

ABSTRACT

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REFUGEE LIFE IN SHANGHAI, 1938- 1950"

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Between 1938 and 1941, 20,000 Eastern and Central European Jews fled to Shanghai. Through a close examination of memoirs and oral histories, I argue that the manner in which the refugees experienced the approximately twelve years (1938-1950) they spent in Shanghai was informed by their nationality, gender, and age. Further, I argue that the twelve years they spent in Shanghai eroded the refugee's behavioral, material, and emotional connections to their old lives in Germany and Austria until all they had left was language and memories.

**“AN UNCERTAIN LIFE IN ANOTHER WORLD”:
GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN JEWISH REFUGEE LIFE IN SHANGHAI,
1938-1950**

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Introduction: A Patchwork of Exiles¹

Between 1938 and 1941, approximately 20,000 Central and Eastern European Jewish refugees fled to Shanghai. It is no coincidence that Jewish migrations to Shanghai began in 1938. In the years between 1933 and 1938, the Nazi government of Germany persecuted the Jews, robbing them of their livelihoods and ending their social integration. Gentile Germans acted as bystanders, looking on, encouraging, and sometimes preempting official anti-Jewish policy and acts. This process, called “social death” by historian Marion Kaplan, transformed German Jews from German citizens to outcasts.² The implementation of the social death of German Jewry was a long, drawn out process. It was so drawn out, in fact, that many German Jews were unable to see the danger it posed to them. It took the horrors of Kristallnacht, the pogrom of November 9, 1938 and the resulting arrests of Jewish men to demonstrate to German Jewry the precariousness of their lives in Germany. Austrian Jewry, however, was not exposed to the brutalities of life under Nazi rule until the *Anschluss*, the unification of Germany and Austria, on March 12, 1938, and Kristallnacht eight months later. Because Austrian Jewry had not undergone the slow process of social death, they understood the danger posed by the Nazis far more clearly than had their German coreligionists.³ Thus, after Kristallnacht, German and Austrian Jewry were fully aware of the danger the Nazi regime posed

¹ Phrase taken from Marie-Claire Bergère, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 102.

² Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5, 44.

³ Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933-1946* (New York: Norton, 2009), 122; Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 45.

to them, and began to look for a way out.⁴ And they found a way out: flight to Shanghai. To understand how and why Shanghai became a destination for these 20,000 refugees, it is first necessary to explain the refugee crisis in the late 1930's, and the historical development of Shanghai from 1842-1937.

The Nazis came to power in a world stricken by Great Depression. The governments of nations with the ability to receive Jewish refugees feared that the refugees would take away jobs from their citizens and add to the welfare rolls. Even when the worst of the Depression was over, immigration policies remained tight. At first, many German Jews fled to Western European nations which liberalized their immigration policies out of the belief (shared by the émigrés) that the Nazi regime would soon fall and the refugees would return home. However, they lost hope that such would be the case after the *Anschluss*. As a result, German-speaking Jewry began to look overseas rather than next door. However, that was an extremely complex process.⁵ The United States government accepted more refugees than other countries: a quarter million between 1933 and 1945, including 150,000 between 1938 and 1941. However, the United States had the capacity to accept far greater numbers of refugees than it did and to accept far more refugees than other, smaller nations. The primary reason the United States could not live up to its potential was the quota system, created in 1924. Had the quotas been completely filled between 1938 and 1941, 206,000 German refugees

⁴ A small group of Polish Jewish refugees also fled to Shanghai, but because Polish Jewry had a different culture, relationship with Judaism, historical development, and far smaller numbers (totaling only about 2,000) than the other two groups, the present analysis will not analyze their experiences.

⁵ David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (1968; repr., New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 35; Dwork and Van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 18, 92; Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus: the Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 20-21, 94.

could have entered the US. The American Congress did not widen the quotas because of popular hostility towards the notion, fueled by Depression induced nativist sentiments, and domestic anti-Semitism. Although President Roosevelt did ensure that the quotas were fully available to refugee immigration between 1938 and 1940, in June 1940 Congress halved the refugee flow by shutting off most migrations proceeding directly out of Germany (as well as the rest of Central and Eastern Europe). Further, head of the Special War Problems Division of the State Department and the bureaucrat responsible for the issue of visas, Breckenridge Long, gave instructions to European consulates to make entry to the United States as difficult as possible by requesting unobtainable documents, and rejecting affidavits.⁶

Great Britain opened its doors only to Jews who could enhance Britain's intellectual, cultural, and business capital. Its restrictive policy was due to a combination of the global economic crisis, domestic xenophobia, and social anti-Semitism. In all, Britain accepted approximately 70,000 refugees, in addition to the 10,000 German Jewish children whom arrived via the Kindertransports. However, Britain did allow a large number of Jews in on visitor's visas. Meanwhile, in 1939 the British government passed the White Paper, which stipulated that Jewish immigration to Palestine was to be limited to 15,000 per year until 1944, letting in approximately 75,000 Jewish refugees. The British Commonwealth, more concerned with maintaining its Christian, Anglo-Saxon composition than with saving lives, admitted only a combined total of some

⁶ Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 172-174, 205, 209-211; Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 126; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 22-23, 130.

13,000. Latin American Republics, desiring to maintain domestic racial composition, changed their policies to effectively bar Jewish emigration after 1938. Brazil did so by requiring baptismal certificates for all emigres, and Bolivia simply made anyone of Jewish blood ineligible for entrance into the country. In all, approximately 17,500 were able to emigrate to Central and South America. Shanghai, however, by accident of its historical development, had one of the few clear openings for the Jews within this restrictive web of global immigration policy.⁷

The evolution of Shanghai into one of the few destinations open to Jewish refugees began in 1842, the year China lost the First Opium War (1839-1842) to Great Britain. After its loss, the Chinese government signed a series of treaties with Great Britain, called the “Unequal Treaties,” which opened the lucrative China market to foreign merchants. The Treaty of Nanking, signed in 1842, laid the groundwork for the Wangxia Treaty with the United States in 1844, and the Whampoa Treaty with the French in the same year. The Treaty of Nanking was the most notable of these treaties as it opened five Chinese ports to Western trade, including, of course, Shanghai. These treaties also included the “most favored nation” clause, stipulating that any privilege accorded to one Western nation by China was automatically applied to all other treaty signatories—primarily Great Britain, the United States, France Germany, Russia, and Japan. These treaties also granted the right of extraterritoriality to foreign nationals, guaranteeing that they

⁷ David Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 31, 34; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 189-190, 217-218, 236-237; Dwork and Van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 25, 36, 95, 148-149; Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1983), 7; Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 30.

could live and function in accordance to Western laws and practices thus outside of Chinese legal jurisdiction.⁸

Shanghai, located near the coast of China on the mouth of the Whangpoo River—a major tributary of the Yangzi River—allowed foreign merchants in Shanghai unparalleled access to inland Chinese markets. This made Shanghai the most popular of the treaty ports. As Shanghai grew as a destination for foreign merchants, the treaty signatories desired settlements in which their nationals could live apart from the native Chinese population. While Western scholars generally treat these settlements as further evidence of racist imperialism, it is important to note that, in the eyes of the Chinese government, it was advantageous to keep the foreign “barbarians” apart from the Chinese. In 1845 the Chinese authorities granted the British a zone measuring 138 acres for the use of its citizens; the zone was enlarged to 491 acres in 1848. In 1849, the French received their own plot of land, which measured 163 acres. In 1863 the Americans and British merged this area to form the International Settlement. Thus the city of Shanghai was divided in three: sections the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese jurisdiction.⁹

Citizens of nations other than Britain and France tended to settle in the International Settlement. The Shanghai Municipal Council (the SMC), an elected body for which only wealthy landowners were qualified to vote, governed this section of the city. The British, the dominant power of the International Settlement, held five of the nine council seats. The Americans, Germans,

⁸ Marcia Reynders Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: the Diaspora Communities of Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7, 8; Bergère, *China's Gateway to Modernity*, 18.

⁹ Bergère, *China's Gateway to Modernity*, 14, 18-21, 28, 30-32.

Austrians, and Italians divided the rest of the seats among themselves until World War I, at which point Germany and Austria lost their extra-territorial rights, and the Soviet Union ceded its claim to those rights. The remaining seats were thenceforth split between the United States and Japan. An elected *Conseil* governed the French Concession. Both the SMC and the *Conseil* took advantage of the instability wrought by China's 1895 defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War and the chaos of the Revolution of 1911 to expand by several times their original size (the International Settlement from 183 to 5,583 acres, and the French Concession from 164 to 2,525 acres). It took the outbreak of World War I to stop their expansion, and by then foreign powers wielded disproportionate control over the city. By the opening of the twentieth century, nearly three quarters of the population of Shanghai were not native to the town.¹⁰

Of all the foreign communities in Shanghai the British was the largest. By 1910, the Chinese section of the city had a population of 672,000, the International Settlement had a population of 500,000, and the French Concession had a population of 116,000. Shanghai also hosted a large population of Chinese nationals not native to the city. In the International Settlement lived 180,000 Chinese from Jiangsu, 168,000 from Zhejiang, and 40,000 from Canton.¹¹ The national, provincial, and ethnic populations of Shanghai lived generally isolated from one another. These self-imposed segregations held true as well for Shanghai's first two Jewish communities: the Baghdadis and the Russians. The

¹⁰ Bergère, *China's Gateway to Modernity*, 14, 28, 30-32; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 7-11; Irene Eber, *Chinese and Jews: Encounters Between Cultures* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2008), 47. In the Revolution of 1911, the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance occupied Shanghai, overthrew the Qing Dynasty, and, led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, established the Republic of China.

¹¹ Bergère, *China's Gateway to Modernity*, 84-86, 99.

Baghdadi Jews—who self-identified as Sephardim and tended to settle in the International Settlement—arrived in Shanghai from Bombay as merchants and subjects of the British crown. Although this community never numbered much more than one hundred families, its members—such as the Hardoon, Sassoon, and Kadoorie families—achieved great prominence in Shanghai. The Russian Jews began to arrive in Shanghai in 1870. This group tended to settle in the French Concession. More Russian Jews entered Shanghai after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and the largest influx of Russian Jews into Shanghai occurred after the Russian Revolution as they fled from the White Russian Army. By 1930, the Russian Jewish community numbered between 6,000 and 8,000 individuals while the Baghdadi community numbered around 1,000.¹²

These city-wide self-segregations and official divisions impeded the residents of Shanghai from forming a collective urban consciousness. The process of identity formation was further hampered by dramatic wealth disparity. A distinctive professional middle class was not visible in Shanghai until the early 1920s. Shanghai capitalism reached its peak between 1920 and 1930. In those years, the city was the center of nearly half of China's external trade. Shanghai was also a center of crime. With a population of three million in 1930, three separate ruling bodies with no history of coordination or cooperation, a massive impoverished underclass, and a popular culture which glorified gambling, wealth,

¹² Eber, *Chinese and Jews*, 8; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 12, 23-26, 32; Irene Eber, *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe: Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), 21-23; David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976), 57-59; Maisie J. Meyer, *From the River of Babylon to the Whangpoo: a Century of Sephardi Jewish Life in Shanghai* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), 200.

and sexuality emanating from the foreign concessions, the Shanghai authorities had no effective way to stamp out the rampant criminality.¹³

Shanghai's dizzying economic growth came to a halt in the 1930s as it faced the dual obstacle of Japanese aggression and global economic instability. Japan annexed Manchuria in 1931. This annexation severely disrupted trade between Shanghai and the Northern provinces. In 1932 the Japanese military attacked Chinese industrial quarters in the north of Shanghai, striking another blow to the economy. The Depression reached Shanghai in 1932, and bankruptcies in the city increased by 100% between 1934 and 1935. The economy was only beginning to improve when the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937. In the Battle for Shanghai between August and November 1937, Japan defeated the Chinese Nationalist troops—nearly leveling the Hongkew section of the International Settlement in the process—and occupied the Chinese section of the city. The foreign concessions, protected by their international status, were spared occupation following the Japanese victory. As safe havens, an influx of between 1.7 and 4.5 million Chinese refugees poured into the concessions.¹⁴

The Japanese conquest of the Chinese section of the city created a power vacuum in which none of the three governing parties of Shanghai—the main players now being Great Britain, the United States, France, and Japan—had authority over passport control. It was this absence of policy which allowed between 18,000 and 20,000 Central and Eastern Europe Jewish refugees to enter

¹³ Bergère, *China's Gateway to Modernity*, 99, 102-103, 148, 213-214.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 165-167, 287-288, 290-291.

this divided, war-torn city.¹⁵ Five scholars have studied this Jewish refugee group: David Kranzler in *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews: the Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945*, Marcia Ristaino in *Port of Last Resort: the Diaspora Communities of Shanghai*, Irene Eber in *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe: Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, Antonia Finnane in *Far From Where? Jewish Journeys from Shanghai to Australia*, and James Ross in *Escape to Shanghai: a Jewish Community in China*. These studies focus on the international and humanitarian organizations and policies which allowed this community to exist, and the cultural and communal institutions created by the refugees in Shanghai. They address why and how the refugees fled to Shanghai, what they encountered there, and how they coped with their new lives. Though all of these studies touch on elements of the nature of daily life in this community, Kranzler, Ristaino, Eber, Finnane, and Ross all present a picture of refugee life in Shanghai distinctly lacking in nuance. In this narrative, the refugees share a uniform struggle with poverty, joblessness, climatic changes, culture shock, and sanitary conditions, briefly alleviated by refugee theater groups. Other studies of this period, such as *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933-1946* by Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt, and *Generation Exodus: the Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany* by Walter Laqueur, perpetuate this narrative of the refugee experiences. This study, however, looks beyond the examination of policy and institutions typical of the

¹⁵ Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 3, 30; Gao Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy Toward European Jewish Refugees During World War II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 39, 71-72, 106-110; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 98-106; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 86.

scholarly literature. Further, while the above cited studies use memoir and oral history in their analyses, they take the words of the former refugees at face value, and use those words to construct a uniform Shanghai refugee experience. I demonstrate through a close reading of the memoirs and oral histories of former refugees in Shanghai that while refugee lives in Shanghai followed very similar trajectories, the manner in which the refugees experienced Shanghai was informed by their gender, generation, and nationality.

My study also differs from the above five works in terms of my periodization. Those analyses tend to date the refugee community in terms of the journey and arrival in Shanghai beginning in 1938 and their 1943-1945 restriction to the Hongkew district of the International Settlement. A more accurate timeframe for this community is 1938-1950, from the arrival of large numbers of refugees in Shanghai through the 1950 amendment of the US 1948 Displaced Persons Act. I periodize refugee tenure in Shanghai as falling into four distinct periods. The first period of refugee life in Shanghai, discussed in Chapter 1, spans from 1938 to 1941, the years in which the refugees left Central Europe, and traveled halfway around the world—by sea and by land—to Shanghai. This “travel period,” I argue, functioned as a brief period of calm in between life under Nazi terror and the stresses of life as strangers in a foreign city. Even in this period of calm, the cracks between the generations, the contrast between how parents and children dealt with stress and trauma, began to show themselves. The second period, discussed in Chapter 2, spans from 1938 to 1943: from the first mass arrival of refugees in Shanghai until their relegation to the Hongkew district.

In this period, the refugees were free to live anywhere in Shanghai they could afford to rent a dwelling. Although after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941 the Japanese took control over the whole of Shanghai, interned “enemy nationals,” and shut down Western businesses, the Japanese occupation did not affect the daily lives of the refugees in a dramatic manner until 1943. I argue that the manner in which the German Jewish refugee group and the Austrian Jewish refugee group experienced these five years was a direct result of the contrasting nature of their earlier encounters with the Nazi regime. The third period, discussed in Chapter 3, begins with the February, 1943 Japanese proclamation ordering all Jewish refugees to relocate to the forty block, half mile district of Hongkew by May of that year, and ends with the September 3, 1945 American and Chinese Nationalist liberation of Hongkew and all of Shanghai. In this period, I argue, the refugees no longer retained the behavioral trappings which marked them distinctively as Central European middle class Jews. Experiential differences between Austrians and Germans no longer determined how they responded to their surroundings; the big divide now existed between the older and younger generation, not between national groups. The younger, teenage generation adapted to the circumstances of life in Hongkew more easily than did their parents. These young people went to work, formed relationships, and stepped into the role of head of the family as their parents clung helplessly to the trappings of a status they no longer had. The fourth and final period, discussed in Chapter 4, begins with the liberation-occupation of Shanghai, and ends with the 1950 passing of the legislation amending the 1948 UD Displaced Persons Act.

This amendment allowed those refugees still left in Shanghai to emigrate to the United States, the destination to which the majority of the refugees wished to relocate. By this period, adults no longer had social or parental control over their children, and the refugees had lost their material and personal connections to the lands of their birth. The generational shifts demonstrated in Chapter 3, I argue, become absolute in the period discussed in Chapter 4.¹⁶

In this periodization of Jewish refugee life in Shanghai, I go beyond simply accepting the words of the refugees. I interrogate the narratives they provide in memoirs and oral histories—my main sources for this analysis—to determine their contextual meaning. Through my analysis of the effects of the age, gender, and nationality of the memoir writer or oral history subject on their narratives, I found that previous understandings of the Shanghai Jewish refugee experience are overly simple, assuming as they do that the refugees experienced events and circumstances in the same manner. The nine to twelve years Jewish refugees spent in Shanghai eroded their behavioral, material, and emotional connections to their old lives in Germany and Austria, until all they had left were language and memories.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, as of this writing, I have not uncovered the exact numbers of Germans and Austrians in the refugee community.

Chapter 1: 1938-1941: Through the Red Sea

The period of travel served as a transitional one for the refugees, as they fled a repressive government for an unknown future. It was on these journeys to Shanghai that generational differences in refugee responses to their surroundings first became apparent. The German and Austrian Shanghai-bound refugees made the journey by land and by sea. Those who traveled by sea began by train to an Italian port (though a small number reached Shanghai by ship from Portugal or Marseilles), and from there sailed through the Mediterranean, called at Port Said, went through the Suez Canal, called at Aden, Bombay, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Hong Kong, and finally, Shanghai. A small number sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in order to avoid the heavy taxes imposed on ships passing through the Suez Canal. This journey generally took between three to four weeks, although those who went around the Cape of Good Hope had a seventy-two day voyage. With visas unnecessary, entry to Shanghai by ship from Italy only required a valid passport and a steamship ticket. The real obstacle for those traveling to Shanghai via Italy was booking passage on board one of the Italian, Japanese, German, or Greek liners servicing East Asia. By January, 1939 bookings on German and Italian liners were sold out six to seven months in advance, and companies charged up to ten times their normal rates for tickets. Prospective emigrants often had to pay a high bribe in order to secure a place on board a liner. Jewish refugees used the overseas route to Shanghai only from late 1938 through to Italy's entrance into World War II on June 10, 1940, at which point the Mediterranean was closed to civilian traffic. After this closure, refugees

had no choice but to travel to Shanghai via the Trans-Siberian railroad. Those who traveled by land first made their way to Moscow, and boarded the train for a six thousand mile journey through the Soviet Union to Japanese-occupied Manchuria. They traveled by train from Manchuria to Dairen, and from Dairen by an average two day journey by ship to Shanghai. This route remained in use through December 7, 1941, when Japan officially entered World War II.¹⁷

The overseas route began by train from Germany to an Italian port. This leg of the journey was an anxious one for refugees, terrified that they would somehow be prevented from leaving at the last minute. These fears were not misplaced, despite the fact that the German government wanted these people to leave. Nazi officials boarded the trains at the Brenner Pass on the German-Italian Border. There they removed all Jews from the train to inspect their luggage and ensure that none were smuggling money or valuables out of the country.¹⁸ After removing the Jews from the train, the authorities conducted a full body search, including a body cavity search. Children as young as ten year old Ursula Bacon experienced such a search.¹⁹ The stress of the journey increased as subsequent trains full of refugees heard rumors of the experiences of their predecessors.

Susette Tauber recalled:

¹⁷ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 86-89; Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 70-71, 131; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 98-106; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 39, 71-72, 106-110; Eber, *Chinese and Jews*, 46-48, 51.

¹⁸ Emigrating Jews were all subject to the Reich Flight tax, which deducted one quarter of all profits made from the selling off of assets—typically valuables—which Jews were not allowed to remove from the country. The money remaining went into blocked bank accounts, and by 1939, Jews could only access 4% of the money in their blocked accounts. Emigrating Jews lost between sixty to one hundred percent of their capital to the Reich between 1937 and 1939. Please see Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 70-71, 131; Dwork and Van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 92-93, 144; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 86-89; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 101; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 72.

¹⁹ Ursula Bacon, *Shanghai Diary: A Young Girl's Journey from Hitler's Hate to War-Torn China* (Milwaukie: Milestone Books, 2002), 15-19.

I remember the tension in the train compartment as we neared the Brenner Pass. We had heard all kinds of rumors about people being pulled off the train at the last minute, about people being searched. All of a sudden, a passenger opened a window...and threw out money. Then somebody else did the same thing. They were afraid that if they were caught at the border with more than ten marks...they would be arrested and turned back.²⁰

After passing the border search, the refugees re-boarded the train, and completed their journey through Italy. Once at port, the refugees boarded the ships which would take them to Shanghai.

“When you are on [the] boat, that sort of feels like a vacation,” recalled Gerard Kohbieter, who made the journey alone at the age of sixteen. “But on the other hand, you were really sailing into a black hole. You didn’t know what in God’s name awaits you there.”²¹ It was on board these ships that the refugees began to confront the lives and horrors they left behind in Germany and Austria, and it was on board the ships that generational experiential divisions began to show. While adults struggled with stress and trauma, children and teens demonstrated sadness and confusion over their rapid departure, but none of the distress their parents felt. Regardless of the class in which they traveled, all the refugees were overjoyed to have escaped, and befuddled by their new existence on board luxury cruise ships. However, trauma experienced by those who had been in a concentration camp, concerns over lack of money, sadness over leaving

²⁰ Susette Tauber, “Susette Tauber,” in *Shanghai Remembered: Stories of Jews who Escaped to Shanghai from Nazi Germany*, ed. Berl Falbaum (Royal Oaks, MI: Momentum Books, 2005), 190.

²¹ Gérard Kohbieter, “Gérard Kohbieter’s Oral History,” in *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich*, ed. Steve Hochstadt (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2012), 64.

the lands of their birth, and fear of what they would find in Shanghai cast a cloud over the month-long voyage. Even children sensed the stress of the adults and the frozen attempts they made to seem jovial, to pretend that they were on vacation. Kohbieter remembered, “There were people that were pacing the deck all night, couldn’t sleep, people that came out of the concentration camp wasted, wasted...People tried to put up a good front.”²² Ursula Bacon wrote “I could tell a refugee from a ‘normal’ traveler at a glance. The Jewish passengers moved about in an air of subdued participation—awkward and hesitant. Their troubled eyes radiated their uncertainties, and their voices were toneless, afraid to be heard.”²³

The opulence of the ships in itself proved jarring (“surreal” in the words of Vivian Jeanette Kaplan, in her rendition of her mother’s experience as a Jewish refugee in Shanghai).²⁴ “That is the strangest thing in the world, you know, it was like a luxury liner,” remembered Lisbeth Loewenberg. “My mother and I had a cabin together. You could barely get any food in Vienna anymore, and Jews didn’t get anything. All of a sudden, you were on the ship and you had three meals a day served to you in the dining room of the ship.”²⁵ Sigmund Tobias was so surprised by the treatment of the refugees on board that he began to fear that it might be some kind of trap.²⁶ Because not all refugees were able to travel in first class, Dr. Theodore Friedrichs wrote that the luxury of that class was “in shocking

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 26.

²⁴ Vivian Jeanette Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles: the True Story of One Family’s Journey From War-Torn Austria to the Ghettos of Shanghai* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s, 2002), 115-116.

²⁵ Lisbeth Loewenberg, “Lisbeth Loewenberg’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 70.

²⁶ Sigmund Tobias, *Strange Haven: A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Shanghai* (1999; repr., Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 6.

contrast to the complete absence to the bare necessities in the third class...[The shipping line] had come up with the grand idea of renaming the real third class ‘economy class’ and making the crew’s usual quarters into the new third class. It was very depressing to look at these facilities.”²⁷ These quarters were very hot and so small that their occupants could barely move. Horst F. Abraham wrote that, in this class, “because the food was minimal, some young married women resorted to having sexual relations with the crew in order to receive better food for themselves and their families.”²⁸ Regardless of class, however, stress over money was a unifying factor on board the ships. Ursula Bacon remembers hearing her parents panic over their lack of money, only having \$15 to their name.²⁹ Some used their “on board money”—funds purchased by the refugees or Jewish relief organizations to be used on board the ship—to purchase expensive items from the ships’ stores which could then be sold for profit in Shanghai.³⁰ Though some passengers were able to relax the further the ships sailed from Europe, anxieties regarding what they would find in Shanghai soon replaced this newfound calm. Before leaving, emigres had encountered negative attitudes from friends, family, and strangers when informed of their destination. Ingrid Wilmot remembers her Austrian family exclaiming “My God they kill the white people there!”³¹ Other times the fear came from fellow ship mates as the refugees exchanged rumors, or,

²⁷ Theodor Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York: My Family’s Flight from Hitler*, ed., trans. Frederick Rolf (Nashville, TN: Cold Tree Pres, 2007), 66.

²⁸ Horst F. Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago: Never Give Up* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009), 31-32.

²⁹ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 21, 22, 24-27.

³⁰ Ernest Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 31-32; Evelyn Pike Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 2nd ed. (1993; repr., New York: Shengold Publishers, 2000), 53; James R. Ross, *Escape to Shanghai: a Jewish Community in Shanghai* (Don Mills, ON: Macmillan, 1994), 36-37.

³¹ Ingrid Wilmot, “Ingrid Wilmot,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 212.

as happened to Ursula Bacon, their stewards entertained them with macabre tales of their destination.³²

Nevertheless, many refugees recalled an extremely pleasant ship-board experience. Refugees who made the journey as children in particular have positive memories, an early indication of their ability to adapt to new environments more effectively than their parents' generation. Ilie Wacs remembered the trip as "a holiday that floated,"³³ while Lisbeth Loewenberg remembered the voyage as "absolutely gorgeous...The nights on the ship you see the flying fish, and you are free." One memory in particular stayed with her:

There were two young men on the ship who had come out from the concentration camp. They were playing the piano and singing in the evening, you know, light songs, popular music, like 'Mack the Knife.' I said to my mother, 'How is it possible that people when they come out from the concentration camps are able to enjoy themselves and sing and be so happy? It seems like a contradiction to me.' And my mother said, 'Well, it's because they came out of the concentration camp that they are happy.'³⁴

An event which holds a special place in the memories of the refugees was the day they sailed through the Red Sea. "Entering the Red Sea naturally evoked Biblical History and left me with a strange feeling. There, after thousands of years

³² Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 22, 23, 26-27.

³³ Deborah Strobin and Ilie Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey: From Vienna to Shanghai to America, a Brother and Sister Escape to Freedom During World War II* (Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books, 2011), 42.

³⁴ Lisbeth Loewenberg, "Lisbeth Loewenberg's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 70.

we as Jews were again fleeing a power suppressing us,” wrote Kracauer.³⁵ Warner Bergh, who made the voyage at the age of fifteen, also remembers the impact this leg of the journey had on him, as a Jew fleeing to safety.³⁶ Theodor Friedrichs wrote that they might they “glided into the Red Sea...the stars appeared to be spread out in perplexing numbers, big and luminous, close enough to touch. After a while the moon rose and made the sea gleam like a broad band of silver. It was a sight that beggars description. We could hardly tear ourselves away.”³⁷

Despite the stresses the refugees faced on board, the voyage functioned as a brief respite—if not a vacation—from what they left behind in Germany and Austria and from the apprehension of what they were to meet in Shanghai. As they approached the city, their anxiety returned as they wondered, some while drinking much champagne, what their lives would be like in this new, unknown, locale. For some, this was more than they could handle, and they prayed for death in a storm, and in another instance, committed double suicide.³⁸

After June 10, 1940, when the Mediterranean closed to civilian traffic, German and Austrian Jews could only reach Shanghai by taking the Trans-Siberian railroad to Manchuria, from Manchuria to Dairen, and from Dairen by ship to Shanghai. The refugees who made the overland journey remember it as generally pleasant, but rather monotonous. Bobby Salomon, eight years old when

³⁵ Kracauer, “Memories and Images,” 8.

³⁶ Warner Bergh, “Warner Bergh,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 22.

³⁷ Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 67.

³⁸ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 29; Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 65, 68; Alfred S. Weissenberg, “Alfred S. Weissenberg,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 205-206; Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 74.

he made the journey with his parents, found it a great adventure.³⁹ Ralph Hirsch, ten years old when he made the trip with his parents, recalls:

The Trans-Siberian railroad...was sort of a little world in itself. We were on that train for just about two weeks, with many stops in many places and days and days where we went through deep green forests. I remember thinking, crossing on the south shore of Lake Baikal, which seemed to take forever, we rode there for hours and hours, it was like riding along the ocean, except that it was so wonderfully covered with trees, that it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.⁴⁰

The refugees got off the train in Japanese occupied Manchuria, and boarded a Japanese train to the port city of Dairen. The Japanese blacked out the windows on the trains and outside, according to those who broke the rules and peaked out the windows, there were soldiers stationed outside with machine guns. This leg of the journey was far more regimented than the last, and there was far less freedom of movement on board. Though some of these refugees landed in Kobe, Japan before proceeding on to Shanghai, the majority boarded small ships and spent two to three days at seas from Dairen to Shanghai.⁴¹

³⁹ Bobby Salomon, "Bobby Salomon," *Shanghai Remembered*, 168.

⁴⁰ Ralph Hirsch, "Ralph Hirsch's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 72-74.

⁴¹ For the Polish refugees, the trip was anything but monotonous. After Germany invaded Poland in September, 1939, more than ten thousand Polish Jews escaped across the border to Lithuania. The Soviet Union annexed Lithuania on April 4, 1940. This increased the anxieties of the Jews who had sought refuge there as the Soviet Union did not allow its citizens to emigrate freely, and the deadline for accepting Soviet citizenship in Lithuania—January 1941—was fast approaching. Because Germany closed the Baltic Sea to air and sea transportation in April 1940, the only escape route for Polish Jews in Lithuania was aboard the Trans-Siberian railroad to Vladivostok, and from there by ship to Kobe, Japan. In Kovno, Lithuania, the Dutch consul, Jan Zwartendijk, and the Japanese consul, Chiune Sugihara, collaborated to smuggle these refugees into Kobe, Japan. Zwartendijk issued them visas to the Dutch Caribbean holding of Curaçao, and then Sugihara issued them transit visas to Japan. They issued these visas with the understanding that the refugees would never reach Curaçao, but would stay in Kobe. There the some 2,000 Polish refugees who spent the war in Shanghai remained until Japan, anxious to remove foreigners from its soil, shipped them to

As the approximately 20,000 refugees traveled to the far shore of China, the Shanghai Municipal Council, the *Conseil*, and the Chinese Municipal Government (still believing that it held true power in the city) became increasingly alarmed, and collaborated to devise a policy to stem the flow. The Japanese, however, were following a military policy which emphasized welcoming Jews to Shanghai in order to use those Jews to leverage positive relations with the United States (for a more thorough discussion of these policies, please see Chapter 3). Japan's official policy towards the Jews in this period was devised at the Five Ministers Conference of December 6, 1938. In the "Summary of Jewish Measures," the ministers outlined three principles:

- 1) Jews living in Japan, Manchuria, and China are to be treated fairly and in the same manner as other foreign nationals. No special effort to expel them is to be made.
- 2) Jews entering Japan, Manchuria, and China are to be dealt with on the basis of existing immigration policies pertaining to other foreigners.
- 3) No special effort to attract Jews to Japan, Manchuria, or China is to be made. However, exceptions may be made for businessmen and technicians

Shanghai in October, 1941. Anna Lincoln and Samuel Iwry both lived through this chaotic time. It began with an illegal border crossing from Poland into Lithuania, typically with the help of professional smugglers. After weeks spent languishing in Vilna, Samuel Iwry and Anna Lincoln's father were able to acquire visa through the Sugihara connection in Kovno. They took a train to Moscow, and began their journey aboard the Trans-Siberian railroad. Samuel Iwry wrote that "the train had once been a trans-European train. But after using it so much and never making any repairs, it looked like a poor-house on wheels...The food was like in a cafeteria—when it was supposed to be warm it was cold." Anna Lincoln remembers over 500 refugees boarding the Trans-Siberian train in Moscow. People on the train were very much afraid of spies, of being taken off by the Soviets. In Vladivostok they boarded a Japanese steamer to Japan ("the conditions on the ship were unspeakable," wrote Iwry), where they stayed in Kobe. There they got their papers in order and arrived in Shanghai in mid-1941. Samuel Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War: From Bialystok to Shanghai to the Promised Land—an Oral History*, ed. L. J. H. Kelley (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 45-48, 56, 60-64, 68, 72, 75-88; Anna Lincoln, *Escape to China* (Woodhaven, NY: Manyland Books, 1982), 51-55, 67-71, 73-83, 100-101, 121-123, 131-132, 142-159.

with utility value for Japan.⁴²

In 1939, however, as the refugee numbers began to overwhelm the city, Japan came under great pressure from the Shanghai authorities to exclude further refugees. Japan then devised a new policy to prohibit Jewish entrance into the city. In June, 1939 Captain Inuzuka and Colonel Yasue, Japan's "Jewish experts," drafted the "Emergency Measures for Managing the Shanghai Jewish Refugees," which prevented Jewish refugees from living, entering, and doing business in Hongkew, the low rent district in which most refugees settled upon their arrival in Shanghai. These measures were officially implemented on August 10, 1939. In October 1939, the Japanese authorities in Shanghai and the SMC introduced further restrictions to Jewish entry. These restrictions stipulated that permits would be issued only to those with \$400 per each adult, and \$100 per child under thirteen years old. Permits could also be distributed to those with immediate contacts in the city who were employed, financially competent, or to whom they were married. Only those approved for a permit were allowed to settle in Hongkew. Meanwhile, the *Conseil* created its own permit system in February 1940, although it changed its mind and attempted to close its doors to Jewish refugees three months later. Although it was the most effective refugee prevention policy devised in Shanghai, the permit systems were particularly open to abuse and did not have a great impact on refugee numbers. The single most effective factor in ending refugee traffic to Shanghai was Italy's 1940 entrance into World War II, which effectively closed the Mediterranean to civilian traffic. When all

⁴² So quoted in Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary*, 74; Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 55-56.

the gates finally closed at the end of 1941 as Japan entered the war, nearly 20,000 refugees reached Shanghai. Their new lives had begun.⁴³

⁴³ Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary*, 60, 77, 81-83, 85-86; Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 55-56; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 39, 71-72, 106-110; Eber, *Chinese and Jews*, 46-48, 51; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 98-106.

Chapter 2: 1938-1943: “An Uncertain Life in Another World”⁴⁴

In this chapter, I argue that the manner in which the German and Austrian refugee groups experienced these first five years in Shanghai was a direct result of the contrasting nature of their encounters with the Nazi regime. I first discuss what the refugees encountered in Shanghai, focusing how life in Germany prepared the German Jewish refugee group for what they encountered in the city. I then analyze how the Austrian Jewish refugee group experienced Shanghai. Their experiences in Germany and Austria informed how the Jewish refugees encountered Shanghai.

The German and Austrian refugees, particularly the adults, experienced great difficulty coping with the sheer foreignness of their new surroundings. The noise, the smells, the crowds, the filth, the humid climate, and the visible poverty of the Chinese populace proved overwhelming and disturbing to the new arrivals. They were received by members of the Shanghai Jewish community and local Jewish relief organizations as they disembarked at the Bund, the harbor side financial district of Hongkew. From there, they were loaded onto trucks and taken to the variety of locations set up for them by the relief agencies. The earliest 1938 arrivals were placed in houses rented by relief organizations. As the number of refugee arrivals increased, Sir Victor Sassoon—an eminent member of the Baghdadi Jewish community—donated the first floor of his Embankment Building, a luxury office building on the Bund, as temporary housing for the refugees. By the early months of 1939, ship after ship filled with an average of seven hundred refugees each docked at the Bund. The Embankment Building,

⁴⁴ Phrase from Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 29.

having served as a refugee shelter for a little over one year, could not hold such numbers. A more permanent form of refugee housing, the Ward Road *Heim* (“home,” that is, a refugee shelter), set up by the International Committee for Granting Relief to European Refugees (the IC, or Komor Committee), opened in Hongkew in January, 1939. The Ward Road *Heim* served as a reception center, soup kitchen, and housing unit for refugees. It also functioned as the prototype for later *Heime*, which opened as the Ward Road *Heim* filled up over the course of the first half of 1939.⁴⁵

Transitioning from the luxury liners to the Embankment Building and the *Heime* was a dramatic, often traumatic, experience for the new arrivals, particularly for adults. Although he never stayed in the Embankment Building, Horst Levin did survey the premises. He remembers seeing tiny rooms filled with wooden cots, and thirty to forty bunk beds pushed together in each of the floor’s small offices. Clothing and blankets were hung off the sides of the beds. There were no other furnishings in the rooms.⁴⁶ Ernest Heppner and his mother, both part of the German refugee group, spent their first weeks in Shanghai in the Embankment Building.

All new arrivals were issued a blanket and bed sheets, a tin dish, a cup,

⁴⁵ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 43, 44; Krasno and Marcus, *Survival in Shanghai*, 12; Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago*, 33-34; Doris Grey, “Doris Grey’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 122; Eric Reisman, “Eric Reisman’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 79; Otto Schnepf, “Otto Schnepf’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 95; Alfred Kohn, “Alfred Kohn’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 99; Susette Tauber, “Susette Tauber,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 191; Charles L. Klotzer, “Charles L. Klotzer,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 100; Trude Schwarz Kutner, “Trude Schwarz Kutner,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 139; Kurt and Inge Nussbaum, “Kurt and Inge Nussbaum,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 159; Gary Silvers, “Gary Silvers,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 182; Susette Tauber, “Susette Tauber,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 191; Alfred S. Weissenberg, “Alfred S. Weissenberg,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 206; Ralph Harpuder, “Ralph Harpuder,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 80; Hecht, *Invisible Walls*, 79; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 85-86.

⁴⁶ Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 23.

and a spoon. How curious, I thought: this morning we ate breakfast in the dining room of the *Potsdam*, served by uniformed stewards, at a properly set table with the silverware laid out, and now we are queuing up in a soup kitchen. Nothing demonstrated more clearly the drastic change that had taken place in our lives than the sight of us dressed in our good, heavy European clothes...waiting in line with tin pots in hand for our next meal...In the reception center the immigrants were almost paralyzed. The older ones sat stunned on their bunk beds. Some cried and were near nervous breakdowns. They did not know what to do and were afraid to even leave the building.⁴⁷

The *Heime* fit up to 150 people per room, a total of between 300 and 600 people each. They boasted a few washing basins, and a shower/bath unit which cost one Shanghai cent to use—a price few of the new arrivals could afford. German refugee Ursula Bacon described the bathrooms facilities as an “obscene row” of buckets on an open rooftop, sheltered by a tin, shed-like roof and a flimsy curtain in full view of the neighboring rooftops.⁴⁸ The huge rooms were filled with wobbly steel bunk beds covered by thin mattresses with only sheets hung over ropes tied to the walls between the beds to create a semblance of privacy. The sanitary and other conditions in the *Heime* horrified the now penniless refugees. German refugee Fred Marcus, fourteen when he arrived in Shanghai, wrote:

I recall a bare table of deeply scarred, unfinished wood. Someone passed down an open piece of white bread with two sardines on margarine, and I

⁴⁷ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 40-41; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 93; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 102-103.

⁴⁸ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 37-40.

vividly remember a chipped enamel mug of tepid, pre-sweetened tea. The tears ran down my cheeks and mingled with the thin tea as I was absolutely and suddenly overwhelmed by my situation. At that moment, the fact of my refugee status became a reality to me.⁴⁹

Austrian refugee Ilie Wacs recalls that the *Heim* at which his parents and his sisters were dropped off “was filled with mostly the old, the ill, and those that couldn’t take care of themselves. It was a jarring introduction to life in Shanghai, having just come off a luxury cruise liner...to find ourselves being herded like cattle into the over-crowded, hot human warehouse.”⁵⁰ Indeed, German refugee Ruth Sumner recalled that “There I had been in first class luxurious Japanese ship, and then we were in a home with army cots and blankets.”⁵¹ Older refugees responded especially poorly to their new environs. German refugee Ralph Harpuder’s grandmother lamented, “If I have to stay here more than one night I will commit suicide.”⁵² German refugee Gerard Heimann, a young boy upon his arrival, remembers being overjoyed by the amount of children in the Kinchow Road *Heim*. His mother, however, took one look at their surroundings and began to cry.⁵³ German refugee Gary Silver’s parents were in a state of shock,⁵⁴ and both of German refugee Ursula Bacon’s parents cried in front of her as her father lamented “Good God in heaven...what kind of a hellhole is this place? ...What have I done to us? What?”⁵⁵ As for Ilie Wacs, his family lasted one night at the

⁴⁹ Krasno and Marcus, *Survival in Shanghai*, 12.

⁵⁰ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 44.

⁵¹ Ruth Sumner, “Ruth Sumner’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 123.

⁵² Ralph Harpuder, “Ralph Harpuder,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 66.

⁵³ Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 50.

⁵⁴ Gary Silvers, “Gary Silvers,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 182.

⁵⁵ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 37-40.

Heim. “The next morning, Papa yelled, ‘Out! We don’t live in a place like this!’”⁵⁶

Those refugees who could afford to leave the *Heime*—some spent the duration of their time in Shanghai in these homes—settled all over Shanghai. Yet, most settled in Hongkew because the rents there were cheap. Approximately 10,000 Jewish refugees lived in Hongkew by August, 1939. Competition for jobs was fierce in the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-governmental setting that was Shanghai. Only 33% of refugees in Shanghai were able to support themselves after arriving. To earn additional income, refugee families sold their European belongings. Children, out of necessity, ceased their formal education in early adolescence to contribute to the family income, and female wage-earning was also quite common in refugee families struggling to make ends meet. At this point gendered and generational differences in adaptability begin to emerge. It is also the period in which different German and Austrian responses to the new environment were most pronounced.⁵⁷

Although the majority of the refugees settled in Hongkew, their numbers were constantly in flux: some settled in Hongkew before moving on to other areas of the city, some returned to Hongkew from other areas of the city to avoid feelings of isolation. Hongkew homes were typically row houses located in lanes

⁵⁶ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 44; 11; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 114, 127, 29, 130, 132, 136; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 123-124; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 105-107.

⁵⁷ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews*, 116; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 125; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 102; Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 19-22; Kurt and Inge Nussbaum, “Kurt and Inge Nussbaum,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 160; David Kranzler, “Women in the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Community,” in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. Sibylle Quack (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 135.

of similar homes one city block deep with stone walls separating each row. Ursula Bacon vividly described one of these rows:

Cement garbage bins with heavy iron lids hulked against the wall every sixth row to accommodate the tenants' refuse. Boiling under the hot sun and steamed by the humidity...was the combination of rotting fruit peelings, spoiled leftovers, raw bones, dead cats, drowned puppies, carcasses of rats, and the lifeless body of a newborn baby, all fermented with human feces and sprinkled with urine from chamber pot...Long before the garbage bins were emptied, they reached a state of overflowing ripeness, spilled their foul contents into the alleys, and hosted swarms of fat green-and-purple bodied flies.⁵⁸

These homes typically consisted of one room—often so small that families could not unpack all of their belongings—within a larger house holding one family per room. These houses featured tiny kitchens, and covered buckets (“honeypots”) which served as toilets, some houses having only one honeypot for all of the tenants. These honeypots were emptied daily by Chinese men (“honeypot coolies”) who made their income selling the human waste as fertilizer. Because gas and electricity were so expensive and so restricted in Shanghai, and because stoves were so rare in Hongkew homes, most cooking was done on Japanese hibachi stoves. A charcoal mix, made up of coal dust, cinders, ashes, and wet straw, made starting and maintaining a fire an ordeal in and of itself. Because of the heavy smoke emitted by the stove, most cooking had to take place outdoors in

⁵⁸ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 43-48, 50, 58, 65-67, 116.

the lanes outside the row houses. Many refugee women passed out from smoke inhalation when weather forced them indoors.

Some refugees found housing in the French Concession or nicer parts of the International Settlement. Ilse Greening, who arrived in Shanghai with her mother as a young adult, wrote that she, her mother, and her husband “lived very primitively. My mother was used to better things. We were young and for us it was an adventure. It did not bother us that we didn’t have running water and no heat, and not too much to eat...My mother never complained, never, but for her it must have been very difficult.”⁵⁹ Ursula Bacon, whose family moved from their Hongkew home to the French Concession after an influx of money, described their new quarters as “the Garden of Eden compared to [their home in Hongkew].”⁶⁰

As they moved around Shanghai, refugees earned their livings in a variety of ways. Some were forced to live off money from relief organizations, while others used relief money to open their own businesses. The Rehabilitation Fund, a revolving fund set up by Sir Victor Sassoon, financed refugee business ventures. By December 1939, over 1,300 people, achieved some level of self-sufficiency with the help of the Rehabilitation Fund. Some managed to get money out of Germany or had money deposited in the Chase National Bank of New York before leaving for Shanghai. Others received money from relatives overseas, though this well dried up as the Japanese entrance into World War II isolated Shanghai from communications with the outside world. Many refugees sold their

⁵⁹ Hebert and Ilse Greening, “Hebert and Ilse Greening’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 107-110; 122.

⁶⁰ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 61; Kranzler; “Women in the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Community,” *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 134.

European belongings for extra money, some reselling at a thrift shop set up for the refugees by the Komor Committee. Some also earned money by partnering with other refugee families to become landlords. The refugees used the money earned through renting and reselling, and from overseas connections to open additional business and to create additional funds. However, there was never quite enough money for a comfortable existence.⁶¹

In Shanghai, many men opened restaurants and coffee shops, worked as tailors, butchers, furriers, barbers, doctors, advertising agents, pharmacists, performers, shoemakers, delivery men, and repairmen. Business owners typically ran their businesses with the help of their families. For others, generating an income remained a struggle. Earning a living was especially difficult for men whom had had high professional standing back home. Theodor Friedrichs remembered “a former German judge...He...was an eminent expert in his field and had written a few authoritative textbooks on legal problems. Here in Shanghai he felt lost...He ended by suicide.”⁶² Doctors in particular struggled as a result of the large numbers—around 200—of refugee physicians in Shanghai. Trude Schwartz Kutner observed one of these men “foraging from garbage cans and talking only to himself. Out of respect, people still called him Herr Doctor.”⁶³ Ernest Culman’s physician father quickly became depressed. “We were often

⁶¹ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews*, 96-97, 116; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 125; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 102; Hebert and Ilse Greening, “Hebert and Ilse Greening’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 109; Henry S. Conston, “Henry S. Conston,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 31; Ursula Gaupp, “Ursula Gaupp,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 60; Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago*, 38; Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 9-10, 19-22, 33, 37-38, 45-48; Eisfelder, “Chinese Exile,” 8-9, 13-18, 32; Kracauer, “Memories and Images,” 4-5, 11-14, 16-25, 48; Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 43-48, 50, 58, 62, 65-67, 116; Grebenshikoff, *Once My Name was Sara*, 49-50, 53-56; Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 77-89, 100-104, 107.

⁶² Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 125-127.

⁶³ Trude Schwarz Kutner, “Trude Schwarz Kutner,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 140.

worried that he would commit suicide. My memory of my father in Shanghai is seeing him seated in a chair, mouth half open, sleeping most of the day away. So terribly depressed that he couldn't support his family...All his dreams just collapsed one right after the other...It was just horrible, and it really affected us.”⁶⁴ Ernest Eick had a similar experience:

My father had no manual skills, and without employment he began a descent into a dark depression that led to his becoming abusive to the family...[he] became mentally unstable. He, along with many Germans, could not adjust to the terrible living conditions. He also found it hard to accept the loss of everything he had worked so hard for in Germany. He was a man who considered himself more German than Jew, so assimilated that he bought and decorated a Christmas tree every year, now living as a refugee in filth and disease.⁶⁵

Similarly, Friedrichs remembered:

One could observe in Shanghai how differently people would react to the same situation. One group began, after a short period of acclimatization, to look for possibilities of making a living, often quite different from what they had done before. Often they succeeded in building a steady, even satisfactory livelihood for themselves and their families. Others...relied on the support of their relatives in America and other countries. Finally, they landed in a camp...and had to be supported by the community. This last was the unhappiest group, because they had given up all hope. These

⁶⁴ Ernest Culman, “Ernest Culman’s Oral History, *Exodus to Shanghai*, 100, 103.

⁶⁵ Ernest Eick, “Ernest Eick,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 36-67.

people simply deteriorated...Men who in Germany had managed large enterprises, when deprived of their normal surroundings, could succeed at nothing here, while formerly insignificant clerks suddenly developed leadership abilities.⁶⁶

As hinted at by the tales of professional men who rapidly disintegrated upon losing their professional identity in Shanghai, this was not simply an issue of career. German Jewish men were socialized to base their status and identity upon their profession. This strong identification meant that without their profession, these men could no longer conceive of their own purpose, and often lost their ability to function.⁶⁷

As German men struggled with this loss of professional identity, German women stepped up to meet the challenges of living in Shanghai. The male, upper middle class Dr. Friedrichs thought this astonishing:

When [the women] saw that, due to the laziness or ineptitude of their husbands, the household would falter, women who in their homeland had simply been good housewives now took bolder initiatives. They discovered in themselves unexpected abilities and took care of the economic needs of the family while their husbands tied an apron around their hips and did the domestic work. Some of them even seemed to enjoy this reversal of roles.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 125-127.

⁶⁷ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 367; Sibylle Quack, "Introduction," in *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, ed. Sibylle Quack (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9; Kranzler, "Women in the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Community," *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 133; Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 1998), 64.

⁶⁸ Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 116-117, 125-127.

German Jewish women had been unwittingly preparing themselves to become household heads and equal, if not primary, earners for years before they set foot in Shanghai. Beginning in 1933, Jewish men were forced out of public sector work and cultural production. In 1938, they were barred from the workplace altogether. From 1935, Jews could no longer hire gentile maids under the age of forty-five. Jewish women made up for the difference in household income by becoming wage earners themselves, and they shouldered the household work as well. Where Nazi ideology restricted gentile women to childbearing, homemaking, and churchgoing, it (unintentionally, of course) opened up new roles for women in the Jewish family. With existentially lost husbands, few resources, and little to no household help, the attacks on Jewish access to domestic help and incomes allowed Jewish women to step, unknowingly, into the position of head of the family. This situation, created by Nazi legislation, accustomed German Jewish women to working and living under strained and stressful conditions. Indeed, observers of training programs put in place to prepare German Jewry for life as émigrés noted the accommodating and adaptable nature of Jewish women, in comparison to men. Husbands, for their part, were increasingly expected by both their wives and the Jewish community to pitch in around the house, but only minimally, as both men and women balked at the idea of the “domestication of men.” Cooking caused particular stress because of tight budgets and limited access to household help. Jewish newspapers advised housewives to consider vegetarian menus because they were cheaper, healthier, and avoided the kosher meat problem. This pattern was continued in Shanghai as

refugee women struggled to cook on hibachi stoves, and frequently turned to Shanghai newspapers for recipes and support. Of husbands, Jewish newspapers simply asked them to limit their expectations of what their wives could accomplish with no household help and a reduced income. Nazi legislation prepared German Jewish women for the challenges of maintaining a household and supporting a family in Shanghai.⁶⁹

While some refugee couples opened businesses together, other refugee women earned incomes as individuals. They baked, opened restaurants, and worked at banks, hospitals, print manufacturing companies, and as secretaries and receptionists. Thirteen year old Inge Nussbaum and her family lived on her mother's earnings. "She was relatively well paid for her work, knitting and making clothes. When she worked, my father cooked and did the housework."⁷⁰ Despite the necessity for female labor, it was not always a comfortable reality. Ursula Bacon's mother, for example, worked as a dressmaker. Her father, a once solidly middle class German man, was uncomfortable with the fact that his wife worked, and with her choice of profession.⁷¹ Moreover, there were some female professions looked down upon more than that of a dressmaker. Some refugee women worked as bar girls and prostitutes to make ends meet. Although not all bar girls were prostitutes and not all prostitutes were bar girls, the two often went

⁶⁹ Trude Maurer and Allison Brown, trans., "From Everyday Life to a State of Emergency: Jews in Weimar and Nazi Germany," in *Jewish Daily Life in Germany: 1618-1945*, ed. Marion Kaplan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 276, 280, 282, 286-287, 290-298, 301-304, 318-319, 324; Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 7, 30, 54-55, 59, 64; Sibylle Quack, "Introduction," *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 9; Marion Kaplan, "Sisterhood Under Siege: Feminism and anti-Semitism in Germany, 1904-1938," in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi German*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Anita Grossman, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 191.

⁷⁰ Kurt and Inge Nussbaum, "Kurt and Inge Nussbaum," *Shanghai Remembered*, 165.

⁷¹ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 51-53, 57-58, 61-62, 75, 95-96, 113-114.

hand in hand. Horst Levin describes bar girls as "...attractive young women who sat at the tables and bars and talked with male customers who bought them drinks...The 'cocktail' the bartenders served the bar girls was tea instead of liquor, and the customers' drink money would go to the girls at the end of the night...Bartenders often doubled as pimps for the bar girls."⁷² Gerard Kohbieter, a sixteen year old who spent most of his time with the "artistic" crowd, remembered that some members of the community looked down on the bar girls simply because they worked in a bar.⁷³ As for prostitution, Horst Levin writes that "In Europe, the idea of a Jewish prostitute was unthinkable. Here in Shanghai, the old moral standards could not hold. Few people condemned those women who did what they had to and saved their families from starvation."⁷⁴

In addition to entrepreneurship, odd jobs, and the "oldest profession," many refugees made extra money by selling what few possessions they managed to bring out of Germany or buy on board the liners which brought them to Shanghai. Some fortunate refugees, before they left Germany, shipped their possessions to Shanghai in huge wooden crates (which, according to Ernest Culman, were "basically the size of a room") called lifts.⁷⁵ Those able to do so packed everything they could fit and had the lift shipped to Shanghai. Lifts were typically filled with bulky European furniture, heavy European clothing, valuables, and kitchenware rendered unusable by the state of most refugees' kitchens. Unfortunately many of the lifts never arrived. Some, shipped on German

⁷² Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 72, 90.

⁷³ Gérard Kohbieter, "Gérard Kohbieter 's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 90.

⁷⁴ Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 72, 90.

⁷⁵ Ernest Culman, "Ernest Culman's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 23, 68, 101.

vessels, were detained on the high seas as the Second World War began. Two years after Ilse Grebenschikoff's family shipped their lift, they were contacted in Shanghai by the Japanese authorities then in power in Singapore, where the British originally detained the ship transporting their lift. "They planned to auction off the contents of the Lift, unless we paid them about One Thousand U.S. Dollars in storage fees. My father wrote to them that we did not have the money. We never found out what happened to our things. Everything connecting us to our past lives was gone."⁷⁶ Ilie Wacs' family's lift was on board a ship commandeered by the Germans. "Everything was gone. Mutti wept fiercely. It was one of the few times she allowed herself to break."⁷⁷ Melitta Colland's family's lift, containing many valuables, made it as far as Italy. "And that's where it was lost and never seen again. Had that lift arrived, we could have been living from what we sold for ten years."⁷⁸ Other lifts simply disappeared into the chaos of the Second World War, and the refugees had to accept that their belongings were gone. Those whose lifts did arrive were re-united with their European lives, and were able to sell enough generate a livable income.⁷⁹

Often, however, money earned from selling belongings did not suffice, and families made the difficult decision to send their children to work instead of school. Ernest Culman's brother and Ruth Sumner both ended their educations at

⁷⁶ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 38, 44.

⁷⁷ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 62.

⁷⁸ Melitta Colland, "Melitta Colland's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 68.

⁷⁹ Ursula Gaupp, "Ursula Gaupp," *Shanghai Remembered*, 60; Ralph Harpuder, "Ralph Harpuder," *Shanghai Remembered*, 66; Margit Zippert Sarne, "Margit Zippert Sarne," *Shanghai Remembered*, 173; Gary Silvers, "Gary Silvers," *Shanghai Remembered*, 182; Steven Low, "Steven Low," *Shanghai Remembered*, 147; Kurt and Inge Nussbaum, "Kurt and Inge Nussbaum," *Shanghai Remembered*, 164; Charles L. Klotzer, "Charles L. Klotzer," *Shanghai Remembered*, 102; Alfred Kohn, "Alfred Kohn," *Shanghai Remembered*, 110; Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago*, 52; Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 31.

the age of fourteen. Culman recalled that increasing numbers of children left the refugee school at the ages of thirteen or fourteen because their parents did not make enough money to survive. Those families who did have the economic wherewithal to send their children to school had many to choose from. Families who wished to send their children to Jewish schools had two options: the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association (the SJYA), also known as the Kadoorie School, and the Shanghai Jewish School (the SJS). Both were established for the Shanghai Jewish communities by Sir Horace Kadoorie. The first refugees to arrive in 1938 sent their children to the Shanghai Jewish School. However, as more refugees arrived, the SJS became overcrowded. For this reason, and because the SJS was located far from Hongkew, Kadoorie opened the SJYA in Hongkew on November 1, 1939 with an enrollment of approximately 600. The Kadoorie School offered a secular curriculum taught in English, with languages and Jewish religious subjects integrated into the curriculum. After Pearl Harbor, Kadoorie, as an “enemy national,” was no longer in charge of the school, and its new Japanese directors introduced German and Japanese to the curriculum. Most of the teachers at the SJYA were excellent, and the school, following the English model, maintained a high educational standard. Most refugee children attended the Kadoorie School, and they profess to have had positive experiences there. However, the SJS, perceived by both students and parents as offering the superior education, was the more desirable of the two. Unlike the SJYA, which was tuition-free, the SJS charged a five dollar per month tuition, a price families struggled to afford. Some, such as Ilse Grebenschikoff’s parents, wanting to

provide their children with the best education available, paid the tuition, while others, such as Evelyn Rubin, attended on scholarship.⁸⁰

Other families turned to Catholic schooling. Ursula Bacon attended the Sisters of Sacre Coeur on scholarship. Though her mother expressed concern at the Catholic education, her father saw no harm in it. Gertrude Kracauer sent her son to the Catholic missionary St. Francis Xavier School. Though concerned with how Catholic school would affect her son's Jewish identity, Kracauer assumed that hers' and her husband's parental influence would overcome the Catholic instruction (she was not entirely correct). Other educational choices included Russian schools, and the Western District Public School in the International Settlement.⁸¹

The Jewish refugee children of Shanghai saw their educations cut off by economic realities and disrupted by the Japanese occupation of Shanghai. Meanwhile, their parents saw the education of their children compromised by economic necessity and the ideological constraints of the chosen institution. German refugee children were in the ideal position to adapt to these education realities, however. In 1933 it became almost impossible for Jewish students to attend high schools. Elementary schools remained open, however, children attending these schools struggled with anti-Semitism from both their peers and their teachers. This left Jewish children to turn increasingly schools run by the

⁸⁰ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 389-392; Maurer, "From Everyday Life to a State of Emergency," *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, 303; Ernest Culman, "Ernest Culman's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 104-105, 107; Ruth Sumner, "Ruth Sumner's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 124; Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name was Sara*, 53, 65-67; Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 77-89, 100-104, 107.

⁸¹ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 43-48, 50, 58, 62, 65-67, 116; Kracauer, "Memories and Images," 4-5, 11-14, 16-25, 48.

Jewish community, or to private instruction. This experience of dependency upon Jewish run schools and exclusion from mainstream schools prepared Jewish refugee children for the isolation and dependency on Jewish relief organizations and schools they would encounter in Shanghai. Further, the experience of being a school age child in Nazi Germany trained Jewish children to take radical changes—from new teachers, to new classmates, to new curricula, to the disappearance of whole families to emigration—in stride. Discrimination in Germany prepared them for the Shanghai experiences of interrupted education. German Jewish parents, however, tied their social aspirations to their childrens' education. Therefore, having to force their children to end their education, and having to send their children to a school perceived as inferior, dealt a great blow to the self-esteem and sense of status of many German-Jewish parents.⁸²

Participation in camps, and scout and youth groups provided another means of cultural continuity for German Jewish refugee youth in Shanghai. In Germany, these groups helped to foster in youth a sense of independence, and a willingness to question authority in their members. Adolescents felt empowered by these groups to question the judgments of their parents who hoped to remain in Germany. As the older generation clung to the past, youth groups encouraged adolescents to look beyond Germany for their future. In Shanghai, many adolescents joined scout groups, which, according to Ralph Hirsch, were almost entirely comprised of German and Austrian children.⁸³ Meanwhile some were lucky enough to go to children's camps. Evelyn Rubin, in her Girl Guides group,

⁸² Maurer, "From Everyday Life to a State of Emergency," *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, 291, 296, 298, 302; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 3; Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 104.

⁸³ Ralph Hirsch, "Ralph Hirsch's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 115.

learned the all important skill of Morse code,⁸⁴ while Illo Heppner's Jewish youth group introduced her to other Central European teenagers and to her future husband, Ernest.⁸⁵ For children and adolescents growing up in Nazi Germany, scout, camp, and youth groups served as a vital part of growing up. By 1939, sixty percent of all German Jews between the ages of 12 and 25 were involved in one of these groups. These groups gave children and youth some diversion—in the form of vacations, hikes, and camping trips—from the harsh realities of the times. They provided a haven from the stress, tension and confusing nature of life in Shanghai by providing young people with continuity and camaraderie at a time when German Jewish youth must have felt that their world was coming apart.⁸⁶

As schools and youth groups provided a sense of continuity and community for young people, adults looked to theater and culture, as they had in Nazi Germany, for a haven from the stresses of Shanghai. As the refugees primarily lived in Hongkew, they gradually changed it from a bombed out slum to a “Little Vienna,” with European-style architecture and storefronts. As the refugees recreated the aesthetics of Central Europe, they longed for the cultural trappings of that world. Luckily for them, within the Shanghai refugee community were an “uncommonly large” number of actors, actresses, singers, musicians, and writers, including well known performers such as Fritz Melchior, Eva Baruch, Lili Flohr, Max Kuttner, and Alfred Wittenberg, who often put on solo performances. Cabarets and variety shows, popularly referred to as *Bunte Abends*, were

⁸⁴ Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 95.

⁸⁵ Illo Heppner, “Shanghai: An Eyewitness Report,” *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 141.

⁸⁶ Maurer, “From Everyday Life to a State of Emergency,” *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, 304; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 3, 5-7, 11; Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 109-112.

especially popular as they could be performed anywhere cheaply, and did not require costumes or sets. German language theater was extremely popular, though the cultured refugees who made up the audiences were often critical of these performances. In all, over 60 German language theatrical productions were produced by the refugees, in addition to the refugee theater group performances of *King Lear* in German-accented English and the Yiddish theater created by the Polish Jews. The refugee community also published newspapers. Between 1939 and 1941, the German speaking refugee community supported three separate daily newspapers, in addition to daily and monthly publications, and two publications of the refugee medical community. Though two of the dailies closed folded after Pearl Harbor, the *Shanghai Jewish Chronicle* (later called the *Shanghai Echo*) continued publication until the 1949 Communist takeover of the city. While certainly dramatic and in its scope and accomplishments, and impressive in light of the economic conditions of the refugee community, the artistic and cultural output of this community are not altogether a surprise. As the Nazi authorities banned Jews from participation in cultural activities in Germany, Jews in turn created their own cultural life and community. The Jewish Cultural Association, founded in the spring of 1933, offered entertainment to Jewish audiences, employed Jewish artists unemployed as a result of racial decrees, and provided a semblance of leisure and normality for its almost 70,000 members. Just as the Jewish Cultural Association provided an escape for German Jews under Nazi rule, the creation of a German cultural world in Shanghai provided the Central European refugees with an escape from the stresses of their daily lives.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 363-369, 372; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 105-107; Eber,

As hard as they tried to reconstruct their mostly urban middle class German lives, however, there were two factors (beyond, of course, their poverty) which kept them constantly aware of the fact that they were not living in Germany, but were refugees in Shanghai: the climate, and the hygienic standards. The humid climate, with temperatures that soared to over 100 degrees in the summer, winter temperatures which hovered around the freezing point, and a dramatic typhoon season added stress, health related concerns, and feelings of displacement to their already disrupted lives. Sigmund Tobias wrote:

It was...difficult to get used to the summer heat in Shanghai. By midafternoon the sun-baked pavement became soft and gooey enough to stick to the tires of cars and trucks...The intense humidity made the inside walls in our house so damp that drops of water actually dribbled down from the ceiling...At night the houses felt like ovens giving off the stored-up heat collected during the day. We all carried fans with us, but they helped only as long as we actually fanned ourselves, and we usually got tired of that pretty soon.⁸⁸

Forming a perfect partnership with this harsh climate were the sanitary conditions of Shanghai. Indeed, when the Whangpoo overflowed during the typhoon season, it flooded the living rooms of refugees, leaving the filth of the streets behind in the refugees' homes, along with destroyed personal effects. Much of the illnesses the refugees experienced can be attributed to their ignorance, and the ignorance of refugee doctors, of how to cope with the hygienic conditions in Shanghai.

Wartime Shanghai, 123, 127-130, 132-133; Irene Eber, *Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 14-15; Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 46.

⁸⁸ Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 18.

Friedrichs wrote that “What we [German physicians] urgently needed was information about diseases that were common in this subtropical country, but about which we were completely ignorant...But intensive study of a good textbook on tropical diseases quickly filled this vacuum, and we were...able to handle all problems that could occur.”⁸⁹ In addition, the unclean water supply created serious health risks. In an attempt to help new refugees deal with the sanitary realities of Shanghai, the Komor Committee, the International Committee for Granting Relief to European Refugees, advised the refugees: “1) Don’t remove your hat in the sun. 2) Never drink unboiled water. 3) Don’t eat any raw fruits and vegetables.”⁹⁰ All fruits and vegetables had to be boiled before consumption. All of the refugees carefully noted their frustrations with having to boil all fruits and vegetables, and the litany of diseases that they, their families, and the community fell victim to. Ernest Culman remembered a story of disease which achieved urban legend status within the refugee community, “There’s [a] couple...the man caught rabies...As they were taking him to the hospital, he kissed his wife goodbye. He died, and a few days later, she had rabies and she died. I didn’t know these people, I just know of them. You had to be so careful.”⁹¹

Although life was hard—especially in the weeks and months immediately following their arrival—the German refugees did achieve some manner of normalcy and stability in Shanghai. Historians David Kranzler, Marcia Ristaino,

⁸⁹ Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 98-99, 115.

⁹⁰ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 285, 297-303.

⁹¹ Ernest Culman, “Ernest Culman’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 101; Gérard Kohbieter, “Gérard Kohbieter’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 88; Curt Walter Hort, “Curt Walter Hort,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 86; Harry Lowenberg, “Harry Lowenberg,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 154; Margit Zippert Sarne, “Margit Zippert Sarne,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 173; Susette Tauber, “Susette Tauber,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 191.

and Irene Eber paint a picture of refugee life in this period as bleak and desperate. They view Shanghai as having wrought massive change, or upheaval, to the daily lives of all of the refugees. Although the move to Shanghai introduced dramatic changes to the lives of the refugees, for the German Jews it was not the upheaval which Kranzler, Ristaino, and Eber portray it to be. That change took place much before the refugees had any idea of moving to Shanghai. That change occurred under Nazi rule. Shanghai merely functioned as a space in which the processes begun in Germany—the generational gap, the increasing self-sufficiency of the Jewish community in response to isolation, and the subversion of traditional gender norms—could grow and intensify in scope. However, while Nazi legislation created the upheaval which readied German Jews for the hardships of Shanghai, the opposite held true for the Austrian refugees. For this refugee group, one suddenly and dramatically confronted by Nazi violence and accompanying need to emigrate, the move to Shanghai was the dramatic upheaval described by Kranzler, Ristaino, and Eber.

The Austrian and German refugees dealt with the same circumstances over the course of their first five years in Shanghai. The difference between the two groups lies in how they experienced those circumstances. The contrasts are subtle, and typically come out in the details remembered and the tone used to remember them. The Austrian memoirs and oral histories are more hopeless and emotional in tone, and more dramatically rendered than those of the German group. For example, the Austrian refugees tended to make broad, sweeping, negative statements about the refugee experience. Trude Schwarz Kutner, who

arrived in Shanghai when she was sixteen years old, told her interviewer that “This is a personal account of a very sad and tragic time.”⁹² Ingrid Wilmot, who arrived in Shanghai when she was still a child, wrote that “Foreigners in Shanghai...did well, but not the refugees of 1938, 1939, and 1940.”⁹³ This inaccurate statement conveys feelings of exclusion, isolation, and inferiority far greater than any the Germans experienced. Indeed, Austrian Jews remembered many aspects of life in Shanghai which German Jews did not. The German group saved the dramatic emotion for their recollections of their lives in Germany and their 1943-1945 lives in Hongkew. For example, Otto Schnepf, sixteen years old when he arrived in Shanghai noted that “We moved around a lot, we lived in a large number of places, the sort of room where three slept, and one shared kitchen and [a] bathroom.”⁹⁴ His specific notation of the impermanence of living situations in Shanghai sits in stark contrast to the casual manner in which the German memoirists discuss the issue. The Austrian refugees, not having experienced the same prolonged Nazi assaults on their careers, households, and finances, saw this living situation as difficult and shocking where the Germans saw it as commonplace.⁹⁵

The Austrians also differed from the Germans in their concern about status and divisions within the Jewish refugee community. Otto Schnepf noted that at the Shanghai Jewish school children from the various Jewish communities of

⁹² Trude Schwarz Kutner, “Trude Schwarz Kutner,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 137, 139.

⁹³ Ingrid Wilmot, “Ingrid Wilmot,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 213.

⁹⁴ Otto Schnepf, “Otto Schnepf’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 95-97.

⁹⁵ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 101-102; Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 45-48; Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 8, 12-13; Evelyn Pike Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 74-75; Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 31-36; Lisbeth Loewenberg, “Lisbeth Loewenberg’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 93; Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, 124-125, 134-135, 141; Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 45-46, 50, 52-54, 64.

Shanghai did not mix.⁹⁶ Ingrid Wilmot, a child when she arrived in Shanghai, wrote that “the refugees were considered the lowest of the low. We were on the bottom rung of the social ladder among white foreigners in Shanghai.”⁹⁷

Meanwhile, Ilie Wacs wrote that “The German Jews looked down on the Austrians, and both looked down on the Polish.”⁹⁸ While the German refugees were without a doubt aware of their status within the refugee body, they did not make these sorts of comparison between themselves and the other groups, nor did they make note of feelings of condescension towards the Austrian or Polish groups. The German group, having experienced “social death” before fleeing to Shanghai, no longer focused on where they stood in relation to the other white communities of Shanghai.⁹⁹ They focused instead on jobs, school, health, and survival. The Austrians, not having undergone this slow erosion of status, were shocked to realize that they no longer had any.

Austrian Jewish adults, struggling to accept this lack of status, were affected mentally and emotionally to such an extent that Austrian recollections, primarily written and recorded by those who were children or adolescents when they arrived in Shanghai, show great awareness of the older generation’s mental and emotional state. While there were elements of this in the recollections of the German group, particularly in regard to the mental and emotional state of adult men, these notations were less pronounced, and less consistent. Deborah Strobin arrived in Shanghai at an age when she was too young to remember Austria. She

⁹⁶ Otto Schnepf, “Otto Schnepf’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 96.

⁹⁷ Ingrid Wilmot, “Ingrid Wilmot,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 216.

⁹⁸ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 64.

⁹⁹ Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair*, 5, 44.

did, however, remember her parents' behavior as they settled into life in Shanghai:

The filth...drove Mutti crazy. She could not stand the conditions in which we lived. She wanted everything in her house to be pristine, which was impossible...She spent her day hand washing our garments, ironing and mending...Mutti's never-ending, losing battle against the filth was...made worse by the fact that we lived two doors down from the children's hospital...Mutti was afraid of everything and everyone. Her fear was omnipotent as she strained to appear stoic, to create the illusion of a rosy life, a pleasant home. She couldn't hide her fear from me. I saw her biting her knuckles. There was always a knuckle between her teeth.¹⁰⁰

Vivian Jeanette Kaplan's mother had a similar experience. Her mother found "it difficult to adapt to the new life and quickly drifts into depression...She has said she has no more strength left to exist here or to start again somewhere else, that another voyage would kill her."¹⁰¹ Otto Schnepf observed that his domineering father, who had absolute power over the family in Austria, "simply lost power" through their emigration and resettlement. "He was no longer a figure of power." Meanwhile, his "mother was a very nervous and a rather pessimistic sort of person. She was, I think, very frightened, and very upset." With his father unsure of how to handle life, and his mother succumbing to fear, Schnepf had to make the big family decisions and become the main wage earner.¹⁰² Not prepared for losing their professional identity, maintaining a household in difficult conditions,

¹⁰⁰ Strobins and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 47-48, 59.

¹⁰¹ Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, 127-128, 137.

¹⁰² Otto Schnepf, "Otto Schnepf's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 97, 99.

frequent moves, or for the necessity of female labor, Austrian Jewish parents foundered, leaving their children to question their authority, and take the responsibility and support the household.

Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany used their experiences under Nazism to respond to Shanghai and create a sense of normalcy in their new home. The Austrians, however, had no such experience. They had not been socialized for the realities of life in Shanghai. As German Jewish women continued to perform their new roles within the family, Austrian Jewish women struggled mentally and emotionally to cope with the new gendered reality of family life in Shanghai. As refugee men slowly lost their status as head of the family and refugee women coped with their shifting role, refugee children and young adults adapted, responding to their parents' inability to adapt, creating and accentuating a generation gap between themselves and the older generation. The Hongkew period of refugee life in Shanghai functioned as an equalizing force between German and Austrian adult refugees. Both groups struggled to adapt to the conditions of Hongkew, as their children drifted farther and farther away into premature independence.

Chapter 3: 1943-1945: Little Vienna

On February 18, 1943, the following proclamation, signed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Shanghai Area and the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy, appeared in Shanghai newspapers:

- I. Due to military necessity, places of residence and business of the stateless refugees in the Shanghai area shall hereafter be restricted to the undermentioned area in the International Settlement. East of the line connecting Chaoufoong road, Muirhead Road, and Dent Road; West of Yangtzepoo Creek; North of the line connecting East Seward Road and Wayside Road; and South of the boundary of the International Settlement.
- II. The stateless refugees at present residing and/or carrying on business in the district other than the above area shall remove their places of residence and/or business into the area designated above by May 18, 1943. Permission must be attained from the Japanese authorities for the transfer, sale, purchase, or lease of rooms, houses, shops or any other establishments, which are situated outside the designated area and now being [sic] occupied or used by the stateless refugees.
- III. Persons other than the stateless refugees shall not remove into the area mentioned in Article I without permission of the Japanese authorities.

IV. Persons who will have violated this Proclamation or obstructed its reinforcement shall be liable to serve punishment.¹⁰³

The Japanese—or rather, Colonel Yasue and Captain Inuzuka, who were to become the Japanese military’s “Jewish experts”—read the anti-Semitic tract the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* while fighting alongside the White Russian forces in the Siberian Expedition of 1918. Yasue and Inuzuka did not merely parrot the Russian anti-Semitism, but based on those concepts, incorporated the myth global Jewish power and capital into Japanese military policy until the signing of the Tri-Partite Pact with Germany and Italy in September, 1940. Inuzuka and Yasue believed that American Jewish leaders had the power to pressure the Roosevelt administration on the behalf of Japan. To motivate these imaginary American Jewish leaders to act on Japan’s behalf, Yasue and Inuzuka believed that they could treat the Jewish refugees as hostages in a negotiation with American Jewry. The geopolitical situation changed after Hitler’s spring 1940 victory in Europe. This victory put European colonial holdings in East Asia under German control, putting Japan in the position to exploit the natural resources in those colonies. Japan thus no longer needed the support and capital of American Jewry after signing the Tri-Partite Pact. Yasue and Inuzuka’s policy of treating the Jewish refugees as pieces in a hostage negotiation became meaningless, and the Jewish refugees lost all political value to Japan. Now simply inconvenient foreigners,

¹⁰³ So quoted in Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 489-490. The Japanese defined a “stateless refugee” as one who “arrived in Shanghai since 1937 from Germany (including former Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland), Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, etc. and those who have no nationality at present.”

Japan abandoned their policy, and forced the refugees into Hongkew where their movements could be easily monitored and contained.¹⁰⁴

As the Jews moved into the “Designated Area,” they began their two year struggle with poverty, disease, and loss of status. The proclamation dealt a serious blow to those members of the refugee community living outside the borders of the Designated Area, especially those unlucky enough to be living virtually across the street from its boundaries. In the space of three months, they had to leave behind homes and businesses and relocate to much smaller, dirtier, and less well-equipped dwellings. “We moved out of our little apartment into the attic of a house where six or seven other families lived. The conditions were deplorable. The roof leaked into the attic; the house didn’t have any heat. We were insufferably cold in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer,” wrote Alfred Kohn.¹⁰⁵ Chinese and Japanese residents of Hongkew profited greatly from the sudden demand for housing. The inflated rents generated by this surge in demand forced refugee families to live together in rooms in houses holding one family per room, much as they had during their first months in Shanghai. Gertrude Kracauer described Hongkew as a “primitive,” over-priced, squalid and crowded square mile, “unrelieved by even a patch of green.”¹⁰⁶ Most cooking was done on the dangerous and difficult hibachi stoves. Even those lucky enough to have working ovens in communal kitchens had to contend with gas and electricity restrictions

¹⁰⁴ David G. Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa. *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype*. (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2000; orig. 1995) 9, 21-28, 76, 78-86, 89, 124-133; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 158-184; Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 55-56; Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary*, 6-9, 26-27, 30, 58-59, 74, 77, 91-92, 124-126.

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Kohn, “Alfred Kohn’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 137.

¹⁰⁶ Kracauer, “Memories and Images,” 41-42, 45, 46, 51, 56-57.

and fees. During the especially harsh winter of 1943-1944, electrical power was cut, so all heating and cooking materials promptly disappeared from the market only to reappear on the black market at up to one hundred times their original price. Bathrooms were shared by many families, if not all residents in the house. Most bathrooms consisted simply of a tiny room with a honey-pot or two. Few people were lucky enough to have a flush toilet, even an illegal one. The bathroom situation made life particularly unpleasant as “you had diarrhea all the time, no matter what you did...Everybody had diarrhea. Two, three, four, five times a night people had to run down on that stinking pot downstairs, and that was for the whole house. The stink was unbelievable, and if they didn’t come to pick up for a day, you know, it was a disaster,” recalled Alfred Kohn.¹⁰⁷ They bathed in cold water sinks, if they were lucky enough to have running water. As for hot water, that was a luxury.¹⁰⁸

Not all refugees were fortunate enough to find a room in a house, even an uncomfortable one. Many, including Gérard Kohbieter and Polish Jew Samuel Iwry, had to live in one of the *Heime*.¹⁰⁹ Kohbieter described the *Heim* he stayed in as two huge halls filled with between 80 and 100 people on double beds standing side by side. During the summers, residents of the *Heime* slept on the roof to avoid bedbugs (“You can’t sleep with bedbugs, man, it’s just impossible,” explained Kohbieter). Residents put their suitcases under their beds, and the *Heim* had an area where residents could store their extra belongings. There was a huge

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Kohn, “Alfred Kohn’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 524-525; Alfred Kohn, “Alfred Kohn,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 111.

¹⁰⁹ Iwry, though Polish, is referred to and quoted here for the experiential, rather than analytical, value of his recollections regarding the state of the *Heime* in this period.

dayroom with a stage, a billiard table, a barber, and long wooden tables with benches. Residents of the *Heim* came up with all manner of ways to make money. People sold frankfurters, cigarettes right out of the package, pastries, “and then of course,” in Kohbieter’s own words, “there was a Viennese cat that was selling coffee.” Tempers sometimes ran high, especially when a theft occurred, or when food supplies were low.¹¹⁰ Samuel Iwry had a more negative memory of the *Heime* during the Hongkew period. They “were just big buildings crammed with shelves for beds, and no privacy. Not even a peg to hang anything on...Most...in the *Heime*, had once been well-educated, professional people, and the existence we had been forced into by the Japanese was difficult...we felt that we were degenerating.”¹¹¹ In addition to the living conditions, those refugees, living in the *Heime* had to contend with condescension from those living outside such facilities. “Most of my friends did not live in the *Heime*,” wrote Ruth Sumner, “we did not associate much with them...I came from [the] upper-middle class, and I got to Shanghai, and we still went around with the same kind of people. That’s why I guess we did not associate with the kids in the *Heime*.”¹¹² This attitude towards the *Heime* and their residents extended to all those in need of help. “To admit that we were starving, to admit we needed help, these were not options,” wrote Ilie Wacs. “...Being seen at the Kitchen Fund carried a stigma...being seen carrying a soup-kitchen pail of food was not an option. We had our pride. We needed to keep it intact. It was the only thing keeping us alive.

¹¹⁰ Gérard Kohbieter, “Gérard Kohbieter’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 142-144.

¹¹¹ Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 119.

¹¹² Ruth Sumner, “Ruth Sumner’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 160.

Stubborn pride kept us going.”¹¹³ Lotte Schwarz recalled that she would have rather starved than accept food from the Red Cross.¹¹⁴ The refugees outside the *Heime* clung to their middle class status even as they too lost the material and behavioral trappings of that class.

Whether in the *Heime* or in one room of a multi-family house, the new, cramped living conditions exposed families and children to stresses and situations they had not experienced since their first months in Shanghai. The quality of the homes and the number of people living in each house assured that the refugees had little to no privacy. “Any time someone had a fight in the house, every word could be heard through the walls and open windows. Tempers were often short, people flared up at the slightest provocation...Living in cramped, unsanitary surroundings...took its toll on peoples’ health and nerves,” wrote Ilse Grebenschikoff.¹¹⁵ Illo Heppner wrote that “The lack of privacy, the physical closeness, the worries about where the next meager meal would come from, and the terrible heat caused constant tensions. Quarrels were usual in almost every family. One could always hear people screaming at one another.”¹¹⁶ Ernest Culman recalls that after the move to Hongkew, every place he lived was successively smaller and smaller. Yet his mother continued to do what Jewish publications had urged her to do years before in Germany, as she arranged and decorated each space to make it seem inviting.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Lotte Schwarz, “Lotte Schwarz’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 141.

¹¹⁵ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name was Sara*, 82.

¹¹⁶ Illo Heppner, “Shanghai: an Eyewitness Report,” *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 143.

¹¹⁷ “Ernest Culman, “Ernest Culman’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 130-131.

One of the more unpleasant experiences for those in Hongkew was the fact that many had nightly diarrhea and had to share a wooden bucket with many families. Parasitic ailments were so common that typical refugee greetings included inquiries as to how many times an acquaintance had used the bathroom that day. Yet, there were worse challenges facing the refugees in Hongkew. The harsh climate, the contaminated water supply, and the dirty, crowded living conditions were not conducive to a healthy existence. “It was impossible to stay clean and live up to German standards of hygiene,” wrote Ernest Eick.¹¹⁸ Poor nutrition and intestinal worms weakened the refugees’ immune systems, making them susceptible to all manner of disease, of which dysentery, typhus, typhoid, beri beri, malaria, tuberculosis, and cholera were among the most common. Refugee hospitals were of little help since they contained few Western medicines and medical supplies. Moreover, because Shanghai was so isolated during the war, doctors could not get supplies from outside the city. What was available in Shanghai was prohibitively expensive. Beyond diseases and sanitary concerns were the issues of starvation and malnutrition. Families struggled to feed their children, often giving up their own health to ensure their children’s.¹¹⁹

Some refugee women worked as prostitutes to feed themselves and their families. “During the war, not a lot but a few women associated with Japanese. Not too many. Many times it was the need for bread,” recalled Ilse Greening. “You know, it wasn’t fun or anything. They needed to support their families... It was...surprising, because most of the women were from middle-class Jewish

¹¹⁸ Ernest Eick, “Ernest Eick,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 36-37.

¹¹⁹ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 297-303, 356, 467-478.

families where you didn't expect it." One of Herbert Greenings patients admitted to him that she was a prostitute exclusively to the Japanese. She hated it, she told him, but the money was good and she needed it.¹²⁰ Vivienne Kaplan's mother met and befriended a woman named Herta on the ship to Shanghai. They lost touch after arriving, but one day at the market in Hongkew, she ran into Herta. Herta, who was now working as a prostitute, pretended not to recognize her, and quickly left. "Herta is not the only Jewish woman in Hongkew who has descended into prostitution. Poverty, hunger, and fear have forced many to make a living this way. Her obvious shame at the position in which she has found herself saddens me...she has had to rely only on herself, and who can blame her for that?"¹²¹ The shared experience of starvation and the difficulty of feeding one's family made these refugees extremely tolerant of a practice which would have been unacceptable back home. Not all, however, were tolerant of this practice. Ilse Grebenschikoff's house had one good bathroom, and next door lived two sisters from Germany, known to Grebenschikoff's parents solely as "Those Women." The sisters entertained Japanese officers in their room while their husbands were at work. They never seemed to lack food, money, or clothes. Grebenschikoff's mother forbade her daughters from using that bathroom and talking to the sisters.¹²² Sigmund Tobias encountered a woman in this line of work while visiting friends of his parents. In the middle of the visit, their daughter excused herself to "take care of something" with a Japanese man. Her son, refusing to make eye contact with Tobias, explained that the Japanese man was his mother's

¹²⁰ Hebert and Ilse Greening, "Herbert and Ilse Greening's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 149-150.

¹²¹ Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, 211-212.

¹²² Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 75.

“friend...She has many friends.” His parents later forbade him from having any further contact with that boy.¹²³

Making enough money for food and shelter was a struggle. As before, families stretched the boundaries of their creativity to make a living. Their ability to do so, however, was constrained by the difficulty of leaving the Designated Area. Japanese sentries guarded the entrances and exits to the area, and refugees needed a properly stamped pass to enter and exit. In charge of pass distribution were the Japanese officials Ghoya and Okura, the only authorities with whom the refugees had direct contact between 1943 and 1945. Ernest Heppner wrote that “it was pure torture to wait in line in the broiling sun for hours or sometimes the whole day just to apply for a pass.”¹²⁴ Ghoya, who commonly referred to himself as “King of the Jews,” holds a near legendary status in the recollections of the refugees because he had so much power over their lives and finances. Ghoya was an unpredictable man. He was very insecure about his height, and behaved aggressively towards adult refugees, particularly refugee men, who tended to exceed him in height. Ilie Wacs remembered that “out of nowhere he would jump onto a table and slap a man in the face. Especially if that man was tall...He hated tall men.”¹²⁵ Ghoya’s peculiar behavior extended beyond his interactions with the refugees in the pass line. Friedrichs wrote:

Ghoya could do everything and do it better than anyone else. He played the piano as amateurishly as possible, but he insisted upon playing pieces that were far beyond his capabilities. Thus, one day he happened to come

¹²³ Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 58-59.

¹²⁴ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 114-115.

¹²⁵ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 68.

upon the sonatas for violin and piano by Franz Schubert. He summoned the famous violin virtuoso Professor Alfred Wittenberg to play with him, but naturally the duet soon fell apart. Ghoya cried angrily: ‘Professor, you have to play as I lead, or I shall kill you!’¹²⁶

Ghoya attended refugee soccer matches, and before the game he made the players parade in front of him, as though he were a king. He often slapped refugees whose behavior annoyed him on any given day, and once smacked Ursula Bacon’s father over the head with a wooden ruler.¹²⁷ Though Ghoya behaved aggressively towards adults, he issued children passes with little problem, and was generally kind to them. Ghoya was aggressive, but his colleague Okura was cruel. “He would give you a pass depending on what mood he was in,” wrote Samuel Iwry. “He could be very mean, and if he caught anyone disobeying even the smallest rule, he would punish them harshly. The worst was that he would simply send you off to the Ward Road jail, which was a death sentence because you would die of typhus.”¹²⁸ Jewish encounter with these two officials often proved traumatic, particularly to male survivors of the Nazi concentration camps.¹²⁹

Employment opportunities within the Designated Area were limited, and movement outside the Designated Area was so restricted that the majority could not work or find positions outside of Hongkew. Many women and children, however, could find work during this period, while men continued to struggle with their ability to support their families and their ability to maintain their

¹²⁶ Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 170.

¹²⁷ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 169, 171-173.

¹²⁸ Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 120.

¹²⁹ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 493-500; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 199-200, 202-204; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 181.

professional identities. Evelyn Rubin once encountered a filthy man with matted blonde hair wearing rags and covered in sores. He had been a renowned judge in Germany.¹³⁰ Some men even gave up trying to support their families. “I worked as a kindergarten teacher for the Children’s Welfare Section of the Kitchen-Fund, a committee of refugees that aided the Jewish community. I don’t think any of the children were orphans, although some had lost their mothers and their fathers couldn’t take care of them,” recalled Margit Zippert Sarne.¹³¹ Some earned money as landlords, while others continued to resell their belongings until they had nothing left. A number of refugees opened restaurants and cafes. “You wouldn’t believe in how short a time [Hongkew] turned into a thriving little self-contained community. Because the majority of people did have guts and enterprise and did something about it, remodeled the houses and opened little shops and restaurants and bars,” wrote Lisbeth Loewenberg.¹³² Meanwhile, more and more children were going to work at an early age. For Gary Silvers, his work as a carpenter began at the age of thirteen.¹³³ Susette Tauber, who went to work in her mid-teens, wrote that “I handled bookkeeping and payroll. For a very young person, I had quite a lot of responsibility. But that’s what happens. In dire times, one grows up fast.”¹³⁴ Charles L. Klotzer wrote that “Most younger persons, like me, had to mature early. Having command of the English language and being the only wage earner in the family...made it natural for me to be in charge of family affairs. It

¹³⁰ Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 135-136.

¹³¹ Margit Zippert Sarne, “Margit Zippert Sarne,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 174.

¹³² Lisbeth Loewenberg, “Lisbeth Loewenberg,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 154-157.

¹³³ Gary Silvers, “Gary Silvers,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 183-184.

¹³⁴ Susette Tauber, “Susette Tauber,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 193.

was never talked about, it just happened.”¹³⁵ As the young people of Hongkew were forced into early maturity, they created a separate life for themselves.¹³⁶

The young refugees of Hongkew created a community for themselves as they adapted beyond the abilities of their parents. Meanwhile, parents of young children continued to do their best to provide their children with the most normal, middle class childhoods possible, despite the poverty and disease. Ingrid Gallin recalled, “I had strong, focused parents. My mother always said: ‘Here we are in this hellhole, but we are alive and so we must live decently.’ My parents established a disciplined life for themselves and me, with lots of rules about cleanliness, what could and could not be eaten, what could be thought and what could be spoken and discussed.”¹³⁷ The young refugees went to school, and joined scout groups, and played soccer, and strove for high academic achievement. However, parents could not protect their children from the hardships of Hongkew life. “I remember witnessing a Chinese woman giving birth in the gutter, and a Japanese soldier bayoneted her and the newborn infant,” wrote Gallin. “I went home and hysterically told of this horrible event which I recall to this day, particularly when similar violence is shown on television or in the movies.”¹³⁸ As for teenagers, Fred Marcus recorded an average evening out for a young person: “Radio. Dance. Games. Horror stories in the dark. During horror stories lay next to Uschi on the couch, but very decent. Tip top. Party ends at 3:00 in the morning.

¹³⁵ Charles L. Klotzer, “Charles L. Klotzer,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 104-105.

¹³⁶ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 368; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 103, 206.

¹³⁷ Ingrid Gallin, “Ingrid Gallin,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 47-48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

4:00 in bed.”¹³⁹ They formed close friendships, read, danced to records, played the piano, went to the movie theater in Hongkew, had parties, and, of course, looked for romance. Eric Reisman wrote that “At that time, you didn’t fool around with girls. You married the girl, then you could fool around.”¹⁴⁰ Ruth Sumner spoke more expansively about the sexual politics of the refugee teenagers, demonstrating that middle class values remained even as the money and lifestyle behind that class was no more:

In our group, none of the girls were sexually active...that was just something you didn’t do... Why didn’t we do it? Because we were raised with a standard of morality, a girl just does not go all the way unless she is completely committed...The good girls played around a little bit. They kissed and touched a little bit, but that was it. I mean, we had no opportunities, there was no parked cars or nothing...the only time you were alone with a boy [was] when he walked you home, and you stood in the hallway of your house, or at the door frame, that’s the only privacy we had. Because it was always groups, and that’s a good protection. Boys would try to persuade girls, but girls wouldn’t get involved, they’d say ‘No.’ And that’s the way it was. Boys had respect for us. In my days it was the bad girls went all the way. There was always a few, but they were well marked...You didn’t associate with kids that were...There were some girls, I know the names, but I’m not going to say. My father and my aunt didn’t talk to me about that. We talked about it, usually young people that

¹³⁹ Krasno and Marcus, *Survival in Shanghai*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ Eric Reisman, “Eric Reisman’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 136.

are not sexually active do nothing but talk. When they're doing it, they don't need to talk about it anymore. So we talked a lot.¹⁴¹

As teenagers went to work and formed close friendships, their parents struggled. Illo Heppner had to step into the role of homemaker overnight after her mother died of dysentery.¹⁴² "My parents suffered terribly," wrote Alfred Kohn. "I had it a little better. I was active in sports, and some of the sports people helped me a little bit. I got a job to work in a kitchen, and I at least had food. I was the main provide by working and bringing home food. It was wonderful."¹⁴³ Horst Abraham wrote that his "personal resourcefulness and commitment to survival was paramount. Because of my age, I was better able to cope than my parents. It was at that point, in the ghetto, that I felt like I became the family leader, urging them daily, 'Don't give up!'"¹⁴⁴ Ruth Sumner took a more negative view of this process. "I did not have a family. There was no loving relationship. My friends were my family. I lived at home, and I obeyed the rules of the home, but I made my own living. I was very independent as a teenager. I stood on my own two feet from the times I was 14."¹⁴⁵ Where women stepped into the head of the family role during the first period of life in Shanghai, their children now began to take on those same duties.

Those who grew up in Shanghai describe dancing, dating, and stepping into the role of head of household, but they also reveal the stress, the depression they observed in their parents. Meanwhile, those who were already adults during

¹⁴¹ Ruth Sumner, "Ruth Sumner's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 158-162.

¹⁴² Illo Heppner, "Shanghai: an Eyewitness Report," *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 143-144.

¹⁴³ Alfred Kohn, "Alfred Kohn's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 137, 139.

¹⁴⁴ Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago*, 67.

¹⁴⁵ Ruth Sumner, "Ruth Sumner's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 158-162.

the Hongkew period emphasized the community's cultural achievements in their recollections. They went to the theater and the opera and to concerts, much as they had before. They recreated Central European cultural life in Hongkew to such an extent that people outside of Hongkew—including Germans, Russians, and the French—frequented this “Little Vienna” for food and culture. Doris Grey recalled that “We always had a big social life... We had wonderful friends, and circumstances kept us ever closer together. With all the troubles and all the worries... we had everything. Not to eat and not to dress, but we kept up our spirits, you know, like the Jewish humor, but it was very, very hard, it really was, I tell you.”¹⁴⁶ Alfred S. Weissenberg recalled the experience of being confined to the same area, and the experience of sharing “the same hardships and joys,” led to strong friendships.¹⁴⁷ Yet, “Life was very hard, particular for the older generation, for my parents and other parents,” wrote Alfred Kohn, in his late teens by the Hongkew period.¹⁴⁸ “One memory never left me: I was sitting with my mother in the camp's canteen, a sort of social gathering spot, which also housed a snack and coffee bar, and I watched my mother's eyes following a cup of coffee bought by someone. She didn't have the money to buy one. Not really a tragic moment, nevertheless an image that cut deep,” wrote Charles Klotzer.¹⁴⁹ Men, such as Illo Heppner's father, could no longer take the stress of Hongkew and became overly critical, demanding, and angry towards the women heading their families and

¹⁴⁶ Doris Grey, “Doris Grey's Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 154.

¹⁴⁷ Alfred S. Weissenberg, “Alfred S. Weissenberg,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 208.

¹⁴⁸ Alfred Kohn, “Alfred Kohn's Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 139.

¹⁴⁹ Charles L. Klotzer, “Charles L. Klotzer,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 104.

keeping their homes.¹⁵⁰ Some of the adults were too frightened of the Japanese officials to leave the Designated Area in the entire two years of their forced sojourn. “The thing was, we didn’t think at all anymore,” recalled Lotte Schwarz. “We just didn’t know what was going on. You know, you were kind of numb in Shanghai. You lived from one day to another, and you hope you have something to eat for your family the next day. And that was about it...we were all together and all in the same boat, so you really didn’t think very much.”¹⁵¹

The monotony came to a dramatic end in July, 1945. By then, the refugees were exhausted, sick, and out of money, and they doubted that they could carry on much longer. Beginning in 1944, the American forces targeted Shanghai in their attempt to blockade China through the destruction and neutralization of Japanese military installments. The sight of the American air force in the skies over the city raised the refugees’ spirits and gave them hope that the war would soon be over. The refugees prayed that none of the bombs would hit them even as they cheered the Americans—their imagined friends, allies, and rescuers—from the rooftops of Hongkew. Signmund Tobias wrote:

We had little fear during the air raids because we assumed that that the Americans, knowing that Jewish refugees were there, would not bomb the ghetto...When the air raid sirens sounded...clusters of refugees gathered in various viewing spots secretly cheering the American planes on after picking them out with field glasses.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Illo Heppner, “Shanghai: an Eyewitness Report,” *Between Sorrow and Strength*, 144.

¹⁵¹ Lotte Schwarz, “Lotte Schwarz’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 141.

¹⁵² Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 88.

Some, such as Evelyn Rubin, feared the Americans' bombs.¹⁵³ Her fears were realized on July 17, 1945: the American Air Force, in an attack on the Hongkew-based radio station which directed Japanese shipping lines, bombed the Designated Area. "The earth shook, the world exploded around us," wrote Ursula Bacon. Her friend Eva wondered aloud: "If this is what our friends do to us, what in the hell can we expect from our enemies?"¹⁵⁴ Eva was not the only refugee to note the irony of escaping Hitler only to be bombed by the Americans. The "bombs fell like rain," wrote Ilie Wacs. "Until that moment, despite all our hardships, I had considered myself a spectator of the war, staring out my window, drawing the life below. As the ground shook and Mutti screamed for me to 'Run!' It occurred to me I might not be around to see what happened next. The war was once again at my front door."¹⁵⁵ Some refugees, however, such as Otto Schnepf, felt intense relief at the American bombing. "The tremendous feeling of isolation in the world is a very deep thing," he wrote. "All around you sort of an alien culture...And then being dominated that way, so powerless. All of a sudden there was this connection to the outside world."¹⁵⁶ Although they represented relief to some of the isolated refugees, the American bombs killed thirty-five Jewish refugees, thousands of Chinese civilians, and wounded two hundred and fifty persons. Arms, legs, and body parts lay strewn on the streets of Hongkew. Deborah Strobin wrote:

The bombing stopped. I'd been given lessons through the Red Cross. I put

¹⁵³ Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 143-144.

¹⁵⁴ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 222, 233, 236, 245.

¹⁵⁵ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 80, 82.

¹⁵⁶ Otto Schnepf, "Otto Schnepf's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 172.

on my white cap with the identifiable Red Cross stitched on it. I grabbed my bag, full of bandages, and ran out into the streets with my brother. The whole neighborhood had rushed to help...I was ten years old, but I had to be of use. I had no choice about it. I had to grow up fast in case I didn't grow up altogether.¹⁵⁷

The first five years in Shanghai saw Jewish refugee women taking charge of the household while men struggled with loss of identity and feelings of failure. In the Hongkew period, the traditional family structure broke down further as many adults retreated into fear, depression, hopelessness, and monotony, leaving their adaptable children to support the family and make their own paths. Families continued to eat German and Austrian food, consume German and Austrian culture, and hold German and Austrian middle class biases even as the roles and behaviors which distinguished them as middle class Central Europeans broke down around them. Where the great divide once existed between Germans and Austrians, it now stood between the generations. "Eva and I spent a lot of time together, trying to act our age, but somehow our 'age' had been lost along the way," wrote Ursula Bacon. "We didn't know how to behave like carefree teenagers. The demands life made on us robbed us of those young and carefree years, and we acted just like all the adults around us—worried, fearful, and concerned with daily events and a veiled, uncertain future." Japan officially surrendered one and a half months after the bombing of Hongkew, on September 2, 1945.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 80, 82; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 552-555.

¹⁵⁸ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 175.

Chapter 4: 1945-1950: The Americans

In this final period of life in Shanghai, the last links between the refugees and the countries of their birth were severed, leaving only language and memories. Young people no longer followed the behavioral patterns expected of the Central European Jewish middle class. This period begins with the American and Chinese Nationalist occupation of Shanghai shortly after the Japanese surrender. The refugees briefly thrived under American and Chinese Nationalist control as they regained their freedom of movement, and worked for the American military. However, post-war inflation and Chinese Nationalist anti-foreign sentiments, combined with the general refugee sentiment that Shanghai was never supposed to be a permanent home, pushed the Jewish refugees back into the emigration cycle. Many began the process in 1946, and left Shanghai in 1947. As the renewed Chinese Civil War raged in the Chinese interior, news of Communist territorial gains began to reach Shanghai in 1947, frightening the refugees, and adding to the pressure to leave. According a 1946 poll, 40% of the refugees aspired to settle permanently in the United States, 21% in Palestine, and 13% in Australia or a Latin American country. The remaining 26% wanted to return to Austria or Germany. Canada accepted 280 refugees, Australia accepted approximately 1000, and 2,676 emigrated to Israel.¹⁵⁹

The Japanese remained in control of Shanghai until August 22, 1945. They signed the formal surrender on September 2, 1945, and the Allied and Chinese Nationalist forces liberated Hongkew one day later. The ‘Stateless

¹⁵⁹ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 251, 255, 257, 261-263; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 481, 581; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 176-195; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 87, 230, 244.

Refugees' were "jubilant," Kracauer noted.¹⁶⁰ Crowds of Jewish refugees and Chinese civilians spilled into the streets of Hongkew in celebration. "One night, all of a sudden, it was like a rumor spread. The war is over. In the same moment, the reaction was, in the whole city, in the whole street where we lived, in the whole Ward Road, everybody turned on the lights and took down the blackout and opened the windows. The lights went on," remembered Lisbeth Loewenberg.¹⁶¹ It was like "Sleeping Beauty awakened from her sleep," recalled Dr. Friedrichs.¹⁶² Improvised celebrations took place across Hongkew; music and song rang out into the night. The boundaries of the Designated Area "disappeared" as the refugees ran rejoicing through the streets, tearing down the signs which marked the borders of the Designated Area in the early hours of the morning, celebrating their freedom and the surrender alongside the jubilant Chinese. Strangers embraced in the streets, and the Japanese were nowhere to be seen. It was the first time Ruth Sumner stayed up all night.¹⁶³ And as the American army marched into the city, it was, according to Ursula Bacon, akin to "the last part of a great drama with a happy ending." She and Ernest Heppner remember the joy of seeing the Americans hoist their flag over the Bund as the watching crowd burst spontaneously into "God Bless America." Heppner wrote that this was "without a doubt the greatest moment of my life."¹⁶⁴ And suddenly the city was full of American soldiers and sailors. Gertrude Kracauer wrote:

The young men, relieved from the horrors of war, [and] grateful to be

¹⁶⁰ Kracauer, "Memories and Images," 62, 65-66.

¹⁶¹ Lisbeth Loewenberg, "Lisbeth Loewenberg's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 173.

¹⁶² Friedrichs, *Berlin Shanghai New York*, 201-202.

¹⁶³ Ruth Sumner, "Ruth Sumner's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 173.

¹⁶⁴ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 254; Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 133.

alive enjoyed all the divertissements and adventures the city had to offer. They had money to spend and did so freely. Their jeeps were everywhere, they made friends with the English speaking school children, took them from school to their homes, helped some poor refugees and were adored by the whole population...the Americans looked like giants, tall, good looking, and well nourished.¹⁶⁵

The Americans wasted no time celebrating the end of the war and spending their post-war salaries. “Sounds of reveling fill the narrow alleyways and broad boulevards of Shanghai...The American soldiers are a raucous bunch, carousing from bar to bar,” wrote Vivian Kaplan.¹⁶⁶ The soldiers were so known for their rowdiness that eleven year Deborah Strobin’s parents forbade her from going near the ships.¹⁶⁷ “The soldiers went wild in the city,” recalled Ernest Culman. “I was walking along the street and some sailor comes up to me, ‘Hey buddy, you got a sister?’”¹⁶⁸

Not all was cause for celebration, however. The liberation of Shanghai and the Japanese surrender freed the refugees and put an end to the four years of isolation. Most of the refugees had not heard from their families since the Japanese takeover of Shanghai in 1941. “After Germany invaded Poland...letters from my family would come less and less frequently. The last communication I received was a Red Cross letter from my sister, dated November 8, 1942,” wrote

¹⁶⁵ Kracauer, “Memories and Images,” 62, 65-66.

¹⁶⁶ Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, 244-245, 248.

¹⁶⁷ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 82-83, 85.

¹⁶⁸ Ernest Culman, “Ernest Culman’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 168-169; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 566; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 242-243.

Ernest Heppner.¹⁶⁹ With communication channels now re-opened, refugee families began to search for family left behind in Europe. It was not long before they learned the truth. From the radio, from cinema newsreels, and from Red Cross officials, they learned of the fate of European Jewry. “The gruesome details that trickled in about Hitler’s concentration camps were beyond comprehension, beyond the capacity of words to express, and our feelings went beyond mere mourning... We sat lost in our thoughts, our own grief,” wrote Ursula Bacon.¹⁷⁰ Newspapers published alphabetic lists of survivors every week, which the refugees then took and posted throughout Hongkew. Each week the refugees gathered to examine the lists, hoping that the names they sought would appear. Unfortunately, most did not. Sigmund Tobias’ father’s side of the family—with the exception of one brother—was all murdered. “My father had always been a talkative and friendly man; now he rarely spoke and was often in tears. It was awful to see his grief.” Shortly thereafter, Sigmund Tobias’ family received the news that all of his mother’s family in Poland had been killed. Nearly every single one of his relatives on both sides of his family, more than forty people total, perished in the Holocaust.¹⁷¹ Horst Abraham’s beloved sister, Vera, never appeared on the lists.¹⁷² Ilse Grebenschikoff’s whole family was murdered; some could not even be traced.¹⁷³ “Then we got word about the Holocaust... A deep sorrow swept through the streets, touching every life... Everything we’d been through suddenly paled in comparison. The hunger, the disease... the poverty,

¹⁶⁹ Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge*, 26-30, 58.

¹⁷⁰ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 231.

¹⁷¹ Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 93-101, 103.

¹⁷² Abraham, *Berlin-Shanghai-Chicago*, 71-72.

¹⁷³ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 96-97.

none of it mattered anymore. We were lucky. Nobody gassed us. We had our lives, but that was no cause for celebration,” wrote Ilse Wacs.¹⁷⁴ Their families and friends, the blood and emotional ties which bound them to Germany and Austria, were no more.¹⁷⁵

With these blood and emotional connections severed, the refugees looked away from Europe, forming new cultural and emotional ties. The American military remained in Shanghai after the liberation to assist the Chinese Nationalist Government in overseeing the Japanese surrender. In addition to partying, the soldiers were quick to form friendships and relationships with the refugees. “The Americans whistled and called to us in very free and friendly fashion. Obviously they had not seen girls for a long time,” wrote Ilse Grebenschikoff. “They complimented us on our looks and asked us for dates...So this is what the Americans were like! Quite a difference from the serious, parent-approved boys we knew at home.”¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Ruth Sumner wrote that “at that time some of the girls were running around, they got engaged to American servicemen, and you know how that goes. He went back with big promises, and that was the end of it, never heard from him since.”¹⁷⁷ Interactions between the officers and refugee women led to a large number of weddings. “It was not a simple procedure to get married...the American authorities would research...the girl’s background and...political affiliations...before allowing...a marriage to take place. At the same time...the girl’s family tried to make inquiries into the background of their

¹⁷⁴ Strobin and Wacs, *An Uncommon Journey*, 83-84.

¹⁷⁵ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 564.

¹⁷⁶ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 103, 113-117, 122.

¹⁷⁷ Ruth Sumner, “Ruth Sumner’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 183-184.

daughter's fiancée," wrote Grebenschikoff. In one such case, an Orthodox Jewish bride's parents disowned her and refused to attend her wedding to a gentile man. Grebenschikoff herself married a White Russian man, a fact which disturbed her parents.¹⁷⁸ Ruth Sumner met her American soldier husband on the job as she worked for the army.

I met him, and I fell in love...I woke up my dad in the middle of the night, said, 'I've got myself engaged and I'm going to get married. And I don't care what you say, that's exactly what I am going to do.' He said 'We'll talk about it tomorrow.'...I was eighteen and a half years old. He's Christian; we had different backgrounds, nationalities, different religions. I'd had no idea what background he had.¹⁷⁹

The actions of these young women were radical in comparison to their parents' generation. That generation was socialized to understand that parental judgment was central to arranging marriages. Although the idea of the love-match had gained ground among Central European Jews in the 1920s and 1930s, marriages were still expected to be used to solidify class standing. The actions of these women indicate a total removal from former cultural attitudes and expectations.¹⁸⁰ These young women saw no need for parental approval, and their parents had no means to stop them. When Ursula Bacon announced to her parents that she would be marrying a fellow refugee, her father "suggested, sort of casually, half-jokingly: 'You're so young. Wouldn't you like to wait a little bit longer? Perhaps meet a nice baron, a duke, a titled man...an aristocrat? You know, they still make

¹⁷⁸ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 109.

¹⁷⁹ Ruth Sumner, "Ruth Sumner's Oral History," *Exodus to Shanghai*, 183-184.

¹⁸⁰ Maurer, "From Everyday Life to a State of Emergency," *Jewish Daily Life in Germany*, 283-285.

those.’’ The separation of young refugees from the norms which governed their parents’ generation was nearly complete.¹⁸¹

The American Occupying Forces did more than simply woo refugee women. They were in desperate need of support staff, and the refugees enthusiastically filled the positions. Especially exciting were the salaries paid in American dollars, some as high as \$80 per month. “The arrival of the American forces opened up job opportunities for many refugees. After working for years at a US\$3- per month job, I was hired as a warehouse manager at \$80 per month,” recalled Charles L. Klotzer.¹⁸² Despite this boom of military jobs and the economic boost bought on by the military’s free spending, the refugees’ financial situation soon deteriorated (again) as the Shanghai economy underwent rapid inflation. Between August 1945 and July 1948 prices increased at an average of 33.7% monthly, and between August 1948 and April 1949 at a rate of 300% monthly. The value of the Chinese *yuan* fell daily and by May 1949 one US dollar—a technically illegal currency—was worth 474,000 *yuan*. It got to the point, wrote Sigmund Tobias, that “a package of paper bills was needed to buy anything of value.”¹⁸³

These economic woes reflected the growing instability of General Chiang Kai Shek’s government. With the Japanese gone, the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists were able to focus on their conflict with each other for the first time since 1937. In 1946, they resumed their civil war, albeit far from Shanghai. By 1947, the refugees were growing increasingly aware of Mao Zedong’s territorial

¹⁸¹ Bacon, *Shanghai Diary*, 258-159.

¹⁸² Charles L. Klotzer, “Charles L. Klotzer,” *Shanghai Remembered*, 105.

¹⁸³ Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 114, 118.

gains in the Chinese interior. At the same time, the Nationalist government ordered all foreigners. The refugees, wrote Grebenschikoff, were “uncomfortably aware that our days in China were numbered.”¹⁸⁴ After living under Hitler, and living in Hongkew, nobody wanted to be trapped again in Shanghai. Gérard Kohbieter recalled:

I wanted to get out of Shanghai in the worst way. A friend of mine was with Chiang Kai Shek’s army. He spoke fluent Chinese, and he wrote me from the interior, ‘The Communists are winning the war.’ He wrote me that early in the game. The Communists, one of the first things they did was to close all the nightclubs, because they felt that it was counter-productive, or that there is no need in a poor country for that kind of conspicuous consumption. And I figured, well, I’ll be dead, because that’s all I knew then. I’d learned a lot, but nothing that you can turn into cash. So I tried to get out.¹⁸⁵

The refugees feared the Communists, “we didn’t know what they would bring,” recalled Herbert Greening. “The Communists made it quite clear that they could do without the foreigners...Then the economy went down, and people started to leave in droves,” recalled Ilse Greening.¹⁸⁶ The Communist People’s Liberation Army arrived in Shanghai on May 25, 1949.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 104-105, 123.

¹⁸⁵ Gérard Kohbieter, “Gérard Kohbieter’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 194.

¹⁸⁶ Herbert and Ilse Greening, “Herbert and Ilse Greening’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 197-198.

¹⁸⁷ Bergère, *China’s Gateway to Modernity*, 323, 342; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 252; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 193-194; Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 243, 247-249; Dwork and Van Pelt, *Flight From the Reich*, 320.

They refugees began to ready themselves for their second process of emigration into a world of immigration policy not much more yielding than it was in 1938. Further, the refugees' ability to obtain papers was complicated by their stateless status. According to a poll taken in 1946, 40% of the refugees aspired to settle permanently in the United States. Twenty one percent desired to relocate to Palestine, and 13% to Australia or a Latin American country. The remaining twenty-six percent wanted to return to Austria or Germany, perhaps not fully comprehending the realities of the war and the Holocaust. Peter Eisfelder wrote that those who chose to return to Germany "were mainly elderly people who longed to be back in a place where they could speak the local languages and would have no problems making themselves understood."¹⁸⁸ The younger generation regarded their lives in Germany and Austria as a period of their lives which was simply over. They could never return. Those who did return to Germany found themselves alone, unwanted, and without a home. Ilse Grebenschikoff's parents had had to return to Germany in order to determine their immigration status. They "were not happy to find themselves...back in Germany...There was nothing left to connect my parents with the life they had known years ago."¹⁸⁹ While Canada accepted 280 refugees (refusing to take more on the basis of domestic unemployment), Australia accepted about 700 refugees in 1946 and then quickly restricted its quota to only three hundred Jewish Displaced Persons [DPs] per year. A further 2,676 refugees emigrated to Israel; many who considered this destination ultimately decided against it as they feared

¹⁸⁸ Eisfelder, "Chinese Exile," 90.

¹⁸⁹ Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara*, 123, 149.

walking from one war zone into another. The fate of the vast majority of the Shanghai refugees was deeply intertwined with post-war American immigration policy. In December, 1945 Congress passed a series of immigration directives specifying that visas be distributed among persons of all faiths, creeds, and nationalities by country of origin, and that two-thirds of the quotas for all nations be allotted solely to German DPs for one year. This meant that German refugees in Shanghai could emigrate to the United States without difficulty (and conversely that non-German refugees had to wait until December 1946 for their chance to emigrate). In 1948 Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act. Section 12 of the Act reserved fifty percent of the German and Austrian quotas for persons of German ethnic origin born in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary or Romania and currently residing in Germany or Austria for two years. This put German and Austrian refugees into competition with all ethnically German DPs in the above countries hoping for entrance into the United States. Congress amended the Act in 1950 to guarantee the issue of 4,000 non-quota immigration visas to refugees residing in China as of July 1, 1948, or who, as of July 16, 1950, qualified for admission to the United States and were still in China, or having left China, had not permanently settled in another country.¹⁹⁰

“I applied for Australia on an outrageously racist application form,” recalled Gérard Kohbieter. “They even wanted to know the color of your eyes and the color of your hair and that kind of nonsense. Then a friend of the family found out that I was in Shanghai and asked me, ‘Would you like to come to the States?’”

¹⁹⁰ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 251, 255, 257, 261-263; Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 481, 581; Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 176-195; Laqueur, *Generation Exodus*, 87, 230, 244. SEPERATE

He was ready to give the affidavits, everything was cleared. We came to the States.”¹⁹¹ The majority of the refugees sailed from Shanghai to San Francisco between 1947 and 1949. Although they began the process early, it took them at least two years to receive their visas. Sigmund Tobias wrote that when his family became American citizens, “It made us feel a little safer to become citizens of a powerful country like the United States after being stateless for so many years, when we felt that no nation cared whether we lived or died.”¹⁹²

There were 2,668 Jewish refugees left in Shanghai by February, 1949. In 1956, there were 171 left, 109 in 1957, 56 in 1961, 20 in 1965, and 15 in 1967. In 1982, a Hong Kong newspaper reported the death of the last Jewish refugee left in Shanghai.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Gérard Kohbieter, “Gérard Kohbieter’s Oral History,” *Exodus to Shanghai*, 194.

¹⁹² Tobias, *Strange Haven*, 120-128.

¹⁹³ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 263, 272.

Conclusion: *Noah's Ark*

Refugee life in Shanghai was neither a bleak existence, nor was it an easy life spent in the theater. Differences in age, gender, and nationality informed how each refugee, from an Austrian girl born in 1936 to a female German 80 year old arrival in Shanghai, experienced life as a refugee in Shanghai. The dominant narrative presented by journalists, historians, and museum professionals paint a uniformly bleak picture of refugee life in Shanghai while in fact there was no uniform Shanghai refugee experience. Children relaxed on the trip to Shanghai while adults struggled with anxiety. Women and members of the German refugee group adapted to the first period of life in Shanghai while German men and the Austrian refugee group struggled. Young people adapted to life in the Designated Area and stepped into the role of head of the family while their parents succumbed to hopelessness. By the time the war ended, the younger generation no longer adhered to their Central European middle class socializations, and looked beyond Central Europe for their futures.

When they refugees left Shanghai, they left behind the precariousness little community they built for themselves over their twelve year tenure in the city. Some of the more permanent changes they made to the environment were the construction of cemeteries. Between 1939 and 1945 there were 1,581 recorded refugee deaths, including 36 suicides; when the refugees left Shanghai, they too left behind the graves of loved ones.¹⁹⁴ Evelyn Pike Rubin's father and grandmother were buried in the Columbia Road Cemetery. "The most difficult

¹⁹⁴ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 303; Trixie Wachsner, "Trixie Wachsner," *Shanghai Remembered*, 202; Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles*, 273; Krasno and Marcus, *Survival in Shanghai*, 242.

farewell took place at the cemeteries. We were leaving Vati and Omi in their graves in a strange land. We took photographs of their graves. We knew we would probably never return, and no one would ever visit them. What was going to become of the cemeteries once the Communists took over, we wondered.”¹⁹⁵ The Communists leveled the cemeteries, removing the headstones and building cement factories and housing developments over the graves. Hongkew was built over, and Jewish buildings altered and re-purposed.¹⁹⁶

The Jewish refugees, their dwellings, shops, and cemeteries had no place in the Chinese Communist State. Benedict Anderson writes in *Imagined Communities* that “The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside of history.”¹⁹⁷ The enforced forgetting of the Shanghai refugees represents an interesting iteration of this: it was European imperialism and racism in China which led the Communist government to so bluntly remove traces of the Jewish refugees. The memory of the refugees, having no place within this post-imperialist Chinese Communist self-conception, was removed from the Shanghai-built environment. The erasure of their presence in Shanghai was such that, in 1976, David Kranzler lamented that “the future of Shanghai as a Jewish enclave is rapidly approaching the same fate as that of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng...the twentieth century settlement of Jews among one billion Chinese

¹⁹⁵ Rubin, *Ghetto Shanghai*, 156-157.

¹⁹⁶ Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 289.

¹⁹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991; repr., London: Verso, 2006), 149.

will have been only an ephemeral phenomenon in the Diaspora history of the Jewish People.”¹⁹⁸

Despite Kranzler’s lament, official Chinese attitudes towards the Jewish history in its borders has changed. In 1991, China officially recognized the state of Israel. In 2004, the Ohel Moshe synagogue—built by the Russian Jewish community in 1927 and used by the refugees—was listed as an architectural treasure of Shanghai. In 2007, the People’s Government of the Hongkew District budgeted for a full renovation of the synagogue in accordance with its original architectural drawings. When the renovation was complete, the government installed in the space the brand new Shanghai Refugee Museum. The Museum’s website contains the following material:

From 1933 to 1941, Shanghai became a modern-day ‘Noah’s Ark’ accepting around 30,000 Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust in Europe. In the ‘Designated Area for Stateless Refugees’...about 20,000 Jewish refugees lived harmoniously with local citizens, overcoming numerous difficulties together. By the time the Second World War ended in 1945, most of the Jewish refugees had survived. Dr. David Kranzler, a noted Holocaust historian, called it the ‘Miracle of Shanghai’ and commented that within the Jewry’s greatest tragedy, i.e. the Holocaust, there shone a few bright lights. Among the brightest of these is the Shanghai haven...the original features of the Jewish settlement are still well

¹⁹⁸ Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews*, 582.

preserved. They are the only typical historic traces of Jewish refugee life inside China during the Second World War.¹⁹⁹

The museum has two exhibition halls, including a space for temporary exhibits. It has a database of refugee names, over 140 photos on display, a multi-screen digital exhibition system, a short film about the refugees, oil paintings, sculptures, facsimiles of passports, and copies the Shanghai Jewish Chronicle. The museum's website also includes information about the larger Hongkew area and walking tours. "As it was the place where Jewish refugees lived in greatest concentration during the Second World War," it reads, "this area became a commercial center with an exotic atmosphere, known as 'Little Vienna' in those days. Mr. Michael Blumenthal, ex-Secretary of the Treasury of the United States and the present curator of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, once lived in a small garret at 59 Zhoushan Road."²⁰⁰ The museum presents Huoshan Park as space of relaxation for Jewish refugees, the *Heime* as well stocked shelters, and Hongkew as a lively little village. It touts its cooperation with Jewish and Holocaust refugee museums around the world, as well as developments in Sino-Israeli relations. Indeed, in 2008, the museum featured an exhibit dedicated to developments in the Sino-Israeli relationship. Its website boasted that "Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, the former Israeli Prime Minister, commented during his visit to Shanghai, 'To the people of Shanghai for unique humanitarian act of saving thousands of Jews during the Second World War, thanks in the name of the government of Israel.'"²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, "About Us," the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, <http://www.shanghaijews.org.cn/english/article/?sid=14>.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

It is abundantly clear that the curators and directors of this museum are intent upon portraying the Shanghai refugee experience as a positive one. Shanghai was a Noah's Ark, not a city which, by accident of its history, had an opening into which 20,000 Jews could squeeze. The Jews and the Chinese lived in harmony, not in separate communities which rarely interacted. The Chinese government has become the preserver of traces of Jewish life in Shanghai, not the Mao-era destroyer. Hongkew was an exotic commercially successful locale, not an impoverished slum. Where the memory of this community once rested in the hands of a small number of memoirists, archival repositories, and historians such as David Kranzler, the Chinese government is now taking a direct hand in the construction of its memory. Indeed, in 2012 historian Irene Eber wrote that:

Chinese interest in Jews and Israel as well as in Jews who once lived among them is widespread today. Not only scholarly works, but also a number of recent popular publications support this interest. Several universities have Jewish Studies Institutes and visiting professors teach courses on Jewish topics. Translation work is flourishing and books on Jewish topics and fiction by major Israeli novelists are being translated. A new and very different chapter in Chinese-Jewish relations has begun.²⁰²

As geopolitics move China and Israel together, suddenly the refugee community and its memory has a space in the Chinese state. It is no longer a forgotten aspect of the imperialist chapter of Chinese history, but a community which demonstrates China's enduring interest in and care for the Jewish people. Thus, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum is not concerned with the accurate

²⁰² Eber, *Wartime Shanghai*, 209-210.

portrayal of the positive and negative aspects of the Jewish refugee experience, but about constructing Shanghai, and thus China, as a friend to and savior of the Jewish people. Indeed, it even touts the words of such American and Israeli luminaries as Yitzhak Rabin and one-time Shanghai refugee Michael Blumenthal in order to cement its new, imagined place in Jewish history.

Historian and Sino-Jewish theorist Vera Schwarz wrote that “When museum building began in earnest under the Communist regime, it was both to tame and to reorder the past,”²⁰³ while theorist Michael Schudson wrote that when “Where the creation of a sense of the past is not in the hands of professional historians, it is all the more likely that they past will be used as a resource for legitimating rather than as an avenue toward truth.”²⁰⁴ In the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, the ambivalent and complex past is re-ordered to legitimize China not simply as a place where Jewish refugees spent the years before during and after the Second World War, but as a space in which the refugees were actively saved. This museum, then, neither serves the memory nor speaks to the experiences of the refugees, but instead speaks to and serves contemporary Chinese political interests.

The ambivalent memory of refugee life emanating from the memoirs, the distressing memory evoked within scholarly and popular history books, the narrative of refugee life constructed by the Chinese government convey living memories which fail to truly address the complexities of the Jewish refugee

²⁰³ Vera Schwarz, *Bridge Across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 50, 115.

²⁰⁴ Michael Schudson, from “The Past in the Present versus the Present in the Past,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 287.

experience in Shanghai. In my present addition to the scholarship surrounding this community, I hope to have demonstrated that life as a Jewish refugee in Shanghai was far more complex, and the refugees' recollections is far more varied and complex than the existing scholarship, the memoirs, and the Shanghai Refugees Museum convey.

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