

A Borrowed Place

Exploring Hong Kong, Jewish and Refugee histories

Category: Shanghai

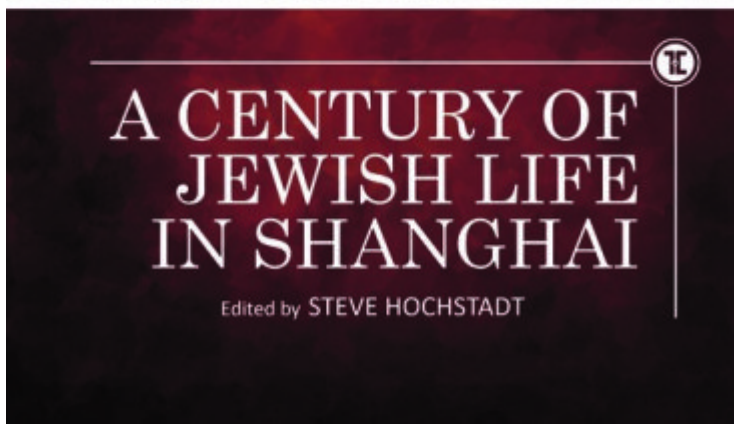
A Century of Jewish Life in Shanghai

ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020MARCH 25, 2020 / BY
HK HERITAGE / IN LITERATURE REVIEW, SHANGHAI / 4
COMMENTS

Professor Steve Hochstadt's latest offering has just hit the shelves. 'A Century of Jewish Life in Shanghai' features chapters written by well-known scholars in the field including Maisie Meyer, Jonathan Goldstein and Xu Xin. Contributors explore themes including refuge, migration, survival, imagined communities and memory.

'For a century, Jews were an unmistakable and prominent feature of Shanghai life. They built hotels and stood in bread lines, hobnobbed with the British and Chinese elites and were confined to a wartime ghetto. Jews taught at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, sold Viennese pastries, and shared the worst slum with native Shanghainese. Three waves of Jews, representing three religious and ethnic communities, landed in Shanghai, remained separate for decades, but faced the calamity of World War II and ultimate dissolution together. In this book, we hear their own words and the words of modern scholars explaining how Baghdadi, Russian and Central European Jews found their way to Shanghai, created lives in the world's most cosmopolitan city, and were forced to find new homes in the late 1940s.'

Council of the Jewish Community of



Shanghai, 1956

ON JULY 26, 2017JUNE 4, 2020 / BY HK HERITAGE / IN
JEWISH REFUGEES, SHANGHAI / 4 COMMENTS

The Council of the Jewish Community was founded in 1949 for the welfare of China Jewry. When the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) closed its Shanghai office in 1951, the Council took over the administrative work in connection with the global repatriation and resettlement of Jews residing in China.

I've written extracts from the Council's 1956 report below:

Economic Welfare and Relief

Shelter House and Free Meals

During 1956 the Shelter House harboured an average of 14 inmates and dispensed free meals to a daily average of about 23 persons; in the first six months of 1957 the average number of inmates was 13, while the average number of persons was about 13. The cost of supplying two meals daily to each person was approximately Yen 40.00 per month.

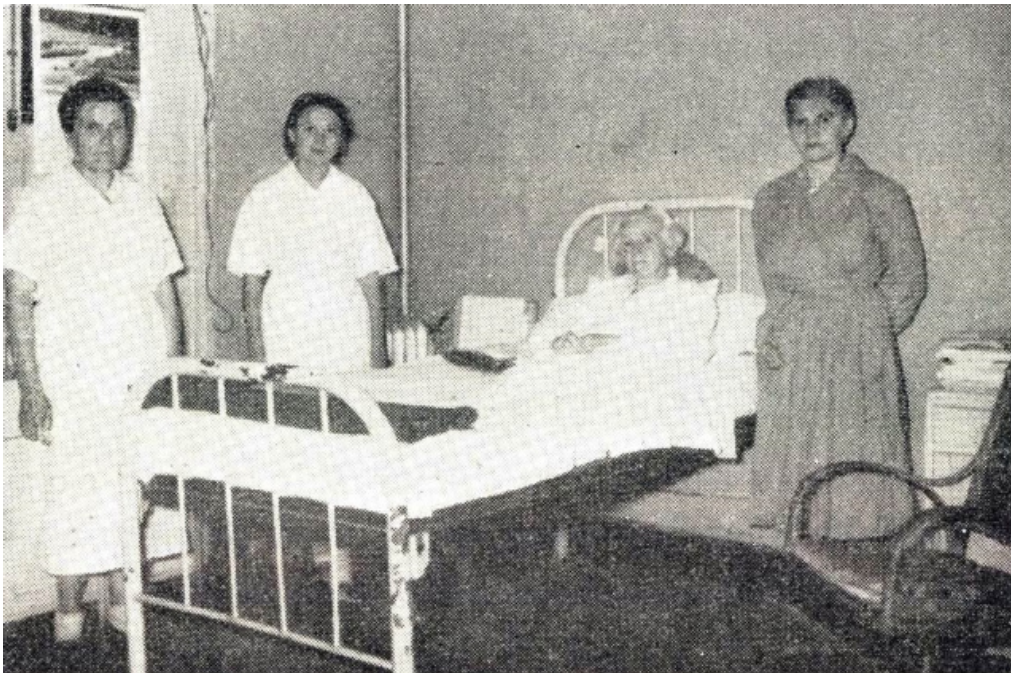
Mr. E Abraham had been acting as Shohet in an honorary capacity up to his departure in November 1956, and was succeeded by Mr. I. Udovich. Mr. & Mrs. G Gleizer acted as supervisors of the Shelter House and Kosher Kitchen.

Seward Road Camp (961 Tung Chang Chi Lu)

The Seward Road Camp is one of the many camps which housed European refugees during World War II. There were 11 inmates domiciled in the Camp during the period under review. The premises are owned by Messrs. E. D. Sassoon & Co., Ltd. Shanghai, and have been used free of charge by the indigent Jews for many years. Mr. H. Lewin supervises the Camp.

Medical Assistance

In order to alleviate the suffering of the mental and chronic cases two nurses are employed in the Shelter House to look after them as before. It must be mentioned that many critical cases have been averted due to the promptness of the United Hias Service in Hongkong in sending the required medicines to the sick. Dr. S. Hocs and Dr. G Rosenkevitch served as Medical Advisors for the Community with marked efficiency.



A room in the shelter ward

Religious and Cultural Activities

As mentioned in the last year's report after the disposal of the Synagogue on Hsiang Yang Road, services have been regularly held in the new Synagogue at the Shanghai Jewish Centre. In spite of the diminishing number of Jews in Shanghai, attendance in the Synagogue has continued to be gratifying in the circumstances.

Matzoth

As in the preceding four years, Matzoth were baked locally and distributed free of charge to all needy Jews in Shanghai. As in the past, the highest grade of wheat flour was allotted by the Food Administration Bureau and sympathetic cooperation was rendered by the bakery where the Matzoth were prepared in accordance with Jewish rituals. Due to technical difficulties in Tientsin, 250lbs. of Matzoth were sent by train for gratuitous distribution among the Jews in that district.

Reading and Recreation Room

Since the closure and liquidation of the Shanghai Jewish Club on December 31 1955 the reading and recreation room has afforded books, periodicals and newspapers to the local Jews. The room has also been used for Hebrew Classes, Children's parties and other activities.



Children attend Hebrew class, 1956

Cemeteries

The four Jewish cemeteries in Shanghai continued in the care of the Council. All graves and memorial stones are constantly kept in good condition under the able supervision of Mr. H. Lewin.



Fa Yuan-Lu Cemetery

Communal Association

By July 1956, the centralised management of the properties and the internal affairs of both the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic Communal Associations had merged into the Council's office. The works in connection with the two communal associations have been handled by the Council staff. The legal entities of the Communal Associations have been preserved. In line with a general decree by the Government, land tax on properties owned by or managed by Jewish organisations has been altered to property tax which has been levied at 18% on rentals received since the fourth quarter of 1956.

Personnel

As the number of remaining Jews in Shanghai gradually diminished, the manifold works of the Council had devolved upon the few members who have been serving selflessly for the welfare of the Jewish Community.

Mr. R.D. Abraham: Mr. R.D. Abraham resigned his membership of the Council on September 1 1956, but continued to give the benefit of his experience and advice up to the time of his departure from Shanghai in November 1956. Any attempt to evaluate his service to the Jewish Community within the limitation of this Report would be hopelessly inadequate. Following the noble tradition of his forebears, he left behind him a record of a life-long devotion to the interests of the community. Whole-heartedly and unobtrusively he identified himself with all aspects of our communal activities, so that every Jewish

institution, Religious, Cultural, Social or otherwise bears the impress of his work. His long tenure of leadership as Chairman of the Council since its inception in 1949 will always remain a cherished memory. It was under his able captaincy that the Council was steered through difficult times and the care and welfare of our brethren in China enhanced. Every Jew who is or has been in China will remember R.D. Abraham with gratitude and affection.

Mr. Ezekiel Abraham: Equally noted for religious and charitable activities is Mr. E Abraham who served as Hon. Treasurer of the Council until his subsequent departure from Shanghai. During a long period of social work, he gave unstintingly of his time and energy in the cause of communal welfare, and his cheerful readiness to assist any one who applied to him had endeared him to all and has made his name synonymous with selfless service.

Mr. K.I. Kushner: Mr. K.I Kushner served as member of the Council and later succeeded Mr. E. Abraham as Hon. Treasurer. Though his service was brief, his work with marked distinction will be long remembered.

Mr. N.L Schifrin: Mr. N. Schifrin succeeded Mr. Kushner as Hon. Treasurer of the Council. In addition to the many works devolved upon him due to the departure of honorary members of the Council, Mr. Schifrin had inaugurated a Hebrew Class and taught the Jewish children with admirable fervency to see that those children were well-equipped Hebraically. Mr. Schifrin has rendered invaluable services to the community in many facets.

Staff: Mr. A.M Bagg continued in rendering invaluable service up till his departure in March 1957. The Council staff consists mainly of Chinese who have worked many years with the Jewish organisations and have performed their duties to the full satisfaction of the Council.

Professor William (Wilhelm) Deman

ON NOVEMBER 18, 2016 JUNE 4, 2020 / BY
HK HERITAGE / IN IMMIGRATION CONTROL, JEWISH
REFUGEES, SHANGHAI, US ARCHIVES / 2 COMMENTS



WILLIAM DEMAN

MISS SMITH

HORACE KADOORIE

Whilst working through the World Jewish Congress (<http://collections.americanjewisharchives.org/ms/ms0361/ms0361.html>)(WJC) records at the American Jewish Archives (<http://americanjewisharchives.org/>), I became intrigued by letters written by **Professor William (Wilhelm) Deman**. Although Professor Deman did not transit through Hong Kong, his plight tells us much about the Kafkaesque difficulties faced by refugees in the immediate post-Holocaust and post-war world – when immigration barriers and quota restrictions remained firmly in place – as well as refugee decisions to leave Shanghai, contentions surrounding repatriation vs. resettlement, and finally, the schisms within the refugee community itself. I'm also interested in Professor Deman as a refugee humanitarian actor. He ran the Gregg School of Business in Shanghai, a valuable training centre for refugees, as well as the Shanghai Jewish Youth Association club, founded by Horace Kadoorie. From 1947 to 1949, Professor Deman was also the Secretary of the *Association of Small Quota Committees*, formed to agitate for the rights of so-called 'small quota' individuals from Austria, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Lithuania and Turkey to enter the U.S.

First, a little background on the bureaucratic impasse faced by those from 'small quota' countries in Shanghai. President Truman's directives on immigration in December 1945 gave two-thirds of quotas for all countries for one year to Germany under blanket corporate affidavits. This measure was good news for German Jews in Shanghai hoping to enter the U.S. Adversely, it also split families, for example a German-born woman married to an Austrian or Polish man could not emigrate to America as a couple. To illustrate the difficulties faced by 'small quota' individuals, the total number of quotas allotted to Shanghai for Poles, Czechs, Romanians and Hungarians for the year 1947 to 1948 amounted to only 220. As Marcia Ristaino has written, the Displaced

Persons Act of June 1948 was a further blow for Shanghai's refugees. It centred on clearing Austria, Germany and Italy of DPs, and consequently, Shanghai was forgotten.

Professor Deman wrote regularly to Kurt Grossman, the WJC representative in New York, on the issue of small quota emigration. His letters become increasingly desperate as the economic and political climate in China disintegrates, anti-foreign sentiment takes hold, and the Communists approach Shanghai. Deman's letters also articulate the desires of some 1,314 refugees to emigrate to the States. They speak of a universal yearning to be reunited with surviving family members and describe how professional, middle aged refugees had learned English in Shanghai, meaning that both their familial and professional lives were tied to the United States. The letters also give a very raw insight into the psychological impact of waiting and of the ruin of lives lived with uncertainty.

The *Association of Small Quota Committees* emerges as a highly organised and resourceful organisation, demonstrating that refugees were not passive victims of circumstance but highly engaged with the changing tides of international politics and immigration legislation. Committee members write pleading letters to the head of the U.S. Visa Section, the State Department, and even President Truman. They are vocal and imaginative in devising strategies to enter the U.S. – opting for temporary evacuation to Japan, Hawaii or Cuba – and often reject suggestions from the WJC, including evacuation to Samar Island on the Philippines. The organisation also acts as a conduit of information for the WJC, who have no representatives on the ground in China (their China Section is made up of refugees), and the data they provide is used as the basis for WJC bulletins.

At the beginning of 1949, as the British, French and American governments evacuate their civilians from China, the situation becomes increasingly desperate and this sparks a schism within the refugee committee, a rebellion led by Professor Deman. He becomes disillusioned with futile hopes of resettlement and opts for repatriation. In February 1949, he sets sails on the S.S. Meigs to San Francisco, where he takes a sealed train to New York. Refugees are allowed to meet with friends and family for one hour on Ellis Island before taking a second ship to Italy where they continue their journeys.

Kurt Grossman writes an account of his 60-minute meeting with Professor Deman at Ellis Island. In many ways his eloquent prose captures the desperate plight of refugees across the globe:

'May I say a word about the procedure which the United States authorities have applied in handling these transports. The Jewish refugees arrive in San Francisco and then are taken under rigid supervision through the United States without allowing anybody to leave either the transport or Ellis Island. The relatives, among them brothers, sisters, and children, are permitted to see their kin for not quite one hour. The psychological effect must be a devastating one. The most depressing scenes take place. From Ellis Island the people can see the Statue of Liberty but the solemn words engraved therein remain just words and the promise they convey remains unfulfilled. Technically and according to regulations everything is in order, but from a human point of view, the treatment of the Jewish refugees coming from Shanghai is cruel. It is obvious that people who have not seen each other for ten years find 40 to 50 minutes inadequate. Departing from Ellis Island, after being with those refugees for one hour, leaves you with a lump in your throat.'

Post-War Exodus: Records of the American Jewish Archives

ON OCTOBER 31, 2016JUNE 4, 2020 / BY HK HERITAGE / IN SHANGHAI, US ARCHIVES / LEAVE A COMMENT

I'm in the United States for a month to study the World Jewish Congress records held at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio, a swing state in the upcoming U.S. elections (Hilary has a 34% chance of winning Ohio according to today's FiveThirtyEight (<http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/ohio/>) forecast).

The World Jewish Congress (<http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about>) (WJC) dates back to 1936 and was founded in Geneva, Switzerland to represent Jews around the world and advocate on their behalf to government and non-government organisations. The World Jewish Council was active in China through its Relief branch and China Section, established in 1945. It attempted to lobby the U.S. government to amend the 1948 DP Act which discriminated against those stranded in Shanghai from so-called 'small quota' countries, and approached government officials and Jewish communities in Australia and Canada with regards to refugee resettlement. The collection provides an insight into the incredibly complex plight of Jewish

refugees in the immediate post-war and post-Holocaust world, a world which kept its pre-war immigration controls and quotas firmly in place (see for example Suzanne Rutland on the ‘subtle exclusions’ of the IRO and Australia).

The collection also raises wider questions surrounding resettlement and repatriation, refugee emigration decisions informed by age and profession, the question of Palestine – whose immigration policy was still controlled by the British until the establishment of the State of Israel (May 1948) – and Allied responses to refugees, the intense pressure on individuals still caught in Shanghai as the civil war raged on in China and the Communists approached the city, and finally, Chinese attitudes towards Jewish refugees and Europeans generally in post-colonial China.

The collection also chronicles the rise of a professionalised cadre of humanitarian refugee organisations, their relief efforts and the competition between agencies, which in Shanghai proper included the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

The Shanghai Municipal Council and Refugee Arrivals, 1938 – 1941

ON DECEMBER 7, 2015 JUNE 4, 2020 / BY
HK HERITAGE / IN JEWISH REFUGEES, SHANGHAI / 1
COMMENT



(https://hongkongrefuge.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/8362_1.jpg)

Image courtesy of Beth Hatefutsoth

(<https://hongkongrefuge.wordpress.com/2015/10/23/fco-historical-collection-at-foyle-special-collection-library/>), the Foyle Library holds an incredible and near complete collection of Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) annual reports. During my visit to the library in October this year, I was particularly interested to see the SMC report for 1939, which describes the arrival of Jewish refugees from Europe and the SMC's attempts to close Shanghai's doors. Here's the extract:

The majority of these refugees took up residence or lived in camps established in the Settlement area north of Soochow Creek. Various committees and organisations undertook the work of finding accommodation for them and the Council had also come to their assistance, several municipal buildings in the Eastern District being loaned for their use. As the situation became more and more serious, the Council asked the Consular Body to take all possible steps to prevent any further influx of European refugees into Shanghai and the various Consuls agreed to make representations to their respective governments in the matter, stressing the unfavourable conditions in Shanghai and the virtual impossibility of any large number of refugees gaining a livelihood. – SMC Report, 1939

Before we go on, a little context about the events preceding the SMC report is needed. Firstly, as to the wider history of Shanghai: in 1842, at the end of the Opium War, the British and Chinese signed the Treaty of Nanking, which forced China to open five ports, Shanghai being amongst them. 'Miniature countries' were created in Shanghai, with the British, French and Americans operating their own tax, justice and defence systems. The SMC governed the city's International Settlement (composed of the Americans and British). July 1937 marked the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War which quickly spread to Shanghai. In her book *'Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China'* (2008), Irene Eber quotes Parks Coble to illustrate the heavy civilian and army casualties, largely localised in Zhabei and Hongkou: 'the bloody Battle of Shanghai would become the most intense conflict since Verdun in World War I'. By 1939, Shanghai was no longer the sparkling 'Pearl of the Orient' it had been at the start of the decade – with massive levels of inflation, an increase in lawlessness, precarious political situation as well as a huge Chinese homeless refugee population stretching the city's resources to its very limits. Eber expounds that 'the massive arrival of European refugees from the end of 1938 on must have seemed like the last straw to SMC officials'.

Another crucial, and often overlooked, aspect of the war was its impact on the passport control system historically handled by officials from the Nationalist government. With the outbreak of hostilities this system ceased to function and the practice was not reinstated by the Western powers for fear that the Japanese may want to have a say too. Passport controls lapsed and became an arbitrary process, with some shipping companies requiring a visa for entry to Shanghai, whilst others did not.

11 of Eber acknowledges, this is a hugely important distinction that many

historians have ignored, leading to the 'visa-free' misnomer. Thank you Irene for elaborating on this integral point.

But how were refugees reaching Shanghai from Austria and Germany? David Kranzler outlines the two major routes to the Far East, which depended on the period during which the escape took place:

By sea – end of 1938 to June 10 1940. Refugees would take a passage by train to Italy, where they would usually take the Italian Lloyd-Tristino line through the Suez and on to Shanghai via Singapore and Hong Kong.

By land – June 11 1940 to December 7 1941. When the Mediterranean was closed by Italy's entry into the war in June 1940, the only way to reach Shanghai was the land route across Russia and Siberia.

With the large-scale arrival of refugees from December 1938, the SMC, as Eber notes, was 'far from calm'. The council's first response was to appeal to Jewish organisations in England, Europe and America to help discourage more refugees from arriving. It was also made clear that no funds would be contributed to support this population, the onus of which was placed on the newly created Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees in Shanghai (although, as we can see from the SMC extract above, accommodation was made available on loan).

Eventually a 'permit system' was implemented to stop this influx of refugees, whereby an entry permit or possession of money was required to enter Shanghai. I will outline the complex political, economic and cultural motivations behind this as well as the attitudes (and failures) of the various communities, committees and national interests, referenced in Kranzler's *'Japanese, Nazis and Jews'* (1976), in a later blog posting. The regulation was issued on October 22 1939 and as Eber notes, the outbreak of war in Europe would, in any case, have prevented German ships from docking in Shanghai. According to these new regulations, further immigration to Shanghai was limited to: persons able to show a deposit of US\$400 as guarantee money; a resident's immediate family; someone with a contract for a job in Shanghai; or the intended spouse of a Shanghai resident.

As a result of a loophole in the regulations (which allowed refugees to procure the necessary funds and leave for Shanghai without a permit) and as, in their view, too many refugees were still arriving in the city, the SMC created new requirements which necessitated both a permit and US\$400, effective July 1 1940. In June 1940 Italy joined Germany in the war, thereby halting the flow of Italian carriers and again changing the picture – events had again overtaken SMC attempts to stem the flow of refugees. As Kranzler states, this spelled doom for the 2,000 potential immigrants with entry permits to the Foreign Settlements. New overland routes were worked out, but people in Germany had to start all over again with permit and transit visa

applications. And so, with the exception of 1,000 Polish refugees who arrived in Shanghai in 1941 and a fortunate few hundred Jews able to enter under the new requirements, Kranzler writes, 'the gates of the sole unrestricted haven for Jewish victims of Nazism were effectively closed'.

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OLDER POSTS

[BLOG AT WORDPRESS.COM.](#)