here that the Shanghai Jewish communities had not requested funds from the JDC since 1926. See JDC RG 33/44, file 456, “China, Statement of Subsidies Made by the J.D.C. April, 24 Through March, 1938”.

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Jewry as well. The loss of face was unthinkable. Moreover, when even by April insufficient funds had been received from London, the British suspected that the local organizations would turn to the German Consulate General, asking them to “assume responsibility for their Jewish nationals.”

Beneath British fears over expenditures was, however, a far greater apprehension over the Japanese reaction to the refugee influx. “There is a definite risk that unless this emigration is checked without further delay Japanese authorities will institute passport inspection generally at Shanghai which would be damaging to British interests and foreign interests”, read a January 1939 communication from the British Foreign Office. Indeed, according to a police informant, rumors had it that the Japanese authorities were discussing measures for establishing passport examination on ships docking in Shanghai, due to Japanese concerns over the presence of communist and pro-communist elements among the refugees.

Looming in the background was the specter of anti-Semitism in Shanghai. This was first pointed out in a confidential communication to Sir Herbert Phillips, British Consul General. “It seems to me that a large influx of refugees would have most certainly upsetting results here, and we certainly do not want anti-Semitic problems added to our Shanghai problems.” British fears were by no means groundless. The Japanese actively supported militant fascist and pro-Japanese elements among the White Russian population which was not known for its pro-Jewish sentiments. Anti-Semitic leaflets in English were appearing, according to the British Consular report from Shanghai, which attacked “by name certain of the most influential and wealthy ‘native’ Shanghai Jewish families”, both British and Iraqi. Also, a campaign against admitting more Jews had started in the Japanese-controlled Russian and Chinese press, labeling Jews “bearers of the Communist virus.” Not only are Jews depriving

77 PRO, FO 371/23510 (27385), Report, quarter ending March 31, 1939, April 24, 1939.
78 PRO, FO 371/24079 (22652) W519, 5, Foreign Office cable to the Ambassador in Shanghai, January 10, 1939.
79 Reel 17, SMP, D5422 (c), Police Report, December 13, 1938. The Japanese also explored, according to the report, instituting certificates of “political reliability”.
80 YVA, 078/85, Shanghai Municipal Archive, unsigned to Sir Herbert Phillips, December 28, 1938.
81 PRO, FO 371/23509, Political report ending December 31, 1938; see also CP, October 2, 1938, p. 2, which describes the anti-Semitic content of one such pamphlet; police report in SMP, D-5422C, translation from the Russian Voice, January 7, 1939. Marxism, Bolshevism, and Jews were coupled even earlier in Shanghai’s German newspapers. See SMP, Reel 25, D-6961-6964, translation from the Deutsche Schanghai Zeitung, September 6, 1935.
Russians of jobs, it was claimed in the daily Xin Shenbao, a Jewish capitalist takeover in China is in the making. Thus the Jewish problem has also become an East Asian problem. Those Jews who came to Shanghai earlier, according to the article, have already established themselves in business and amassed capital. It is, therefore, entirely possible that within twenty-five years the wealth of China’s economy will gravitate into Jewish hands. Not only will Jews then be able to control China, they oppose Japan now, and Jewish capital is behind British designs. One might say, the article concluded, that “Shanghai is the Jews’ market.” For different reasons, but with equal anxiety, the Japanese Special Naval Landing Party watched the ever growing refugee numbers. But the Japanese were caught on the horns of a dilemma. Notwithstanding the red “J” stamped in their passports, the refugees arrived with valid German passports. Not allowing entry might cause friction in the Japanese-German alliance. The policy formulated by the Five Ministers Conference in Tokyo on December 6, 1938, pointed the way to a formal solution. It had been agreed upon, among others, that, while Jews would be treated impartially like other aliens wishing to enter Japan, Manchukuo and China, no positive steps would be taken to harbor Jews expelled from Germany. Yet, to discriminate against Jews, as Germany was doing, would contradict the oft-stated Japanese principle of racial equality and might endanger the inflow of foreign capital needed for economic reconstruction as well as exacerbate Japanese-U.S. relations. On the surface, therefore, Jewish refugees would not be discriminated against, but, by the beginning of December 1938, the Special Naval Landing Party was said by the Japanese consul general in Shanghai to be limiting their entry into Hongkou.

82 “Chise Youtairen lai Huhou, bai E shangji beiduo (After red Jews come to Shanghai, White Russians are deprived of their livelihood)”, XSB, December 18, 1938, p. 2. The Xin Shenbao, or New Shenbao, one of the most respected of Chinese newspapers, started by Japanese journalists in imitation of the original Shenbao began publication in 1938.


84 See note 2, above.

85 JFM, S Series microfilm, Reel 415, frames 2561–2562, December 6, 1938, for text of the document. The document has been sometimes misunderstood as expressing a pro-Jewish policy, as, for example, in David Kranzler, Japanese, Nazis & Jews, New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976, p. 224 ff. The five ministers were the prime minister, the army, navy, finance and home ministers.

86 JFM, Reel 413, frames 797–798, Consul General Hidaka, Shanghai, to Arita, December 7, 1938.
Although one would have expected a certain degree of relief on the part of the Jewish organizations in Europe and America over Shanghai as a refuge – especially after the Evian conference – this was not the case. 87 Joseph C. Hyman, of the JDC, wired Berlin not to send more refugees to Shanghai, and was thanked by Max Warburg. 88 Many among Jewish leaders did not support Shanghai as a viable option. At the end of 1938, some countered the panic to escape with the warning not to travel blindly abroad. “It is more honorable to suffer a martyr’s death in Central Europe than to perish in Shanghai”, Dr. Julius Seligsohn, member of the governing body of the Union of Jews, is quoted as saying. He and others resisted German pressure to transport Jews on “Jewships” (Judenschiffe). 89 Norman Bentwich of the British Council for German Jewry wrote in 1938 that German Jews were “dumped” in Shanghai. 90 As late as January 1941, when Josef Loewenherz, head of the Vienna Kultusgemeinde, desperately pleaded for immigration to Shanghai, he encountered resistance from the JDC. Its representative argued that Japan’s rule in Shanghai might endanger Jews as much as German rule. At a meeting in Lisbon, he had to plead for a limited budget toward the $400 financial requirement of “show money” (to be discussed below), even if it was acknowledged at the time that getting Jews out was a question of life and death and that they must leave “before the ‘final accounts are in’”. 91

Professor Nathaniel Peffer of Columbia University, eminent expert on Asia, too lent his voice to those who clamored for a cessation of Shanghai immigration, declaring that the influx must be shut off at any cost. His argument was based on the depressed conditions in Shanghai since the hostilities of 1937.

He saw no prospect for the refugees, “except degradation to a kind of Occiden-
tal coolie status until they die of deprivation or shame.92”

In comparison, Frank Foley’s humane and compassionate stand in his
“Minute” which he appended to his letter to the British Embassy in Berlin
is moving:

It is useless to talk to the German Government whose declared object is to destroy
these people [the Jews] body and soul; it makes no difference to them whether
destruction takes place in Germany or in Shanghai. I rather think preference would
be given to the Far East as their shipping companies are paid for the freight. One has
to remember that the declared wish of the N.S.D.A.P. is that Jews should verrecken ...
It might be considered humane on our part not to interfere officially to prevent Jews
from choosing their own graveyards. They would rather die as free men in Shanghai
than as slaves in Dachau.93

In January 1939, however, when Foley wrote this, the British were determined
to halt the refugee traffic at its source. For the next nine months, British embas-
sies and consulates in Europe were requested to prevail on the governments
of the countries to which they were posted to curtail and even stop the refugee
traffic. The consuls in Shanghai also agreed to contact their respective govern-
ments.94 Meanwhile it was feared that Danzig’s Jews, who had been given an
ultimatum to leave by April 1, 1939, would also end up in Shanghai.95

92 JDC, RG 33/34, file 457, Nathaniel Peffer, Department of Public Law and Government,
Columbia University, “Memorandum to Professor J. P. Chamberlain”, n. d. [April 1939].
93 PRO, FO 371/24079 (22652), Foley, British Consulate General, Hamburg, to British
Embassy, January 10, 1939. Foley was posthumously named a “Righteous Gentile” by
Yad Vashem, Ha’aretz, February 28, 1999, p. 8a. We might also note the comment of
the minister of the American Church in Berlin, who wrote shortly after returning to the
U. S., “The German objective was extermination of the Jews and their method was
murder”. Stewart W. Herman, Jr., It’s Your Souls We Want, New York-Boston: Harper
and Brothers, 1943, p. 234.
94 PRO, FO W519/519/48, Walter Roberts, Foreign Office to Norman Bentwich, Council
for German Jewry, January 20, 1939; FO W2061 to Ambassador at Shanghai, February
4, 1939. This was duly noted in the Japanese controlled Chinese press, “You tai nan min
rujing wenti, benshi ponan rongua, geguolingshi yicheng zhengfu (The Jewish
refugees are a regional problem, the city has considerable difficulty accommodating
them, consuls of other countries have already notified their governments)”, XSB,
no. 479, February 19, 1939, p. 7.
95 PRO, FO 371/24085, W5285, Sir G. Ogilvie-Forbes, Berlin, to Foreign Office, March 25,
1939. For details about the Danzig deportations, see Joshua B. Stein, “Britain and the
pp. 29–33.
Like the earlier efforts of getting Jewish organizations to stop the exodus, these moves too produced no results. The Germans claimed that they could not control the ultimate destination of Jews leaving Germany, although they later conceded “that it is essential that all Jews must leave Germany as soon as possible”. They also claimed they could not deter Jews from emigrating “if they so desire”. The Italians protested that they did everything in their power, that shipping companies were not selling tickets to anyone who did not have proper documentation and, lying blatantly, that few if any refugees have sailed on Italian ships to Shanghai.96 When the British Foreign Office next tried to prevail on its own shipping companies not to engage in the refugee traffic to Shanghai, it met with similar failure. Even an appeal to British patriotic sentiments, namely that the refugees endanger British interests, led nowhere, and on June 1, 1939, someone in the Foreign Office noted laconically, “There is not much more which the F.O. could do to stop this emigration to Shanghai.97”

Others had reached the same conclusion. Sir John Hope Simpson wrote in his general summary on the refugee problem that China is “a most unsatisfactory place of refuge ... Nevertheless, in despair of escaping anywhere else, large numbers have gone to Shanghai ...98” Thus a letter sent by the Jewish leadership in Berlin to the London Council for German Jewry underscored the lack of faith in promises:

We have now the very greatest misgivings whether those [colonization] plans99 which the Sub-Committee in London is studying now might not take such a long time for preliminary work that the practical realization might come too late for a very great part of German Jewry [underlining in original]. Please trust us when we tell you that we are unable to diminish the emigration from Germany ...100

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97 PRO, FO W5686, Mercantile Marine Department, Board of Trade, London, to Foreign Office, Under-Secretary of State, April 4, 1939; W5868/519/48, A. W. G. Randell for Lord Halifax to the Secretary of the Board of Trade, May 16, 1939; W8638/519/48 W8638, 72, Home Office (Aliens Department), unsigned to ?, June 1, 1939.


99 According to Bentwich, *Wanderer Between Two Worlds*, p. 288, these “overseas settlement” plans included British and Dutch Guiana, Northern Rhodesia, the Philippines, San Domingo, and Ecuador.

100 CAHIP, DAL 76.1, Hilfsverein to the Rt. Hon. Viscount Samuel, The Council for Germany Jewry, February 10, 1939, signed by Dr. Victor Israel Bischofswerder, Dr. Arthur Israel Prinz, Victor Israel Löwenstein. Copies were sent to Mr. Stephany; Mr. Otto Schiff, AJDC, Paris; Hicem, Paris; Refugee Economic Corporation, New York.
While the Jewish leaders in Germany were becoming increasingly desperate and the British increasingly discouraged, the Japanese in Shanghai were not idle. They, too, searched for a solution to the refugee influx, especially because most of the refugees were finding asylum in Hongkou, which was under Japanese control, north of Suzhou Creek, where rents and food were cheaper. The first steps were taken in April 1939, when a three-man committee representing the Foreign Ministry, the army, and the navy was set up to investigate the “Jewish problem” on the spot in Shanghai. The committee was given a wide-ranging brief, which indicated the political, economic, and military setting in which the Japanese viewed their problem. It was instructed to propose how to deal not only with the Jewish refugees, but with all the Jews in China.101

The committee began work on May 9 and formulated its proposals into a top-secret report consisting of two parts: (1) a strategy for winning the support of Shanghai’s Jewish capitalists for Japan, primarily the Sassoon interests and, through them, of American Jewish influence on the U.S. government; and (2) measures to keep the Jewish refugee community in Shanghai under the Japanese thumb. The report was discussed on June 3 at a meeting of local army, navy, Foreign Ministry, and Asia Development Board representatives.102 This meeting was followed by nearly three months of examination of the document and of proposals for amendments and revisions.103 The final text of the Joint Report stated that the number of refugees to be allowed into Hongkou had to be limited and that their financial capabilities carefully scrutinized to ensure that they not become a liability. Measures taken now, it was stressed, were to be provisional, until the final plans – among them the postwar reconstruction of Shanghai in a Japanese-ruled China – were worked out.104

101 JFM, Reel 414, frames 1168–1171, Arita to Miura, Top Secret. The three committee members were Ishiguro Yoshiaki, a consul in the Shanghai consulate general; Col. Yasue Norihiro, the head of the Dairen Special Services Agency who controlled the Manchukuo Jewish community, and Navy Captain Inuzuka Koreshige, who was attached to China Area Fleet HQ for the duration of the investigation. The latter two were considered experts on the “Jewish problem”.

102 The Asia Development Board, the Kaoin, was a cabinet agency established in December 1938, to coordinate all government activities related to China, apart from formal diplomacy; Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983, Vol. 1, p. 102b.

103 Although a good half of the report dealt with strategy vis-à-vis the well-to-do Jews in Shanghai and, through them, with the Jews in the United States, the views on these proposals were not recorded in the available documents. The discussions dragged on for three months, probably due to disagreements among the participants.

104 “A Joint Report of Research on the Jews in Shanghai”, Top Secret, July 7, 1939, JFM, Reel 414, frames 1235–1281. For discussions of the report and proposed changes:
Some weeks later, on August 4, Arita instructed Ambassador Oshima Hiroshi (1886–1973) in Berlin to ask the German government to stop sending Jewish refugees to Shanghai and all other areas occupied by the Japanese armed forces. Arita also informed Oshima that, on August 10, acting consuls general Enno Bracklo (1886–1963) and Farinacci were to be told to have their governments take “all steps within their power to prevent Jewish refugees from coming to Shanghai.”

Also on August 10, Ellis Hayim, the CAEJR chairman while Speelman was abroad, was summoned to a meeting at the Japanese consulate general. There he faced, in addition to Ishiguro, Inuzuka and one Tanii, a staff officer in Third Fleet HQ. However, an army representative was notably absent. Hayim was handed a memorandum in English stating that the Japanese authorities had decided to call a “temporary” halt to further “European” immigration to Shanghai, because “an influx of refugees in exceedingly large numbers will have a direct bearing ... on the plan of reconstruction of the war-torn areas”. So crowded was Hongkou that “even the return of the Japanese to the area is not permitted unrestrictedly, not to mention the free return of the Chinese”. The memorandum went on to claim that “it was made clear that the Jewish leaders among the Refugee Committee wished to see, for the benefit of the refugees already arrived in Shanghai, that further influx be discouraged in some way or other ...”

Hayim was ordered to have the CAEJR register the refugees living in Hongkou by August 22. Only those so registered would be allowed to remain. Hayim was also ordered to have the CAEJR inform Jewish organizations in England, the United States, France, and Germany of the Japanese decision. Thereupon, under duress, he sent off a cable to the Council for German Jewry saying, “Further immigration to Shanghai must cease and be prevented. Inform Paris New York Cairo Speelman”. In another cable, to the JDC office in Paris, he asked that Berlin and Vienna also be informed.

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Reel 414, frames 1102–1104, 1219–1220, 1227–1233, 1285–1290, 1293–1296, 1321, 1354, 1397–1404, 1458–1469. I thank Professor Avraham Altman for making these and the following materials available to me.

105 The communications to Bracklo and Farinacci, both dated August 10, 1939, are in JFM, Reel 414, frames 1414–1418 and frames 1421–1423.

106 The two cables, the first dated August 14, 1939, and the second August 16, 1939, are in JDC, RG 33–44, file 458, Trooper to JDC New York, August 18, 1939. The meeting at the consulate general is detailed in JFM, Reel 414, frames 1419–1420, Miura to a list of senior military recipients and the Liaison Sections of the Central China Fleet Expeditionary Force HQ and of the Asia Development Board, Secret, August 11, 1939. The text of the memorandum, dated August 9, 1939, is in Reel 414, frames 1424–1426. For the Chinese text, see “Youtai nanmin xuxiang Ri, shenqinghou ke juli, fouze
In fact, the SMC had been forewarned earlier that the Japanese were planning some kind of closure. A note transmitted to an unspecified addressee stated that Captain Matsubara, Chief of the Shanghai Naval Rehabilitation Corps, had informed the sender of the note that, “... in future the right of residence of these refugees will be controlled in favor of Japanese interests and also in favor of those Chinese desiring to return to that area.” Thus the subsequent unilateral SMC decision to close the International Settlement altogether to European refugees might have been contemplated for some time.

The SMC’s reaction to the Japanese closure two days later in August was to decide unilaterally and without consulting the Consular body “that the Council is compelled to forbid any further entry into International Settlement of refugees from Europe”. All steps will be taken, according to the Council, to prevent further immigration, although refugees already embarked on ships or on the high seas would still be allowed to land. As reported in the press, the SMC decision was taken August 11, 1939, in “parallel but independent action” with the French, who did not sign until August 14. The SMC secretary denied that the decision was related to the Japanese closure. However, if the Japanese lift the embargo, he declared, the SMC might also consider finding homes for the 5000 Jews already “booked for Shanghai”. Having decided and informed the members of the Consular body, the secretary of the SMC held a meeting on August 17 with the Japanese and the French Consuls General, at which time they determined that refugees who sailed after August 18 from European ports would not be permitted to land.

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107 YVA, 078/86, Shanghai Municipal Archives, “Memorandum”. This is an unsigned copy of the memorandum.
108 PRO, FO 371/24079, W12030, ? addressed to the British Ambassador, Shanghai, August 15, 1939. See also PRO, FO W12030/519/48, telegram from Sir H. Phillips, Shanghai, to the Foreign Office, August 15, 1939, informing the Foreign Office of the Japanese move and the Council’s decision to forbid entry of refugees to the International Settlement.
109 “All Shanghai Now Closed to Emigres”, CP, August 15, 1939, pp. 1,8. See also, Evreiskaia Zhizn, no. 38, September 6, 1939, pp. 4–6, where the Japanese authorities are quoted as reiterating that they will not interfere with the arrival of Jews in Shanghai, but that Jews must settle in districts other than Hongkou.
110 PRO, FO 371/24079, W14479, ? addressed to the British Ambassador, Shanghai, September 1, 1939.
The German and Italian consulates and, surprising to the British, also the Portuguese consulate, swiftly lodged protests. In their view, the Council’s decision was not legal, as it was taken without the full agreement of the consular body. But the protest was, in fact, only a formal gesture, for both the German and Italian consuls included a paragraph in their letter stating that in the current situation they accept the SMC’s decision. Each added a condition: the Germans, that relatives be allowed to join family members already in Shanghai; the Italians, that the Council’s decision be confirmed by the consular body.111

The announced closure created a major problem for the shipping lines. They above all wanted to make certain that those refugees already on the high seas would be allowed to land. But they were also concerned over how to distinguish refugees from non-refugees, since both traveled with valid passports. What documents are required, asked the North-German Lloyd Bremen agent in Shanghai, to prove that a person is not a refugee? And the Lloyd Triestino agent wondered who is to be considered a refugee. Their worries were justified. By mid-August, the Lloyd Triestino line alone had over 900 refugees on the high seas who would arrive at the end of August and in September; another 120 were about to board the Potsdam in Germany.112 No doubt, many hundreds more had also already booked passage.

Realizing that these questions demanded answers, and having meanwhile reached a consensus in private talks with the Japanese and French consuls general on not admitting any more refugees, Phillips undertook the initial step toward limiting the refugee flow. He informed the local representatives of nine shipping companies that regulations would be promulgated in the near future regarding the entry into Shanghai of European refugees. Pending this action, Phillips asked the companies to “avoid taking any bookings for Shanghai from persons who may possibly come within the ambit of any proposed regulations.”113
At the same time, the committee on the definition of a refugee, the Refugee Admittance Committee, consisting of Eduard Kann, vice-chairman of the CAEJR; Japanese consul S. Ishiguro; French vice-consul M.G. Cattand; E.T. Nash of the SMC, began its deliberations.\footnote{114} In the draft documents circulated among the members of the committee, the word “Jew” or “Jewish” was never mentioned, as it would also not be in the final version.\footnote{115} Stressed were rather the economic and social problems and lack of employment opportunities that a large influx of immigrants in Shanghai would cause. Thus the draft “Preliminary Regulations for the Entry of European Refugees into Shanghai” stated in the first paragraph that, “‘Refugee’ has application irrespective of race, nationality or religious faith; having a purely economic connotation”. And the second paragraph defined a refugee as a “non-Asiatic foreigner.\footnote{116}” That limitations on entry into Shanghai applied only to passport holders with a red “J” was successfully hidden and in subsequent years the SMC persistently refused to state this fact in writing.\footnote{117} Defining who was a refugee entailed, of course, also defining who would be permitted to land in Shanghai. The permit system that subsequently came into being, therefore, had its genesis in the unilateral Japanese decision to close Hongkou to the refugees, on the one hand, and to the SMC reaction, on the other. But the permit system was destined to be as ineffective as the Japanese and the SMC steps. Ultimately, it was events in Europe – the start of WWII, Italy’s entry into the war, and Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union – that ended sea travel and the refugee influx into Shanghai

**The Permit System**

Despite the agreement of the three partners on immigration restrictions, they soon disagreed on their implementation, and in the end decided to implement them independently of one another. The regulations for Shanghai entry, issued October 22, were published in the *Municipal Gazette* of October 27, 1939. They

\footnote{114} “Committee Formed for Jew Problem”, *NCH*, August 23, 1939, p. 325.  
\footnote{115} According to the “Rules for Refugees”, the *NCDN*, October 6, 1939, carried a report from the *Taiiriku Shimpo* from October 5, that it was decided at the meeting to drop the term “Jewish refugee” in favor of “Central European Refugee”.  
\footnote{116} YVA, 078/86, Shanghai Municipal Archives, “Provisional Arrangement Regarding Entry into Shanghai of European Refugees”, n.d., signature illegible; “Suggested Regulations re Admittance into Shanghai of European Refugees”, E. Kann, August 25, 1939; “Prohibition of Entry of European Refugees into Shanghai”, no signature, August 1939.  
\footnote{117} CAHJP, DAL 96, Birman to Hicem, Marseilles, October 27, 1941.
stated that a person could land if he or she had the required sum of $400 per adult and $100 per child, which travel agents or shipping companies were to verify. Instead of money, a person could also land with an SMC entry permit, which had been granted if the person was an immediate relative of a financially secure refugee in Shanghai, intended to marry a Shanghai resident, or had an employment contract. Entry permits were to be obtained from the Council through the CAEJR, and the Special Branch of the Police Department would investigate each application. An appended note stated that these regulations were valid only for the International Settlement south of Suzhou Creek; those wishing to reside north of the Creek had to apply to the Japanese authorities.\textsuperscript{118} The French Concession is not mentioned in the note, but it was understood that arrangements with it would have to be made separately. The French financial requirement differed from the SMC’s and demanded $300 for the first and $200 for every additional person, including children.\textsuperscript{119} By the time the regulations came into effect, Germany had invaded Poland, WWII had begun, and German ships no longer sailed to Shanghai.

Before many months had passed, however, the Shanghai Municipal Police discovered a serious loophole in the regulations. Refugees who managed to secure bookings on non-German vessels generally preferred showing possession of money, rather than wasting precious time waiting for permits, and shipping companies were often lax in enforcing possession of funds. Among the ninety refugees who arrived on April 4, 1940 on the \textit{Conte Verde}, only eighteen had permits, while seventy one landed with money.\textsuperscript{120} According to the police report of May 23, 1940, of the 213 refugees arriving on the \textit{Conte Rosso} on May 2, only 47 had permits. The October regulations, stated the report, were therefore not stopping the influx and, “Any Tom, Dick, or Harry can land here provided he has the necessary funds and as many as a shipload can arrive with each and every steamer”. The police verdict was that permits alone, and not money, would “act as a brake”. Even members of the Jewish community agree, the report went on, that immigration be either forbidden or limited to a few “desirables from time to time.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{118} YVA, 078/88, “Entry of European Refugees”, dated October 22, 1939. For the aftermath of the closure, see also JDC, RG 33/44, file 458, E. Kann, “Report on the Problem of Immigration into China on the Part of European Refugees”, November 11, 1939.

\textsuperscript{119} CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, May 13, 1940. The French procedure was also somewhat different.

\textsuperscript{120} CAHJP, 86.4, CAEJR to Daljewcib, April 8, 1940.

\textsuperscript{121} YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Police report sent to the SMC Secretary and Commissioner General, May 24, 1940.
Meir Birman also realized that permits did not deter immigrants: if a person can show the required sum of money, permits are easily obtained on arrival, he wrote. While the SMC undertook the revision of the permit regulations, the Jewish leadership in Shanghai too wanted to introduce a change in the financial arrangements. According to the October regulations, the “show money” (Vorzeigegeld, as it was considered by the Jewish organizations) was paid to the shipping companies, which gave the money to the passengers upon arrival. Not all arrivals had used their own funds, and those who had received money from the Jewish organizations were expected to return it to the HICEM office in Shanghai. Unfortunately, some refugees – penniless arrivals, it must be remembered – refused to part with the funds, which led to considerable unpleasantness between the Jewish authorities and the refugees, as neither HICEM nor anyone else had the authority to collect the money from a recalcitrant refugee. A Mrs. Baden, for example, requested and was given “show money” by two different offices, and arrived in Shanghai with double the amount needed, which she refused to return. Other refugees were said to be sending the money to their relatives in Germany to enable them to come, instead of returning it or using it in Shanghai. Several months later, Birman still recalled the embarrassment the refugees’ untrustworthiness had caused. Even the Japanese got wind of it, he said.

Therefore, both the SMC regulations and the financial regulation were also revised. Henceforth funds were to be paid into Speelman’s account with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and the CAEJR was to send a letter to the Settlement police that the money was indeed on deposit. The revised regulations, dated June 1, 1940, were published in the Municipal Gazette of June 28, effective as of July 1, 1940. They stated that refugees must have entry permits as well as money, which was to be deposited with the CAEJR. Shipping or travel agents must verify the possession of the permit at the time of booking passage, and permits were valid only for four months. Similar to one year earlier, these regulations applied to the International Settlement south of Suzhou Creek and not to other areas.

122 CAHJP, DAL 86, Birman to the South African Fund for German Jewry, May 3, 1940.
123 YVA, 078/88, Birman to Speelman, May 30, 1940.
125 CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reich Association, November 21, 1940.
126 YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Nash to Kann, June 19, 1940; CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, June 27, 1940. The bank was changed later in the month to the Chase Bank because it belonged to a neutral power.
127 YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Gazette copy. CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, November 11, 1940, the SMC has agreed to issue permits for six
Although generally referred to as “permits”, the actual document was labeled a “Certificate”, which stated: “This is to certify that there is no objection to the entry into the International Settlement of Shanghai South of the Soochow Creek”, followed by the name of the person. This careful wording had political reasons and reflected the SMC’s delicate relationship with the Japanese, and the continued question of the measure’s legality that the Japanese might want to turn to their advantage.

Clearly, the Japanese were pursuing their own policy in regard to the refugees and the SMC was unwilling, or considered its position too vulnerable, to challenge it. Perhaps this is the reason why Assistant Secretary E.T. Nash felt compelled in July 1940 to put himself and the SMC on record. “By understanding reached with the Japanese, we are exercising assumed powers to prohibit certain Jewish parties from ‘entering’ Shanghai”, wrote Nash. The SMC, however, had no such powers; it had no passport office, and it was not empowered to authorize entry to anyone. Therefore, the permits only stated that there are ‘no objections’ to entry into the International Settlement. Nowhere was either “permission to enter” or “Shanghai” referred to. However, should the Japanese not permit entry into Shanghai, the letter continued, “on the strength merely of our certificate of ‘non-objection’, we should refrain from challenging their decision”. On the other hand, if the Japanese authorities refused entry to qualified Jewish refugees, such information would probably have been conveyed to the Consular body, who could raise the matter with the Japanese if they wished.128

There were other problems. The SMC tried to control the continued, though much smaller, refugee influx on Japanese ships arriving from Dalian. A Mr. Nakashima from the Dairen Kisen Kaisha Line was requested to prepare lists of refugees and to collect their passports for members of the Jewish committee who met the ships. But Nakashima was uncooperative. The ships’ crews were

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128 YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Nash to R.W. Yorke, July 10, 1940. 

Instead of four months; DAL 99, Birman to International Migration Service, Geneva, September 5, 1941, Japanese permits continued to be valid for only four months, but none have been issued since a year ago; DAL 87, Birman to Hicem, Paris, June 5, 1940, unlike the SMC and the French, the Japanese did not have a money requirement. See also, Efraim Zuroff, The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust, the Activities of the Vaad-Ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee, 1939–1945, New York: Yeshiva University Press, Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2000, p. 147, notes 13, 15, p. 165. Some manipulation of the permit system was apparently possible. When the Shanghai Ashkenazi Jewish Communal Association provided guarantees for $30 maintenance per person for 300 Polish refugees in March 1941 the SMC agreed to issue permits for them.
unable to do these extra chores, he declared, nor was he willing to post a notice advising refugees to remain on board until they were met by a member of the committee.\textsuperscript{129} The SMC was also attempting to control the arrival of refugees with expired permits as the shipping companies seemed to pay no attention to their expiration dates.\textsuperscript{130} Finally, refugees with criminal records, who had been imprisoned, were said to be arriving in Shanghai. This was in fact so. Not only had Jews been arrested and rearrested, but among them were also Communist Party members, as mentioned earlier. These staunch communists held meetings and engaged in, to use their term, educational activities.\textsuperscript{131} They may not have escaped the notice of police spies who were active among the refugees.\textsuperscript{132}

A new and at first puzzling development meanwhile took place in spring 1940. Whereas to the British the refugees were a worrisome nuisance, to the Japanese they looked potentially useful in their bid to gain greater power in Shanghai politics. By the middle of April 1940, Meir Birman noticed a sudden increase of permits issued by the Japanese Consulate General since the beginning of the month. Compared to the Settlement’s 800 permits issued by February 1940, there had been only around fifty or sixty by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{133} In the first two weeks of April, however, the Japanese issued around 200\textsuperscript{134}, and by May apparently as many as 800 or 900 had been obtained by the refugees.\textsuperscript{135} An irate Eduard Kann penned an angry letter to Japanese consul Ishiguro,

\textsuperscript{129} YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Nash to Dairen Kisen Kaisha Line, June 4, 1940; Police memorandum (?), unsigned, June 26, 1940.
\textsuperscript{130} YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Archive, Police memorandum (?), unsigned, May 30, 1940.
\textsuperscript{131} Gerd Kaminsky, \textit{General Luo genannt Langnase, das abenteuerliche Leben des Dr. med. Jacob Rosenfeld}, Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 1993, p. 48, mentions weekly meetings of German Marxists with Gregory Grzyb alias Heinz Shippe, members of the German Communist Party.
\textsuperscript{132} Dreifuss, “Shanghai – Eine Emigration am Rande”, p. 575, mentions around twenty-five party members; Nobel, “Erinnerungen”, pp. 885–886; see also SMP, Reel 17, D-5422 (c). D. S. I. Gigaron, a Russian, for example, was watching and reporting on Jewish activities.
\textsuperscript{133} CAHJP, 86.2, Birman to Braun, Reich Association, February 22, 1940.
\textsuperscript{134} CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Braun, Reich Association, April 15, 1940. Birman, by then, was well aware of the reason for the increase, but called it a “special occasion”.
\textsuperscript{135} CAHJP, DAL 87, Birman to HIAS, New York, June 6, 1940. According to a letter from Birman to the Vienna Kultusgemeinde, June 14, 1940, the Japanese issued 900 permits. However, according to a letter from the Japanese Consulate General by May 27 only 874 permits had been issued. SMP, Reel 17, D5422 (c) 70, M. Shibata to E. T. Nash, May 27, 1940.
strongly objecting to the issuing of “1,000 immigration permits for Hongkew residence”. Without mentioning in so many words the reason for the Japanese authorities’ munificence, Kann wrote that applications for permits “were submitted without the intermediary of our Committee, so that the latter was not enabled to investigate the bona fides of the applicants, nor could we examine the prospects of the new arrivals to make a living in Shanghai”. And he added pointedly, “Recently the Electioneering Association, consisting of refugees, a body without juridical standing, has inaugurated a campaign for the issue of immigration permits. We have no desire whatsoever to either criticize, nor to interfere in any way with the decisions of your Consulate General in this respect”. Kann nonetheless wanted it on record that his committee could not be responsible for persons whose background had not been examined.136

The Japanese suddenly issued a large number of permits because of the April 10–11, 1940, elections for members of the Municipal Council on which the Japanese wanted to increase their representation. Instead of their traditional two members, they put up five candidates. Elections were based on the so-called “rate-payers’ principle”.137 Hongkou’s large refugee population, where many met the rate-payers’ requirement, thus became a valuable pool of votes. When, in addition, the Japanese promised to issue permits in return for refugee votes, it seemed a foregone conclusion that the Japanese would get their five council members.

Paul Komor, head of the I.C., Ellis Hayim, and others were horrified. On the one hand, they took pains to assure the Japanese that they would in no way influence immigrants to vote one way or another. But, on the other, they stressed that refugees should abstain altogether from voting, having been advised on arrival not to engage in political activities.138 Whether the refugees would heed this advice was anyone’s guess because in the meantime the Japanese opened a canvassing office in which two Japanese and four refugees busily wooed potential voters.139

The Japanese were not pleased with the advice to the Jews to remain aloof. On April 8 the Japanese confiscated all issues of the German-language emigre

136 PRO, FO/371/24696, no. 364, Kann to Ishiguro, April 25, 1940. (Copy of Kann’s letter).
137 Eligibility to vote was based on taxes paid. Property owners as well as tenants who paid a certain assessed value were entitled to a franchise.
138 “Refugees Urged to Remain Neutral”, NCDN, April 4, 1940, p. 2. This had been stated in a meeting on March 29.
newspaper, *Gelbe Post*, whose lead article proffered similar advice. At the same time, Shanghai’s foreign community realized that their fate might very well be decided by these newcomers who had no stake in Shanghai’s future, as they saw it. Under the screaming headline, “Emigres deciding S’hai’s Fate, British-American Bloc Votes Equal Japanese; Jewish Holding Balance”, the *SEPM* article went on to say, “Leaving their homelands within only the past year or so, German and Austrian Jewish refugees today hold the destiny of the International Settlement ... in their hands”. Under its thinly disguised anti-Semitism, the article repeated the charge that the Japanese were bribing the refugees with permits for their relatives when, in fact, they “know nothing of the history of Shanghai” and its foreign investments.

Fortunately, the huge turnout at this “most momentous municipal election that the city has seen”, assured the maintenance of the status quo. As in previous years, two Japanese, two Americans, and five British were elected to the council. In spite of having received permits, overwhelmingly large numbers of refugees apparently did not vote for the Japanese candidates. According to a newspaper report, many were seen voting not at the Hongkou market, where there would have been greater Japanese surveillance, but at the Shanghai Volunteer Corps Drill Hall in the International Settlement.

The defeat of the Japanese candidates may have prompted Inuzuka of the Japanese Naval Landing Party to write an insolent and threatening letter to Speelman and his committee in August. In it he reminded Speelman that a country admits aliens provided they exert themselves “to enlarge the prosperity of the country”. Japan has admitted refugees into that portion of Shanghai which is under occupation, therefore,

In view of the sweeping anti-Semitism which it is feared might spread to and be aggravated in the Far East, it would appear to be to their own interest ... to endeavor at all times to make the best possible impression upon ... [the Japanese authorities].

He also reminded Speelman that the Harbin Jews had adopted a resolution at the Far East Jewish Congress to cooperate with Japan. And he indicated that it behooves Jews living in the Japanese-occupied territory of Shanghai to do likewise. Inuzuka may have regretted that by then many hundreds of permits had become available for the areas under Japanese control, although we have

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141 *SEPM*, April 5, 1940, p. 3.
143 PRO, FO/371/24684, K. Inuzuka to Speelman, August 27, 1940.
no way of knowing how many of these were eventually used. Inuzuka wrote still another letter, this time to Ellis Hayim, advising him and the I.C. to write to the United States government expressing “their gratitude and appreciation for ‘the kindly attitude of the Japanese authorities to the Refugees.’” When Hayim refused, Inuzuka accused him of being more English than Jewish.  

Pressure was also brought on Speelman to write to American Jewish leaders how indebted they were to the Japanese. Speelman proved more cooperative than Hayim and wrote to the JDC secretary, “We ... wish to place on record that the Japanese Authorities have always made it a point to treat our refugees ... in a very sympathetic and humane manner, which is greatly appreciated.”

These letters, and there may have been others, brought home no doubt to Shanghai’s wealthy Jews how precariously poised they were between protecting their privileged status with the British while somehow attempting to avoid Japanese pressure to do its bidding. They identified their interests with those of the British; it was in their interest to support British attempts to limit the refugee influx. And they, like the British, had no desire to antagonize the Japanese. Yet, men like Hayim, Speelman, and Kann, must have also realized that they were Jews in the eyes of the British as well as the Japanese, part of a world-wide Jewish community.

While the new regulations went into effect and Nash worried about the Japanese, world events intervened once again in the refugee flight. In June 1940 Italy joined Germany at war thus ending the Italian participation in the refugee traffic. Henceforth only French and Japanese ships would be available. Before long, however, these too would no longer leave from Europe for Shanghai. By the end of June 1940, the few Japanese liners that still sailed from Europe were generally fully booked with Japanese returnees. In October 1940, the JDC discussed discontinuing bookings on Japanese liners due to the strained U.S.-Japanese relations, and in November 1940, Japanese ship travel from Lisbon to East Asia was suspended. French ship space had never been plentiful and, after Germany oc-

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144 PRO, FO/371/24684, A. H. George, Consul-General to the Ambassador, Shanghai, September 5, 1940.
145 JDC, RG 33-44, file 460, Speelman to JDC secretary, September 9, 1940.
147 JDC, RG 33-44, file 59, “Meeting of the Administration Committee of the Joint Distribution Committee”, October 9, 1940. Although knowing full well how dangerous the situation had become for Jews in Europe, Morris C. Troper supported discontinuing use of Japanese ships by arguing that Jews sailing on Japanese liners might get stuck indefinitely in Japan and would then require JDC support; CAHJP, 86.4, Braun to Daljewcib, November 11, 1940.
cupied France in June 1940, dwindled even more. Moreover, the French Conces-

sion had issued very few permits since October 1939 and by May 1940 stopped

issuing them altogether.148 The advantage of French permits, however, was that

they had no expiration date, so that recipients could at least continue to sail from

Marseilles to an Indo-China (Vietnam) port provided they were able to obtain a

booking. Indeed, Shanghai was increasingly less frequented by international

shipping and by August 1941, Meir Birman remarked on the mostly local, Asian,

traffic in Shanghai harbors. Three months later, a growing sense of isolation was

evident in Birman’s letters when he wrote that, “Shanghai is cut off from many

countries, South and Central America. Trans-ocean traffic has been suspended

by the Japanese lines.”

Finally, Nationalist consulates abroad were apparently not informed of the

permit requirements in Shanghai. Rene Unterman, stranded in South Africa

after the German invasion of Antwerp and in possession of a Chinese visa

which he had obtained in Lisbon, turned to the Chinese consulate when he

was unable to book passage for Shanghai. Considering it probably no more

than a mere procedural matter, Consul General F.T. Sung simply requested a

permit from the SMP, receiving, in turn, no more than a frosty reply from

Nash.150

Legitimate and Forged Permits

The permit system as conceived in 1939 and revised in 1940 involved only the

SMC, the French, and the Japanese Consulate-General. If the question arose

whether the Chinese Municipal Government had the authority to issue permits,

it is not mentioned in any of the documents. Yet, by mid-September 1940,

permits issued by the Bureau of Social Affairs of the City Government of

Greater Shanghai (Shanghai tebieshi shehui ju ...) suddenly came to Birman’s

attention, and were, according to Braun of the Reich Association, honored by

the Japanese consulate in Berlin.151 Eduard Kann, whom Birman consulted,

was told by the Japanese consul that the people of the Bureau of Social Affairs

were not trustworthy. But apparently he did not indicate that permits from the

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148 CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, April 1, 1940.
149 CAHJP, DAL 99, Birman to Settlement Association, Dominican Republic, August 24,

1941; DAL 101, Birman to Polish Relief Committee, Melbourne, November 6, 1941.
150 YVA, 078/88, Shanghai Municipal Council, F.T. Sung to The Chairman, SMC,

November 19, 1940; Nash to F.T. Sung, January 30, 1941. Unterman had been

Honorary Consul for Rumania in Antwerp.
151 CAHJP, 86.3, telegram from Berlin to Hicem, September 18, 1940.
Chinese were not acceptable.\textsuperscript{152} In fact, the Japanese consul had become aware of the permits – with seal and signature of a Yao Keming – already one month earlier, and had noted that these permits were circulating for several months. He considered them counterfeit (something he seems not to have wanted to admit to Kann), and he wondered if they were produced by officials of the Social Affairs Bureau on their own initiative.\textsuperscript{153}

Despite the Japanese consul’s hints that something unsavory was afoot, Meir Birman expressed cautious optimism about the appearance of the Chinese permits. In his view, “Although the issuing of permits for Greater Shanghai is not sufficiently organized and therefore not as significant ... meanwhile the Nanjing regime, to which the Greater Shanghai authorities are subordinate, was recognized by both Manchukuo and Japan.”\textsuperscript{154}

There is no way of knowing how many such permits were actually in circulation, or how many people arrived with them in Shanghai. But counterfeit permits also circulated, and various individuals began to sell either genuine or counterfeit permits.\textsuperscript{155} A Dr. Herbert Frank, an attorney in Shanghai, claimed to be able to get Japanese permits\textsuperscript{156}, and three German Jews were imprisoned in August 1940 for promising to get Japanese Special Naval Landing Party permits, having acquired in the process the tidy sum of $2000.\textsuperscript{157} A Heinrich Haas, who had arrived in Shanghai in 1938 and was said to live with a Japanese woman, produced counterfeit municipal permits\textsuperscript{158}, and according to Birman,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{152} CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, September 19, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} JFM, Reel 415, frame 2304, Miura, Consul-General to Matsuoka, Foreign Minister, August 12, 1940; frame 2305–2306, Miura to two Army and Navy addresses in Shanghai, August 12, 1940. See also Japanese Foreign Ministry, Foreign Relations Archive, telegram, August 18, 1940, from Japanese ambassador Kurusa in Berlin to foreign minister Matsuoka. The ambassador had discovered four cases of permits issued by the Bureau of Social Affairs which he considered to be forged permits. The permits are labeled “Certificates”, like those from the SMC, and the text reads, “This is to certify that the permission for entry into Shanghai is granted to”, followed by name of person. It is signed Bureau of Social Affairs City Government of Great (sic) Shanghai. The signature for the English text is illegible, the Chinese text is signed by Yao Keming. A copy of this permit is reproduced in Inuzuka Kiyoko, \textit{Yudaya mondai to Nihon no kosaku}, Tokyo: Nihon kogyo shinbunsha, 1972, p. 369.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} CAHJP, DAL 93, Birman to Reich Association, December 12, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, March 28, 1940. This is the first mention in the correspondence.
  \item \textsuperscript{156} CAHJP, 86.2, Birman to Speelman, July 15, 1940; 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, August 8, 1940, Birman vigorously denied that Japanese permits are available through middlemen, they can be only obtained by a person living in Hongkou.
  \item \textsuperscript{157} NCH, August 14, 1940, p. 258.
  \item \textsuperscript{158} JFM, reel 415, frame 2312, Miura to two Army and Navy addresses in Shanghai, August 17, 1940.
\end{itemize}
some people actually managed to arrive in Shanghai with counterfeit permits.\textsuperscript{159} Not all were that lucky. The Japanese Consul-General in Hamburg reported seizing one Japanese counterfeit permit in July and two in August.\textsuperscript{160} Still other refugees arrived with permits obtained from “middlemen”, for between $25 and $50.\textsuperscript{161} Con games with permits did not turn out so well. Abraham (sic) and Erich Schrangenheim were arrested when they defrauded Martin Bandman of 50 British pounds, by promising to obtain a Japanese permit for him.\textsuperscript{162} Max Jacobi was arrested for taking $450 from three refugees to obtain permits.\textsuperscript{163} A Polish attorney and one-time police commissioner, Gabriel Lax, attempted to get SMC permits by forging the Shanghai Municipal Police stamp and two signatures on an application to the Jewish Immigration Committee. The forged signatures were those of two people who promised to provide employment for a family from Germany. Unfortunately, the forgery was discovered and Lax was convicted in court, but given a suspended sentence.\textsuperscript{164} Nothing more is heard about counterfeit permits in 1941. Either the forgers were caught, or else decided not to press their luck.

The available data does not enable me to estimate how many permits were issued or how many were ultimately used. Presumably, between July 1940 and the beginning of 1941, the CAEJR had reviewed 3,700 applications for approximately 6,000 persons. 55\% of these applications were for Japan-controlled Hongkou, 40\% for the International Settlement; 5\% for the French Concession. Altogether 2,500 applications for 4,000 persons were approved by the SMC.\textsuperscript{165} The Japanese had issued more permits than the French, but only because they tried to buy the refugees’ votes in the SMC elections, discussed

\textsuperscript{159} CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, September 2, 1940.
\textsuperscript{160} JFM, reel 415, frame 2321–2322, Kawamura to Foreign Minister Matsuoka, August 23, 1940.
\textsuperscript{161} CAHJP, 86.3, Braun, Reich Association to Daljewcib, August 3, 1940. Braun adds that he has seen a number of “successful” cases. Emigres on their initiative made contact with the middleman and received certificates. These forged permits were, therefore, apparently produced in Germany.
\textsuperscript{162} “Two Arrested in Fake Pass Count”, \textit{SEPM}, August 13, 1940, p. 2. They each received a two year prison sentence. \textit{CP}, September 11, 1940, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{163} “Refugee Held in Fake Pass Charges Here”, \textit{SEPM}, October 10, 1940, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{CP}, June 9 and June 16, 1940, p. 2; see also CAHJP, DAL 87, Birman to Reich Association, June 10, 1940. See also JDC, 33/44. file 460, clipping from the \textit{Shanghai Jewish Chronicle}, n. d., which discusses the various counterfeit permits in circulation.
above. The SMC had issued by far the largest number of permits, but in the spring of 1941, the waiting periods were long and the conditions ever more stringent.\textsuperscript{166} Aside from the lack of ship facilities, the permit system was undoubtedly the next most important factor in preventing refugees from reaching Shanghai. Permits were crucial documents that refugees had to produce when applying for emigration and booking passage on steamers and trains. But due to the cumbersome system of obtaining and mailing them to recipients, these life-saving documents reached many too late. Let me cite several cases. There was the tragic example of Paula Laufer from Vienna. Her brother Moritz Laufer in Shanghai had managed to get her a permit sometime in 1939, but she was told in 1940 that permits issued prior to the outbreak of war were no longer valid. Another permit, issued April 28, 1941, was not acceptable to the German authorities because it was submitted without the envelope in which it had arrived. September 14, 1942 Paula Laufer was deported to Minsk.\textsuperscript{167} Klara Lewin had left her two children in a Berlin orphanage. After reaching Shanghai, she requested permits for them from the Japanese. She never received them.\textsuperscript{168} In May 1940, permits arrived in Warsaw for the Sonnenfeld, Goldman, Szmulewicz, Grynsspan, and Jakubowski families, but they were unable to use them because Jews were no longer allowed to leave the German-occupied portion of Poland.\textsuperscript{169} Permits for over fifty people still arrived in Warsaw in June 1940.

\textsuperscript{166} CAHJP, 72.4, Birman to Rosovsky and Epstein, Kobe, March 31, 1941; DAL 93, Birman to E.J. London, Washington D.C., December 26, 1940. See also JDC, RG 33/34, file 459, February 1, 1940. The SMP could deal with only thirty applications a week, while twice that number was received by the CAEJR. CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, November 7, 1940, at the Japanese consulate general there were presumably 4,000 requests for permits, which apparently were never dealt with.

\textsuperscript{167} YVA, Dokumentsarchiv des österreichischen Wiederstandes, 16230, from Moritz Adolf Laufer to Modern Millinery LTD., January 15, 1940; Auslandbriefprüfstelle Berlin to Paula S. Laufer, June 13, 1941; W. Guttman of the U.K., Search Bureau for German, Austria, and Stateless Persons from Central Europe to Mrs. Josephine Bauer, n.d.

\textsuperscript{168} CAHJP, DAL 86, Birman to Reichsvereinigung, May 3, 1940.

\textsuperscript{169} CAHJP, 86.4, JEAS [acronym for Hias] to Birman, May 22, 1940, and cable from JEAS, also May 22; John Mendelsohn, ed., \textit{The Holocaust, Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes}, Vol. 6, pp. 234–236. A May 8, 1940 telegram from Kirk informed the Secretary of State, Washington, that, although no formal prohibition regarding emigration of Jews from the General Government exists, the Germans believe that allowing Polish Jews to leave would retard emigration from the Reich and Austria. The formal order prohibiting Jewish emigration is dated October 25, 1940. Tatiana Berenstein, A. Eisenbach, A. Rutkowski, comps. eds., \textit{Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach Polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej} (Extermination of Jews on Polish soil during the Hitlerite occupation), Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1957, pp. 55–56.
September 6, 1940, Dr. J. Morgenstern of JEAS cabled Shanghai that all emigration from the General Government had been stopped since April 1, 1940.\textsuperscript{170} Finally, there is the tragic case of Dr. Franz Spitzer and his wife Louise, who had come to Shanghai, having left their two children, aged fourteen and ten, in southern France. By the time they secured permits in August 1941, which had been sent to the children’s uncle in Limoges with the necessary travel funds, it was already too late. Four months later, after Pearl Harbor, Birman returned the money to the parents.\textsuperscript{171} In February 1941, Birman estimated that more than 2,000 Jews with SMC permits waited in various European cities.\textsuperscript{172} For all these and many more it was already too late.

\subsection*{Overland Routes}

In order to reach Shanghai from Germany or Austria overland, a person required not only a permit from one of the three international bodies in Shanghai, but also two transit visas: one for the Soviet Union and the Trans-Siberian railway in Moscow\textsuperscript{173}, and another for Manchukuo to travel to Dalian (Dairen), and from there hopefully book ship passage to Shanghai. In order to avoid the Manchukuo transit visa complication, some travelers went to Vladivostok, hoping to find passage to Shanghai from there. But Vladivostok, as we shall see below, was hardly a solution because few Soviet ships (for the most part cargo ships) sailed from Vladivostok to Shanghai. A slightly different overland route was taken by a group of Polish refugees who had fled to Lithuania when the Germans invaded Poland September 1, 1939. Consisting of rabbinic school (yeshivot) students and their rabbis as well as secular journalists, writers, poets, and actors, these people first obtained end visas from the Dutch consul,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\textsuperscript{170} CAHJP, 86.4, JEAS to Daljewcib, June 14, June 17, September 6, 1940. Morgenstern’s terse sentence tells it all, “Jedwede Auswanderung aus dem Generalgouvernement ist seit April 1 J. eingestellt ...”

\textsuperscript{171} CAHJP, DAL 101, Birman to Margolis, December 22, 1941. A year earlier, December 16, 1940, Spitzer had written to Komor on behalf of his two and twelve other teenagers in France to prevail upon the French Consul General to allow the children to enter the French Concession. Spitzer’s appeal produced no results. SMP, Reel 17, D-5422 (c)-10, 2–8.

\textsuperscript{172} CAHJP, DAL 94, Birman to Montreal, February 12, 1941.

\textsuperscript{173} The Trans-Siberian left four times per week from Moscow. Before arriving at the Manchukuo border, the line separated. Twice weekly the train traveled to Dalian, and twice to Vladivostok. YVA, JM/3155, Deutsches Generalkonsulat Shanghai, “Judentum in Shanghai”, June 30, 1940, p. 2. Sinature illegible.
\end{footnotesize}
Jan Zwartendijk (1896–1976), in Kovno for Curaçao, a Dutch colony. On the basis of the end visas, Sugihara Chiune (1900–1986), Japanese consul in Kovno, issued Japanese transit visas, allowing the refugees to go by Trans-Siberian railway to Vladivostok and to sail from there to Tsuruga on the Japan coast. But instead of leaving for Curaçao, their supposed destination, they remained in Kobe until shipped to Shanghai in 1941 by the Japanese.

The sources do not mention special difficulties in obtaining Soviet transit visas or exit permits, provided they were in possession of permits to enter Shanghai once the permit system had gone into effect. The Manchukuo transit visas for travel to Dalian were, however, a different matter, and the problems in obtaining them will be described below. Nonetheless, if they had not done so earlier, it was singularly important not to arrive at the Soviet border without a Manchukuo transit visa because at the Otpor station passengers had to obtain a Soviet exit visa. Once having left Soviet territory and entered Manchukuo territory without the proper documentation, a person could not re-enter Soviet areas nor, of course, could he remain in Manchukuo. Whereas most refugees used the overland route after sea travel was no longer possible, groups of


175 Presumably Sugihara was to issue transit visas to Polish refugees only, but when many Jews from elsewhere came as well, he did not refuse. How many visas he ended up issuing – after all he wrote transit visas only from August 11 to August 31, 1940 – is not certain, as will be discussed below. Ewa Pałusz-Rutkowska, Andrzej T. Romer, “Współpraca, Polsko-Japońska w czasie II Wojny Światowej”, Zeszyty Historyczne, no. 110 (1994), 43 pp. (English translation, “Polish-Japanese Co-operation during World War II”, Japan Forum, Vol. 7, no. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 285–316.

176 Quite probably the Japanese decision to send the Jews to Shanghai was taken after JOINT money from America ceased. This had followed the freeze of Japanese assets on July 25, 1941 in retaliation for the Japanese move into Indo-China (Vietnam). See Joseph C. Grew, Ten Years in Japan, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944, p. 408. See also Pamela Rotner-Sakamoto, Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees, A World War II Dilemma, Westport-London: Praeger, 1998, p. 141.

177 JFM, reel 413, frames 775–778, Acting Consul Matsuda, Manchouli, to Foreign Minister Arita, December 1, 1938.
refugees mainly from Austria had begun using the rail link as early as November 1938.\footnote{Evreiskaya Zhizn, nos. 15–16, April 14, 1939, English section, p. 3.} Reaching Moscow was, however, often a problem after the start of WWII, when a person had to cross from German-occupied to Soviet-occupied areas of Poland. Some refugees opted, therefore, for air travel to Moscow, not realizing that transit visas for ground travel were not valid for air travel.\footnote{CAHJP, 86-3, Birman to Reich Association, August 15, 1940.}

But once on the Trans-Siberian, travelers often succumbed to the enchantment, the majesty of the vast and sparsely populated landscape that they confronted in the week-long journey of around 10,000 kilometers.\footnote{The monotonity of the landscape and its few high points are captured by Harmon Tupper, To the Great Ocean, Siberia and the Trans-Siberian Railway, London: Secker and Warburg, 1965.} Four or five years earlier, in 1935, Meylekh Ravitch (Zekharia Khone Bergner, 1893–1976), the well-known Yiddish poet, penned a long poem about this journey on the Trans-Siberian railway.\footnote{Meylekh Ravitch, Kontinentn un okeanen: lider, baladn, un poeme (Continents and oceans: songs, ballads and poems), Warsaw: Literarishe Bleter, 1937, pp. 24–26.} In 1940, Leo Adler, when seeing Lake Baikal, wrote similarly, though perhaps less poetically:

One sees snow, and only snow. The only interruption of this scene is an occasional train station. The scenery at the Baikal Lake was beautiful. The train travels for hours around the lake. The surface of the lake is the only thing not covered by snow. On the other side of the lake are the mountains. Since the train travels in a half circle around the lake, one sees the previous train stations light up like in an ocean of stars. This truly was a beautiful landscape.\footnote{Adler, Against the Stream, p. 37.}

But this stretch of the journey was only a short reprieve from the realities that awaited travelers in Manchukuo or Vladivostok.

Much of the information they had was based on hearsay or contradictory facts. Thus, for example, (contrary to Japanese information), Birman believed in December 1938 that transit visas could be obtained at the Manzhouli border crossing. In November 1939 Manchukuo transit visas were presumably not available. In January 1940 the American Express thought that transit visas must be requested in Harbin. According to Birman in February 1940, transit visas were only issued against Japanese permits from Shanghai, and in March Manchukuo citizens had to act, it was said, as guarantors.

No doubt, because of the Shanghai Municipal elections in May 1940 transit visas were issued against SMC as well as French Concession permits. But by June 1940, no more Manchukuo transit visas were issued, and in March 1941
Birman reported 94 people stranded in Manzhouli with SMC permits and no hope of transit visas.\textsuperscript{183} The frustration engendered by these prevarications was expressed by Dr. Arnold Horwitz in Berlin when he wrote to Harbin, “The information supplied by the Manchurian embassy is never consistent and changes from case to case. Ever new requirements are demanded, and when one succeeds to fill the requirement, still no visas are granted for one reason or another.”\textsuperscript{184} Yet the overland route was attractive to many and seemed to solve at least one problem because it did not have to be paid with foreign currency until Manzhouli on the Heilongjiang border, or until Harbin, as Birman indicates.\textsuperscript{185}

Turning now to the Vladivostok-Shanghai or Japan question, we find that despite the fact that ships frequently called on Vladivostok – leaving every 5\textsuperscript{th}, 15\textsuperscript{th}, and 25\textsuperscript{th} of each month for Tsuruga\textsuperscript{186} – there was much uncertainty about whether a person would be allowed to leave for the continued voyage to Japan or get stuck in Vladivostok or – worst of all – be sent back to an unknown destination. Moreover, Birman’s inquiry at the Shanghai Intourist agency yielded the information that Soviet authorities were unlikely to permit travel via Vladivostok, thus contradicting the information that Braun in Berlin had, namely that the Soviets created no difficulty of travel via Vladivostok. Notwithstanding these uncertainties, an enterprising Herbert Braun advertised the help of his travel office in arranging the Vladivostok-Shanghai voyage for 100 Japanese yen. According to Birman, this sum was exaggerated for the run should cost no more than 65 yen.\textsuperscript{187}

Whatever the truth of the matter, the fact was that there was no passenger traffic between Vladivostok and Shanghai, and only once, in May 1941, did 52 Polish and Lithuanian refugees arrive on the Russian freighter Arctica.\textsuperscript{188} Unlike Dalian, which had a Jewish community and was prepared to care for refugees whose continued travel had been delayed, Vladivostok had neither a Jewish community nor facilities to care for persons waiting for passage. Nonetheless, and especially because the vexing Manchukuo transit visa defied solution, Birman decided to explore chartering a ship for the Vladivostok-

\textsuperscript{183} Summarized from CAHJP, 76.1, 86.2, DAL 86, DAL 87, 86.3.
\textsuperscript{184} CAHJP, 76.1, Arnold Horwitz, Hilfsverein, Berlin, to Daljewcob, Harbin, May 11, 1939.
\textsuperscript{185} CAHJP, 86.3, from Braun, Reich Association to Birman, March 20, 1940 and 86.4, from Birman to Reich Association, June 17, 1940.
\textsuperscript{186} CAHJP, DAL 87, Birman to Reich Association, June 10, 1940. The ships were handled by the Kitonihon Kisenkaisha Company.
\textsuperscript{187} CAHJP, DAL 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, May 6, 1940.
\textsuperscript{188} CAHJP, DAL 99, Birman to HIAS, New York, August 17, 1941, and Birman to Polish Relief Committee, Tokyo, September 8, 1941.
Shanghai run. This was especially tempting, provided it could be worked out, because then SMC and French permits could be used. Several problems had to be solved, however. The ship had to fly a neutral flag, several hundred people had to be brought in a short time to Vladivostok, and provisions as well as eating utensils had to be brought on board.¹⁸⁹

Negotiations proceeded throughout the fall of 1940 and Birman finally turned to the French Messageries Maritimes which had two freighters in Vietnam harbors. The French company was willing, according to Birman, to make port in Vladivostok toward the end of the year, arrange accommodations for women and children, and take on food and dishes for the seven to eight day voyage. Yet to make plans under the tense circumstances in Shanghai seemed almost foolhardy. According to Birman:

> The only thing that worries us is the completely unclear situation ... everyone is nervous, and no one knows what will happen here. Today French steamers can still come to Vladivostok; they can also dock in Settlement and French Concession ports. But what will happen in the next weeks or months no one knows, of course, in the present situation.¹⁹⁰

Let me now turn to the last large group that came overland, the Polish refugees who had left Lithuania after the Soviet armies marched in. Instead of trying to reach Shanghai from Vladivostok, they went to Tsuruga on the Japan coast and from there to Kobe. The refugees who embarked on this voyage had almost exclusively arrived from Lithuania with Japanese transit visas, which most of them had obtained from Chiune Sugihara on the basis of Jan Zwartendijk’s Curaçao visas or permits, as mentioned earlier.¹⁹¹ Precisely how many refugees eventually came to Kobe, how many left on American and other visas, and how many remained to end up in Shanghai will be, no doubt, always a matter of conjecture. Similar uncertainty surrounds the composition of the refugee group: how many Polish yeshiva students and their teachers were there, how many secular Polish Jews, and how many German refugees who had somehow made their way to Kovno and Vilna?

¹⁸⁹ CAHJP, 86.3, Birman to Reich Association, September 2, 1940, September 5, 1940, and September 12, 1940.
¹⁹⁰ CAHJP, 86.4, Birman to Reich Association, October 10, 1940.
¹⁹¹ The story of the odyssey of the Polish group, from Warsaw to Vilna and Kovno, from Kovno by train to Vladivostok, by ship from Vladivostok to Tsuruga, from Tsuruga by train to Kobe, and seven or eight months later by ship from Kobe to Shanghai is not well known. Two excellent documentary films on this topic can be highly recommended. See Appendix 3 for their description.
We need to be also careful about distinguishing the number of transit visas issued and the number of people who actually arrived in Japan with transit visas. Another possibility may have materialized and a person, after obtaining a Japan transit visa, may have opted for a different destination. To be sure, there are lists, but one cannot be certain that they are accurate or complete. Hillel Levine admits in a note that Sugihara’s saving of 10,000 Jews is only a “reasonable estimate.” A list compiled at the time indicates that 4,413 refugees arrived in Japan between July 1, 1940, and May 30, 1941. This figure included 2074 German refugees, 2040 Polish ones, and 299 from other countries.

Assuming that this is a trustworthy list, the figure of over 4,000 is also corroborated by Layzer Kahan who wrote shortly after his arrival in Shanghai in 1941 that between 4,000 and 5,000 refugees came to Japan. At first glance a suspiciously large gap of time seems to exist between Sugihara’s consular activity in Kovno and the arrival of the Jews in Japan. Sugihara was in Kovno between mid-October 1939 and the end of August 1940, the brief eleven months of Lithuania’s independence, and the months during which he issued transit visas, whereas more than half of the refugees arrived in Kobe at the beginning of 1941.

To understand this gap of time, we must consider that the refugees had no reason to move on before the arrival of the Soviet armies. According to Kahan’s often lively account, it was the threat of the Russian takeover of Lithuania and the anticipated closure of the consulates that sent the “Jews with their healthy feelings [of survival] ... to maps and globes to diligently learn geography”. The road to America, they learned – and where most wanted to go – led over Japan, hence the attempt to procure end and transit visas. People would have tried to obtain these only after the Soviet army arrived in the summer of 1940. Meanwhile, the Red army had marched into Lithuania in June 1940 and it took some time to apply for and receive Soviet exit visas.

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193 YIVO Institute, HIAS-HICEM I, MKM 15–57, 15-B22, “Movement of refugees through Japan from July 1, 1940 till May 30, 1941”. Earlier lists from 1940 and 1941 show the arrival of fewer refugees from Poland and more from Germany. See also CAHJP, 72-4. HICEM, Kobe [Epstein] to HICEM, Lisbon, July 31, 1941, who mentions the same figure of 4,413 arrivals by June 1, 1941.
194 Layzer Kahan, “Nisim oif unzer vanderveg (Miracles on our journeys)”, *In Veg*, November 1941, p. 7.
195 Levine, *In Search of Sugihara*, pp. 130, 125.
197 The exact reasons why the Soviet authorities allowed Jewish refugees to depart may never be known. For some interesting views why Soviet exit visas were granted, see Goldstein, “Motivation in Holocaust Rescue”, pp. 81–82.
Presumably the majority of the Polish refugees departed Lithuania during January and February 1941 – the peak months of arrival in Japan were February and March 1941 when first 785 and the next month 624 Polish Jews arrived.\(^{198}\)

The refugee flow did not always proceed smoothly and people were often stuck in Vladivostok. Shoshana Kahan worried in March 1941 about the fate of Raya Zomina, J. Rapoport (more about them in the next chapter) and others since they were not allowed into Japan.\(^{199}\) The crossing from Vladivostok to Tsuruga was also often highly unpleasant, as confided by the outspoken Shoshana Kahan to her diary, “When I saw the ship, I saw black. An old broken-down boat. Small and tight, I wanted to run away. But where to?” In the end, 550 Jews were packed into the ship. Then they encountered a violent storm and everyone was terribly seasick. The journey, instead of lasting 36 hours, took 60 hours.\(^{200}\)

Jews, escaping the Nazi scourge, confronted formidable obstacles in their search for a safe haven. For the Central Europeans, whether from Poland or Germany, the distance between Europe and China or Japan defied imagination. Added to this were the bureaucratic requirements: permits, visas, transit visas, good conduct certificates, exit permits, not to mention money in currency they were perhaps accustomed to, or more likely in strange local currency. As described above, arranging the sea voyage was simple and uncomplicated when compared with the overland flight. Still, it is difficult today to imagine what it was like for entire families, whether by ship or by train, to leave behind the comforting certainty of a familiar home for an unknown exile in strange parts of the world. Only in retrospect and from the distance of more than half a century can we say that those who left hearth and home chose life over certain death. At the time those who departed could not be certain that they would arrive. Not only that, they could not be certain that they would have the inner strength to create a cultural life on Chinese soil, that they would be able “to conserve their own integrity if their social, political and legal status is completely confused”, as Hannah Arendt wrote in 1943.\(^{201}\) That this is indeed what happened is as much due to the resilience of the human spirit as it is due to the nature of the Shanghai metropolis that the refugees encountered upon arrival.


\(^{200}\) Kahan, *In fajer un flamen*, pp. 263, 266, entry for March 3, 1941.