INTRODUCTION

A Seder in Shanghai in 1989

At sundown on 19 April 1989, the first evening of Passover, in the luxurious Xi Jiao Guest House in Shanghai, a room full of Jews shared unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and Manischewitz wine, reciting in turn ancient Hebrew phrases. Seven former Jewish residents of Shanghai stood up to recall with affection Chinese tolerance for their religion and the openness of the city that offered them haven. Their return recreated Shanghai's links with the Holocaust, drawing attention to its little-known role in saving 20,000 European Jews from the gas chambers. These Jews came to Shanghai for a personal celebration of their escape half a century earlier from the worst horrors of modern politics. As they toured Shanghai once again, the human dramas of their survival long ago were replayed against the background of rapidly changing international and Chinese politics to create an unforgettable Passover.

"Who the hell wants to go to China for a Seder?" wondered Gerhard Heimann, when he first heard of plans for this reunion. Heimann and Curt Pollack, Californians who had spent World War II in Shanghai, helped to organize three large reunions of Shanghai Jews over a decade, the most recent in Jerusalem in October 1988. Their newsletter, the *Hongkew Chronicle*, reached thousands of these "Shanghailanders". Both were skeptical about the willingness of their readers to embark on another pricey excursion so soon and advised postponing it until 1990 or 1991.[1]

Their doubts did not deter Peter de Krassel, a Santa Monica lawyer whose extensive business contacts in the People's Republic led to the idea for the Passover reunion. With little money but lots of media savvy, de Krassel plunged into publicity in January 1989. An impressive list of "patrons," including the Chief Rabbis of six European countries, California political heavyweights, and a few stars like Elizabeth Taylor thrown in for glitter, appeared on a 5 January press flyer. It promised a remarkable trip: "receptions and meetings with Chinese officials and dignitaries, economic and business seminars, historical tours," ceremonies placing historical plaques on synagogues and other Jewish buildings still standing, broadcasts of events on Shanghai television, a PBS documentary recording the entire trip, and perhaps most unlikely, exclusive use of the banquet

kitchen of Shanghai's finest hotel in order to assure adherence to *kashrut* standards for those who wanted a Chinese, but also a kosher Passover.

De Krassel was a boyishly handsome forty-two-year-old entrepreneur, who had created an international business in the unlikely intersection of Hollywood entertainment and modernizing China. His firm, Counselors at Large ("affiliated offices worldwide" proclaimed the letterhead), acted as middleman for Chinese imports of American television and radio programs. He attributed much of his success to his partnership with Tiffany Chu, a stylish young Shanghai native, who preferred Western clothes but moved with ease in Chinese bureaucratic circles.

Even as the world press took considerable notice of the reunion plans, the impressive facade de Krassel had created under the title "International Assembly of Jews in China" crumbled. Counselors at Large turned out to be a tiny operation that had to hire temporary help to field calls from interested Jews. The skepticism of Heimann and Pollack was justified: hardly anyone from their list of thousands of Shanghailanders signed up. With no financial backing and few paying to go, publicity dried up. The Hollywood producer in charge of filming dropped out. Striking at the heart of the religious basis of the reunion, Rabbi Dr. Abner Weiss, whose wealthy Beverly Hills congregation originally sponsored the reunion, withdrew his support.[2] Rabbi David Rosen, a B'nai B'rith official in Jerusalem, also decided not to come. On 16 April, the International Assembly departed Los Angeles airport for Hong Kong, leaving behind a string of unpaid debts and broken promises.[3] By then, I knew that I had been hoodwinked. On the plane across the Pacific Ocean, Curt Pollack explained his belief that the reunion was a front for private contacts between Israel and the Chinese government.

The Assembly consisted of five former Shanghai Jews, a handful of Israeli TV and press reporters, de Krassel and Chu, and myself, a historian following in the footsteps of my grandparents, Viennese refugees to Shanghai in 1939. Most of us were ignorant that the tour organization had disintegrated, that most of the events on the tour publicity would never materialize, that the only rabbi on the trip was an Israeli journalist under cover, and especially that the large gathering of Shanghai Jews that had been promised did not exist. De Krassel smiled away questions, blaming the Chinese for all difficulties.

Although the world's Shanghailanders showed little interest in the International Assembly, Israel and China attached considerable significance to this small group of tourists. Israel had been the first nation to recognize the new Communist government in China in 1949, but official relations between the two nations were permanently broken during the 1956 Suez crisis. With the People's Republic firmly supporting Arab radicals, contacts between Israel and China disappeared, making it nearly impossible for an Israeli citizen to get a visa into China. Only in the few years before 1989, with China's liberalization, did informal contacts develop again; persistent rumors suggested covert Israeli arms transfers. Both sides appeared to be groping toward an opening from the diplomatic impasse Middle Eastern conflicts imposed on an interconnected world. The Assembly provided a conveniently innocuous opportunity for rapprochement.

Israel's interest in the International Assembly was obvious. One of the first Shanghai Jews to join the reunion was Yosef Tekoah, a veteran Israeli diplomat, former Ambassador to the United Nations, the Chancellor of the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He originally suggested the Passover holiday for the reunion and used every opportunity to speak of the mutual affiliation of Chinese and Jews. More journalists from Israel joined the Assembly than Shanghailanders. Israeli state TV sent a Washington-based reporter and a New York freelance cameraman to create a documentary. At the last minute, the *Jerusalem Post* sent George Leonof and Sasson Jacoby, old Shanghai pals who shared the foreign editor's desk. The Chinese government demonstrated its interest more quietly, avoiding offense to Arab friends. Arriving in Hong Kong without visas for China, separate from our group, Leonof and Jacoby were able to procure the necessary papers within twenty-four hours, an unprecedented gesture toward Israeli reporters. Throughout the stay in Shanghai, the returning Jews were treated as special guests. Although the Chinese kept their motives hidden behind a polite facade, they clearly hoped to use the trip to drum up increased investment by US and Israeli Jews in their ambitious economic modernization program, sputtering lately for lack of capital. On 18 April, the small group, now numbering seven Shanghai veterans amid assorted reporters, wives, and organizers, left Hong Kong airport on China Eastern Airlines for Shanghai. That same day, thousands of students gathered in Tiananmen Square in Beijing to demand political liberalization.

Shanghai is the largest city in China, its commercial and industrial capital. It developed into one of the world's great ports during a century of domination by the British, an imperialist enclave on the Chinese coast. In 1842, the Royal Navy, protecting the mother country's opium trade, sent a few steam-powered gunboats up the Yangtze River, scattering a small fleet of junks and paddlewheelers powered by human treadmills. China was forced to open five ports, including the small town of Shanghai, to Western trade. The British received extraterritorial rights in the city, which were later extended to other Western nations. Shanghai's location near the mouth of the Yangtze allowed it eventually to dominate both coastal and inland trade. By the twentieth century, Shanghai was really two cities. The International Settlement and French Concession were administered completely by whites, mainly British, Americans, and French, although most of the population was Chinese. Surrounding "Greater Shanghai" supplied cheap Chinese labor.

The great movements of national unification and nationalist division of empires after 1850 left this partitioned city an anomaly in a twentieth-century world of nation-states. White European and US businessmen continued to run the city government in their commercial interests, Sikhs brought from British India directed traffic, and the huge Chinese population labored for wages no European would accept. The freedom of self-government allowed capitalism and imperialism to reach a peak of sleazy corruption that became legendary. Opium addiction, prostitution, bribery, and petty thievery defined daily life under a municipal administration that practiced a kind of apartheid by keeping Chinese out of parks, fine apartment blocks, and positions of power.

Shanghai's unique status also made it attractive to Jews, ever seeking a haven from the antisemitism that seemed inevitably to accompany emotional nationalism. Sephardic Jews from Baghdad, oppressed by their Ottoman Turkish rulers, followed the expansion of the British Empire along the south Asian coastline in the early nineteenth century, eventually reaching China. The Sassoon family became the Rothschilds of the East, with family members amassing fortunes in banking and commerce in the British-controlled ports. Elias David Sassoon was one of the first Jews in Shanghai, making it his headquarters in 1850, and his clerks created the first Jewish community there.

For the next eighty years, Sephardic Jews trickled into Shanghai, reaching nearly a thousand by the 1930s. A few families, notably the Hardoons and Kadoories, joined the Sassoons in wealth and power.[4] But many were poor refugees who found freedom, if not fortune, in Westernized Shanghai. Sasson Jacoby's father was born in Baghdad, where he studied to become a rabbi. When the Turks began to mobilize an army for the small Balkan Wars, which soon led to World War I, a friend in the Turkish police warned the family that Jews would be drafted. The Jacoby family boarded an English ship for Karachi and bounced from one Jewish community to the next until they finally landed in Shanghai. Jacoby's father became an "all-purpose rabbi" for the highly religious Sephardic community: scribe, *mohel* (performing circumcisions), *shohet* (kosher butcher). Sasson was born in Shanghai in 1918.[5]

By the 1920s, the Sephardic community was well enough established in Shanghai to build a large synagogue, Ohel Rachel, in the French Concession. But the flow of Iraqi Jews continued, often for the same reasons. Yehuda Halevy's father left in the late 1920s to avoid military service, floated slowly along the south Asian coast, arriving in Shanghai in 1930. Yehuda was born in 1937 and was the youngest Shanghai Jew on our tour.

George Leonof, Jacoby's co-editor at the *Jerusalem Post*, represented the second ethnic wave of Jews into Shanghai, this time from Russia. Leonof's father was among the Russian "pioneers" who moved across Siberia into Manchuria at the turn of the century to build a spur of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. For Jews, Manchuria represented both economic opportunity and a chance to escape the vicious antisemitism encouraged by Tsar Nicholas II. Leonof was born in 1915 in Harbin, the center of the Manchurian Russian community. The Russian Revolutions of 1917 transformed most of these Russians into emigrés.

> It was a community that was caught by the Revolution out of Russia . . . certainly with no interest in going back. And I remember as a child, a lot of Russians, Jews and non-Jews, staying over in our house, who had come on foot across the border. They were tired, hungry, and we used to provide them with a nice cup of boiled water. They didn't want any more, just to get them back into shape.[6]

Many of these newly stateless Russians drifted south to Shanghai, as did the Leonofs in 1922. In 1931, Japanese armies invaded Manchuria. Soon the Japanese managed to get

a stranglehold on most of the business life in the area. Seeking a more open economy, Jews flowed south, making Shanghai the center of Jewish life in China.

Now Jacoby, Halevy, and Leonof were returning to Shanghai for the first time in forty years. At the Shanghai airport, we met our guide and local impresario, Song Zi Qiang, calling himself Max, who slipped us through customs with bags unopened. But even Max could not prevent the petty chicanery that has reasserted itself with the atrophying of the Chinese revolutionary spirit. Lisbeth Loewenberg from San Francisco needed an individual exit visa, because she planned to leave China later than the rest of the group. Not knowing that this cost $6, she approached the official in charge of issuing documents with a $20 bill. He had just collected two other such payments, so had only $12 for change: "I owe you $2." But Loewenberg also did not have the picture for her exit visa. How to deal with this problem? Pay $2. "It felt like old times," said Loewenberg, remembering Shanghai in the days when anything could be bought at the right price.

We were driven by bus to the Jinjiang Hotel in downtown Shanghai for our first dinner, where Richard Nixon and Zhou Enlai had normalized relations between the United States and China in 1972. The Jinjiang is the flagship of one of China's new capitalist conglomerates, the Jinjiang Company, holding thirteen hotels, three thousand taxis and rental cars, eleven cargo ships, and over seventy other companies, totaling perhaps $1 billion in assets. Although the chairman of Jinjiang, Ren Baizun, claimed a monthly salary of only $108, these capitalist ventures within socialist China can be lucrative. Jinjiang and a handful of other market-oriented enterprises in China are taxed at a flat rate and allowed to distribute profits as they wish, into reinvestment or bonuses. Max, a middle-level manager for Jinjiang, used his considerable year-end bonuses to support a preference for $50 silk neckties.

As we entered the Jinjiang Hotel, Tekoah pointed out how the doorway had remained the same for fifty years. Before the building's name was "Sinified", it had been the Cathay Hotel, residence for Shanghai's Western elite. There Tekoah's family found an apartment upon arrival in Shanghai. The Tukaczynskys, as they were then named, were among the wealthiest in a second wave of Russian refugees who sought out Shanghai's commercial and religious freedom. They left the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, when the relatively liberal New Economic Policy was replaced by a centrally planned economy based on hyper-industrialization. The commercial interests of many Soviet Jews made them suspect as bourgeois influences, black marketeers, and capitalist exploiters. The Tukaczynskys were not only wealthy, but prescient. The family ran an international trading business in Perm, the major industrial center of the Ural Mountains. Recognizing the change in Soviet policy as it was occurring, they left the Soviet Union in 1929, Tekoah's father settling in Poland, while two uncles moved to Harbin. Traveling throughout Europe in the early 1930s, his father saw the warning signals of impending disaster and joined his brothers in northern China. In 1938, they moved south into Shanghai, where they soon established a large international business, importing steel, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and food products, while exporting bristles and furs.

> Shanghai, in those days, for people like ourselves, was really a window to the big world, the outside. We suddenly found ourselves in a city which was very cosmopolitan, the largest city in the entire world, a large foreign population. This expressed itself in a choice of schools for us as children, in a choice of particular interests or social associations. It was the open world, the big world, in every sense. Unlike the Jewish people who came as refugees from Central Europe later, we were settled there, well established. A large part of the Russian Jewish community was well-off. My family was very, very well-off. In Jewish life, it counts what your financial position is. And the fact that my father was chosen chairman of the community is an indication of that. So here we were in a city which was very fascinating from the point of view of its cosmopolitanism, from the point of view of its tremendous international business activity. In those days, I think the United States had more invested in China than in any other part of the world outside the United States. Here you were really in the heart of the universe, in a sense. You would meet people from everywhere. You had friends who came from India, you had friends from Australia, you had friends who were from America. If you went for summers to Japan, you met foreigners who came for their summer vacations from all parts of the world. . . . The life we led was a life of material ease.[7]

At the Jinjiang, Tekoah could again dine in style in his former residence. Our hosts from Jinjiang provided the International Assembly with fine food and luxurious accomodations. But Tekoah and the other Shanghai Jews wanted most of all to see the important sites of Jewish life in Shanghai. De Krassel held out the tantalizing possibility that the local government would permit memorial plaques to be placed on former Jewish buildings. The group wanted to find the synagogues and schools again, after forty years. So on the first morning in Shanghai, we piled into a minibus and set off for the former International Settlement. As our unflappable driver weaved among the hundreds of bicycles that clog Shanghai's streets, leaning on his horn, the minibus was filled with excited shouts and waving arms.

> A rich man used to live here . . . I lived there, the second alley from the corner . . . There is the Shanghai Jewish School . . . Here's the back of the synagogue . . . Over here on the left used to be markets . . . I've lost my way now . . . Wasn't that Carter Road? . . . There was a market right here where I used to go with my mother . . . That's Bubbling Well Road . . . Now we're coming to the end of the International Settlement on this road . . . I visited this street often.

After some wandering among the sycamore-lined streets of the former French Concession, our first stop was the Ashkenazi synagogue. Built in 1940 in imposing geometrical style, the synagogue had once seated over a thousand. There was no indi-

cation of its former use. The large banner inscribed with exhortatory Chinese characters, which hangs in nearly every public hall, dominated the stage. The balcony wings, where women sat during services, had disappeared in a 1984 fire, as had the wooden floor and the old seats. Now perhaps forty bored listeners scattered among the five hundred chairs turned away from a droning lecturer to watch the excited Jews milling in the lobby and peeking inside the hall. Our local host from the foreign affairs office of Shanghai, Fan Yu-fei, announced that he knew the building quite well: it had been the auditorium for his high school during the days of the Cultural Revolution. His class knew that this had once been a synagogue. Today, the hall is used for a law college.

Later the Israeli TV journalist shooed us all out of the auditorium so the cameraman could film Tekoah, with white yarmulke, standing in the front near his family's old pew, reciting prayers not heard within those walls for decades. Tekoah would be the star of the projected documentary as the head of the group and its most distinguished member. He thus recreated his family's life in Shanghai, quite different from those of the former refugees also on the tour.

Actually Tekoah had little interest in his family's lucrative business activities. He visited the huge downtown offices and warehouses of the family firm only a few times in his youth. In his spare time, Tekoah became increasingly involved in his own Jewish background. Dissatisfied with the Jewish content of his formal education, he studied Jewish history and joined the Jewish troop of the British Boy Scouts. Tekoah was drawn to public life, to the intersection of Jewish culture and public affairs. He joined Betar, the organization for young Zionists, and helped found a junior chapter of the B'nai B'rith, the first in China. "It was all a kind of expression of pride in being what you are. You felt happy by being Jewish, by being able to practice Jewishness, by being able to find inspiration in Jewishness."[8]

Tekoah followed his father into the spotlight of leadership. From the synagogue, the bus took us a few blocks to the former Jewish Club, mainly used by Russian Jews, now a music conservatory. Tekoah's career as an orator began there at age fourteen, delivering addresses on Jewish history and culture, such as his speech on the anniversary of the birth of Theodore Herzl, a founder of modern Zionism. By the time Shanghai was liberated from Japanese occupation by US troops in 1945, Tekoah was recognized as a community leader. At a special service in the Sephardic synagogue greeting the Americans, Tekoah gave the welcoming speech.

In front of the Jewish Club, Boris Katz remembered hearing Tekoah speak there. Katz was a mild, warm, bespectacled engineer at the University of Illinois. His family also came out of the Soviet Union as Stalinism was on the rise, but without the Tukaczynskys' advantages. One night in 1931, Stalin's secret police searched their home for incriminating evidence against his father, a petty trader in clothing. Some letters from relatives in the United States turned up. His father took off for the Far East, just in time to avoid another police visit. A few months later, in the winter of 1931, the whole family, together with the family of his father's business partner, quietly boarded a train for the fourteen-day ride to Vladivostok. Katz, an eight-year-old at the time,

remembers crossing the Urals, the enormous bridge over Lake Baikal, and the vast plains of Siberia.

> I knew that we were going to Shanghai, and as I was laying on the top bunk in the train I started singing a little song. And in Russian, Shanghai and *chai,* which is tea, rhyme. So I was saying to myself that when we get to Shanghai, we will drink *chai*. And my mother's face appeared at the bunk and being usually a very kind woman, she was furious, and she said, if I didn't stop, that she would kill me. Because that would give away the whole story you see. If there was a conductor or some stranger that would hear about it, we would be dead.[9]

From a town on the Manchurian border, they were led on foot out of the Soviet Union, and traveled to Harbin.

> In Harbin that was a very chaotic time, sheer anarchy. Harbin was a city where gangs would get a hold of, kidnap people for ransom. I remember several Chinese men, and perhaps there were one or two Russians, a gang. So they came in, they went through the drawers and pretended to find a gun and threatened us as if they were some sort of authorities. Now this other man [the partner] had a son who was eighteen years of age, and they grabbed him and started to walk off with him. We were all there and the two men were there and nobody knew what to do, except my mother, bless her soul, a little, short, dumpy, plump woman, a wonderful Jewish mother, you know, in the best sense. She started to scold them and challenge them and asked if they had a warrant, what basis are they taking him away and proceeded to go after them, yelling all the way. They went down the steps—this was on the second floor—and down an alley where the car was waiting. I could see from the window. And by the time they were almost at the car she physically grabbed this young man and took him away from them and saved his life. They were so stunned that they just left . . . and that's my mother . . . I'll never forget that. This is the supreme example of the courage that she had.[10]

The Jewish Club was locked, so we left in search of the Sephardic synagogue, Ohel Rachel, and the Shanghai Jewish School built next to it in 1932. With help from some elderly Chinese, who noticed us arguing over maps on a street corner, we came upon these well-preserved buildings on Shaanxi Nan Lu, the former Seymour Road. Both were locked and evidence of Jewish origin had been removed, yet childhood memories flooded our group. When the Katz family arrived in Shanghai, young Boris was sent to the Jewish School. He remembers arriving in school looking like a refugee, wearing a hat with ear flaps, and being laughed at by the other kids. Katz took his revenge by shooting to the top of the class and staying there throughout his elementary years.

Katz attended the Jewish School with Tekoah and Yehuda Halevy. Halevy is a burly smiling man, a retired general in the Israeli army.[11] But he remembered less disciplined days, when he often waited outside the principal's office. Halevy and Katz fondly recalled days on the playground between the school and synagogue, playing marbles or soccer. They also noted with a mixture of pride and regret the British-oriented curriculum. In the 1930s, the British school system was world-renowned, and it dominated the Shanghai Jewish School. Mrs. Gibbs from Cornwall taught English, and Mrs. O'Dwyer from Ireland instructed English literature. Katz and Halevy recognized the imperialist bias: "Chinese was not on the agenda." Chinese language was not taught, China appeared in geography lessons as the fringe of the British Empire, and the cafeteria served only Western food. In this way, the Jews mirrored the colonial prejudices of the larger white community. English was the language of commerce. Whites went to white schools, sought out white doctors, and ate European food cooked by their Chinese servants. Chinese could not be members of European clubs (the American Club was the first to accept Chinese guests). Yet socioeconomic necessity could temper racial prejudice: while the wealthier Jews met Chinese only as servants, coolies, and rickshaw drivers, poorer families like the Halevys lived in Chinese neighborhoods and mingled with them daily.

In a light Shanghai drizzle, standing in front of the Jewish School, Tekoah and Katz fell to arguing about curriculum. Tekoah, the youthful Zionist become Israeli diplomat, belittled the religious side of the school's curriculum, claiming its deficiencies were typical for the education of Jews in the Diaspora. "If I depended on what I learned about Jewish culture in this school, I would never have gone to Israel." Katz, the secular Jew assimilated to American life, resented this disparagement of his school and the unspoken criticism of his own lack of Zionist fervor. They were not merely disagreeing on the merits of their education half a century in the past; they were recreating the argument among modern Jews.

Tekoah's religious activities outside of the Jewish School had taught him more about Judaism. He was a young man on the rise, no longer content to see the big world through the window of Shanghai. Taking the first freighter out after the end of the war, he enrolled at Harvard in international law. He created a student organization to observe the newly formed United Nations. The British had just turned over the fate of their Palestinian territories to the UN, and Tekoah immediately offered his help to the Jewish delegation in New York. Upon graduation, he went to Israel and began his long successful career in the Foreign Ministry. Tekoah's passage through Shanghai was marked by his and his family's recognition of the opportunities ahead and dangers all around, and their use of great financial resources to activate their plans. His career paralleled the creation of the Israeli state, the end of two millenia of Diaspora.

Katz, too, had absorbed the Zionism implicit in youthful Jewish activities in Shanghai. But the chauvinism and authoritarian tendencies that infused the uncompromising Zionism of Betar made Katz uncomfortable. After World War II, Katz also came to the United States to complete his education at Berkeley, and chose to stay. To Israelis, this

was a choice for continuing Diaspora over the Jewish state. Polite disagreements about education in Shanghai masked the Israeli resentment of American Jewry's willingness to criticize from the outside. The form of the argument is modern, but the crux is age-old. Should Jews assimilate into their host society or band together to protect their traditions? Was individual or cultural survival the goal?

The lessons of Shanghai were ambiguous. Jews needed Shanghai as a refuge from failed attempts at assimilation. Yet life in Shanghai encouraged the dream of living peacefully among non-Jews, of tolerance, of internationalism. Tekoah and Katz learned opposite lessons in this Jewish School in China, but practiced the argument with equal tact. Katz refrained from bringing up the *intifada* in the presence of Israelis, only whispering about his horror at Israeli militarism in the privacy of his hotel room. Tekoah rarely dropped his professional diplomacy, which he employed to solicit US support for his new university in the desert.

As it began to rain harder, we left the Jewish School, drove out of the former French Concession over the Suzhou Creek (formerly Soochow Creek) into Hongkou (formerly spelled Hongkew). In 1937, the Japanese had taken over Hongkou in heavy fighting with the Chinese; this dense urban neighborhood became a bombed-out slum. The bus stopped in front of an ordinary block of apartments on Ward Road. We all tumbled out, keeping a respectful distance from the TV camera, which was focused on Curt Pollack as he turned into a spacious courtyard. While the cameraman huddled under an umbrella, Pollack told his story, the unfortunate but not quite tragic tale which made Shanghai so indispensable to Jews.

Image 0.1. Curt Pollack, Shanghai, 1989

Pollack was born in Berlin in 1927. Like most German Jews, his family was fully assimilated into German society, mixing with little friction in schools, cultural life, in the professions, and on the street.[12] The sudden advent of Nazi government, with its public humiliation and separation of Jews, came as a shock. As a young boy, Pollack did not understand national politics, but he could readily sense the changed circumstances of his life after 1933. He was beaten by schoolmates, forbidden to enter parks, playgrounds, and movie houses, and forced to transfer from his public school to a special school for Jews. Despite these warning signals, his family made no plans to leave the country: "My father felt that this was going to blow over, like so many Jews did, and then everything was going to go back to normal."[13]

The so-called *Kristallnacht*, Night of Broken Glass, 9 November 1938, dashed those forlorn hopes, as German mobs destroyed Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues throughout the country. "It was brought home to me, an 11-year-old boy at that time, how severe the situation was, because not only did the synagogues burn all over the city, which was unavoidable to anyone to recognize, but my father, who was on a business trip to Hamburg, never returned home." Arrested by the Gestapo along with thousands of other Jews "for his own protection," his father landed in the Buchenwald concentration camp. His business, car, and bank accounts were confiscated. When Pollack's mother finally discovered her husband's whereabouts, she was told that he could be released only if she showed proof that he would immediately leave the country.

> My mother took me by the hand and we went from one consulate to another all over the city, together with thousands of other Jews who were doing the same thing, trying to obtain passage or visa to enter a foreign country. I remember standing on my feet for hours in long queues . . . it was cold weather . . . February. All of a sudden a rumor spread, somebody just came from the Cuban consulate, they were issuing visas, so in five minutes this row had dissipated at the Dominican, and everybody went over to the Cuban and found out that it was a bunch of you-know-what. . . . In January or February 1939, there was hardly a country that would want to take a Jew from Germany.[14]

One city in the world offered hope: Shanghai had no restrictive immigration policies, no visa requirements, no public antisemitism. It also had a reputation as a corrupt and filthy city: "terrible conditions, disease, vermin, and—oh, my God, should we go? The long and short of it was, there was no other choice."

The Western world closed its doors, but even in 1939 only the most desperate Jews headed east. The decision to embark for Shanghai was often forced by the arrest of a family member. Without this pressure to emigrate, Pollack's extended family, like so many others, stayed behind, retaining those forlorn hopes that were finally choked in the gas chambers. "(My mother's) sister and her brother said, 'Well, you go, we don't want to go. I'll go to Belgium, I'll try to get to Switzerland.' They all stayed behind and unfortunately we have never seen them again since." For young Pollack, the prospect

was not so daunting. "Shanghai, when I found out about it, I got an atlas, and I looked where Shanghai was and mapped out pretty much how we would be getting there. For a young boy of twelve, it was a great adventure, not knowing the dangers, the frustrations and the sorrows that my parents felt. I was very excited."[15]

In May 1939, Curt Pollack and his mother were reunited with his father at the Berlin railroad station, and stepped on a train to Genoa, carrying two suitcases and 10 Marks per person, all that was allowed by German law. At the border with Italy, Nazi officials had one last opportunity to frighten fleeing Jews.

> The customs people grilled you pretty thoroughly, because they thought you were smuggling diamonds, and that's the one thing, we made sure that we did have some, we smuggled some stuff out of Germany. They were sewn by my grandfather into a pillow that I carried as a child under one arm and a teddy bear under another. One was a very, very long gold chain necklace into the bunting of the pillow all the way around so it wouldn't be felt. And then inside the teddy bear's nose, there were rings that my mother wore. I wasn't aware of any of this.[16]

Thousands of Jews confronted the same forced choice, not only in Germany, but in Austria, too, incorporated into Greater Germany in the Anschluss of 13 March 1938. Viennese Jews, probably the most fully assimilated Jewish community in Europe, were suddenly faced with intolerable conditions. Children were forced out of their schools. Jews could only shop in grocery stores during certain hours. Lisbeth Loewenberg remembers her final days in Vienna at the end of 1939.

> You have to know that in Vienna we were every day afraid about our lives, because so many people were picked up and brought to concentration camps. Most of the males that were still around that we knew didn't sleep at home, slept every night somewhere else from one friend to another, so if they would come to their home to pick them up, so they weren't home. You shivered every minute for your life.

Loewenberg was eighteen when her mother suggested they go to Shanghai. Her father left immediately and soon sent for his family. But passage was increasingly difficult to find in late 1939. War in Europe had broken out; Jews were already being transported to Poland. Only a few Italian and Japanese ships per month left for China. A Jewish cultural organization helped the Loewenbergs get a ticket, and it cost them all of their money. But it did not matter: "All you could take out was 10 Marks, $3, to start your new life on a different continent. . . . When we got to Trieste, I thought it was the most beautiful place in the world, because you could breathe freely. You were not afraid for your life."[17]

Loewenberg and her mother, penniless like the Pollacks, were put up by an international Jewish aid organization in Trieste until their boat departed. On board, for a few weeks at least, their lives were transformed.

Image 0.2. Lisbeth Lowenberg on the Great Wall, China, 1989

> You were on the ship and you had three meals a day served to you in the dining room. For me it was a fantastic experience. First through the Mediterranean, then through the Red Sea, Aden, Bombay, Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai. It was like a luxury cruise and, of course, you are free, you don't have to be afraid for your lives any more. I remember particularly one thing: there were two young men who had come out from the concentration camp. And they were playing the piano and singing in the evening. You know light songs, popular music, "Mack the Knife" and so forth, and I said to my mother, "How is it possible for people when they come out from a concentration camp are able to enjoy themselves and sing and be so happy?" And my mother said, "Well, it's because they came out of the concentration camp."[18]

To the Nazis, all Jews were alike, but this idea was as false as the rest of Nazi ideology. Wealth and status could smooth the bumpiest paths. My grandmother, Amalia Hochstädt, described a very different manner of leaving Vienna. Her husband Josef was a gynecologist, her brother the lawyer for the Vienna Philharmonic. Like all Jews in Greater Germany, they experienced terror in the wake of *Kristallnacht*. Her father and another brother were arrested and incarcerated under terrible conditions. Her brother fell sick and died. Josef was arrested, too, accused by a Nazi patient of molesting her, convicted and sentenced to eighteen months in prison. Friends were grabbed by the police and forced to wash the streets by hand with caustic chemicals. The Hochstädts feared first for their eighteen-year-old son, Ernst, my father. In 1938, he was sent to friends in Trieste, from there to Portugal, and finally to a wealthy relative in New

York. Then preparations were made to leave: a silver service was sent to England, $20 installments (the maximum allowed) mailed to various relatives, furniture shipped to Shanghai. Property in Berlin was sold, and the proceeds smuggled out. My grandmother explained: "We sent money out. We paid about 60 or 70 percent. I think per $1,000 we got $400 or something like that. We gave it to somebody who had money outside. You had to trust everybody, without papers."[19] Then Amalia and Josef took the train to Italy. Their friends in Trieste had valuable connections. They knew the owners of the shipping company and got first-class tickets to Shanghai. They procured a letter of recommendation to an Italian doctor on the Shanghai Health Commission. When preparations were complete, the Hochstädts boarded a ship filled mostly with Jews who had just been released from concentration camps and sailed to Shanghai.

The trip took four weeks, as the ship stopped in the British-controlled ports along the coast of the Indian Ocean, following the path of the Baghdadi Jews decades before. British authorities sometimes allowed Jewish refugees to disembark, but not to stay. Only in Shanghai, whose harbor was controlled by the Japanese fleet, could the refugees freely enter. Upon arrival those Jews without funds were met by a highly organized welfare system. They were taken to one of several *Heime* or "homes," like the one in Ward Road, where they were registered, assigned a bunk, and received meals. The Ward Road camp was intended to be a transit camp until new arrivals could get enough money to find housing elsewhere in Hongkou. But soon it was overwhelmed with refugees: the soup kitchens served 5,000, then 10,000 meals daily. Those with a bit of money might move into a cheap house in Hongkou. After two months in the camp, the Pollacks sold their smuggled jewelry and bought a tiny house, which they painted, renovated, and then shared with other refugees. Many Jews were never able to leave the *Heime*.

The Hochstädts had a more pleasant reception. They were met at the boat by a cousin, another doctor who had been in Shanghai for several years. That day they dined with the Italian Health Commissioner. Through friends they heard about an apartment just vacated by a jai alai player transferred to the Philippines. For $600 the Hochstädts bought a spacious apartment in the International Settlement, one floor above the Uptown Cinema, with enough space for Josef to have an office. They did not like the dining room furniture, so a Viennese architect designed a new set. One day the Italian doctor, a surgeon, told Josef about a rich Chinese family whose daughter, six months pregnant, was deathly ill. Would he do the caesarean? The baby was already dead, but the daughter was saved, and Dr. Hochstädt's reputation was made. Soon he had an international clientele. The Hochstädts could recreate their former bourgeois Viennese life, except that the servants were Chinese.

For most Jews, life in Shanghai was not so comfortable. About 17,000 Jews from Germany and Austria managed to escape to Shanghai before Italian entry into the war in 1940 and new Japanese restrictions made the trip much more difficult.[20] Most settled in run-down Hongkou, separated by the Suzhou Creek and by even wider class differences from the cosmopolitan communities in the International Settlement. As

their numbers grew, a Jewish communal life with a Central European flavor was reestablished. Shops, restaurants, and bakeries opened, newspapers were founded, an orchestra was organized. Horace Kadoorie, one of the leaders of the Baghdadi community, established a school in Hongkou, where Lisbeth Loewenberg's father taught history to Curt Pollack. Religious services were held in any available building; Pollack had his bar mitzvah in a Ward Road synagogue. But even his father's job as pharmaceutical salesman could not support the family; they still received a daily meal from the *Heim*.

Today the former Ward Road *Heim* is indistinguishable from hundreds of other Shanghai apartment blocks. The rain and history darkened ordinary buildings, and soon everyone began to move back toward the bus. Lisbeth Loewenberg, standing in the rain after most of the others had left the courtyard, looked immobilized by memories. I asked whether she had lived here. No. Visited friends? Not really that either. She paused and found strength. There had been a hospital for Jews here in the compound. There her father and her infant son had died. This revelation had been costly, and the alert cameraman saw us embracing. He came over to ask what had happened. Loewenberg explained that her father had died of cancer, "he would have died anywhere the same." The rest she would not tell to the machine, with its future and impersonal audience. A few minutes later the cameraman returned to her. The camera had not worked, and she had been so emotional, would she do it again?

The day's drive through Shanghai's Jewish past had been emotionally draining. Perhaps that explains the subdued atmosphere that evening, the first night of Passover. Back at the Xi Jiao Guest House, a large dining room had been reserved for the International Assembly, and a wide assortment of guests came to celebrate a Seder in China. The American Consul headed a group of about twenty Americans who happened to be in Shanghai, exchange students and professors, vacationers, and business people. The Hungarian Consul General, Andras Halasz, turned up because a Hungarian Jewish visitor to Shanghai several months before had asked for his help in finding the former synagogues. Halasz convinced the Soviet Vice Consul to come, too.

The Seder is a thoughtful celebration of Jewish deliverance from persecution. Symbolic foods and readings from the *Haggadah* engage every participant in a ritualized recitation of Jewish history. Neither the distinguished guests nor the exotic location, however, could raise the evening above the level of ritual. None of the diners hoped for deliverance: they were tourists, not refugees. Religious fervor was also absent: many Jews from Shanghai, like their communities of origin in Russia and Germany, were Jewish in cultural heritage rather than doctrinal observance. The Israelis tended to express their Judaism as Zionism, which failed to move the Americans. Tekoah's fine words about the close affinity of Jews and Chinese missed their intended audience: no official Chinese attended. Something was awry with de Krassel's much touted connections. This was the first signal that the Chinese government was wary of our group. This unusual Seder was perhaps appropriate to the return of the Shanghai Jews: Jews from many nations, yet a people apart, celebrating their cultural heritage in the middle of a great Chinese city.

Traveling through Shanghai's streets had brought back individual as well as communal memories. In the next few days, the International Assembly began to be pulled apart by those ethnic differences that had once divided the Jews of Shanghai. Loewenberg and Pollack took a taxi back to Hongkou. Those with roots in the International Settlement went to search for their pasts. Determined to find his childhood neighborhoods, Yehuda Halevy went looking on Great Western Road for the pharmacy, which had been next door to the second house his family occupied. But in this formerly European neighborhood, Halevy was disappointed. He hardly recognized the buildings and found nobody who had lived there in the 1940s. He pushed his memory further back, to his first home in Shanghai, in the slums of Wuting Road. Arriving there he asked an old woman: "Do you know of any Jewish people living here?" "What is Jewish people?" "Do you know of any foreigners?" "No foreigners." Halevy told what happened then:

> By a *mazel*, a bit of luck, there is a *noodnik*—do you know what a *noodnik* is? A woman who knows all the gossip, she knows what is going on. She sees us and says, "Don't you say there were no foreigners. There were a family or two of foreigners. Just a moment. The father was Oussif." My father's name was Yosef. From all the houses started to pour in the old generation. They were so happy. And they started to tell me that they remembered me. I was really excited. And what was really authentic was that one of the ladies said, "Yes, he had a very beautiful sister, called Kathy. We remember how beautiful she was." So what could be more authentic? My father, my sister, myself, I remember the house. And they bring me the guy who played mahjong with my father. And he wouldn't give up, used to stay all night, he had to win. Suddenly two people come and they said they played marbles with me.

Halevy was able to rediscover his past, because he had lived in a poor Chinese neighborhood.

> There it stayed Chinese, because that was the population, none of them ran away. None of them were high class. So there was no in and out. They were the second generation, maybe a third generation, but their parents were still there. So I was welcomed truly with love, and I felt at home.[21]

I had never been to Shanghai, but I too wished to find a home there. On the corner of Shaanxi Nan Lu and Nanjing Lu, formerly Seymour and Bubbling Well Roads, I stood across from the former Uptown Cinema, still a movie theater, but no longer playing Hollywood's latest productions. An imposing seven-story building curving to fit the corner, it dominated one of the busiest intersections of downtown Shanghai. My grandparents had lived in apartment 1B. I could read their address, 1191, above a simple doorway; I went down a dark hall and up the stairs. The second floor landing was crowded with bicycles; a bored girl sat in a narrow elevator. The doors were marked with Chinese characters, but my Chinese was limited to hello and thank you. I was lost

in the embarassing way peculiar to travelers: wanting help but dumb with ignorance, illiterate, literally out of place. Which door would lead me fifty years back into my family's past? A young Chinese man coming down the stairs noticed my distress: "Can I help you?" Yes, he could. He found a door with the Chinese character corresponding to B; behind the symbol the shadow of the letter B was still faintly visible. He knocked and asked whether I, the grandson of former residents, could come in.

The apartment was a barely furnished office where several men sat at big desks reading the newspaper and chatting. The large airy rooms were well lit by windows on both sides, unlike the dark black-and-white photos I have seen in my grandmother's hands. My grandfather's medical office, once filled with furniture shipped from Vienna, was a separate two-room apartment for the woman who cleans up. In her crowded room overlooking Seymour Road, we traded names. She changed her dress to be in my photograph and showed me her husband's personal computer piled up on a desk. I thanked them all for the spontaneous hospitality we had met so often in the past few days. With my translator's help, I caught a bus, so crowded I wanted to put my head on the foreign shoulder inches away and cry for joy, maybe also for sadness for my grandmother, victim of so many forced removals, who had just suffered the last one to a tiny room in a nursing home in Albuquerque hopefully named *La Vida Llena*, The Full Life.

On 21 April, we packed into our minibus for our only official meeting with the Chinese that had not been canceled. We arrived at a plain looking brick building and were guided into a room with several long tables. The Shanghai Jews ranged themselves on one side, facing an impressive group of scholarly gentlemen. They were members

Image 0.3. Former Uptown Cinema, Shanghai, 2010

of the Shanghai Judaic Studies Association, which had just been created in September 1988. We were handed copies of their constitution:

> This Association, based on the belief that understanding and friendship between all peoples of the world help to promote world peace, unites all researchers in the field of Judaic studies for development of the studies of Judaic history, culture, economics, politics, religion, and folk customs. It will also promote the development of Judaic studies and better understanding of the Jewish people.

The dozen men reflected these interdiscipinary aims: they included scholars of economics, history, religion and philosophy, politics, international relations, and literature. Jin Yinzhong, our host and Secretary General of the Association, opened the meeting with a friendly gesture: "We are all Shanghailander." Then with real scholarly indignation, he decried the paucity of Jewish studies done by Chinese scholars. In less than a year, this small Association had already accomplished more than in the past century. About twenty essays had been written, to be published as a book. A member was writing a volume on the Shanghai Jews. Translations reflected the varied interests of the group: the *Talmud*, but also two standard works on Jews in China and Japan during World War II.

Xu Buzeng (born c. 1927), an earnest man with wire-rimmed glasses, then spoke with animation for thirty minutes about Jews in Shanghai. He focused on Jewish leaders in various cultural fields, offering little new to those present except the tidbit

Image 0.4. Meeting with Shanghai Judaic Studies Association, 21 April 1989

that practicing Shanghai psychologists had absorbed Freud's methods from one of his students, a Viennese Jewish refugee.[22] The next speaker performed a familiar academic exercise, reading a paper about the documentary disputes associated with the Jews of Kaifeng, a city in northern China, where Jews settled over a thousand years ago and were absorbed into the local population. The seminar with these Chinese scholars was remarkably like an American scholarly convention, combining the intellectual excitement of breaking new ground with dry paper-reading. Yet the context was unique: pauses for translation, the whir of the television camera, the personal interest in the subject bringing together people from China, Israel, and the United States.

The seminar ended with high hopes. Tekoah thanked these Chinese scholars of Judaica with a gift of books on Jewish history in China, as well as one of the *Haggadah* books used at our Seder. He offered the Ben-Gurion University as a center for exchanges between Chinese and Western scholars working on Jews in China. De Krassel brought up the question of economic resources to support further exchanges and suggested Halevy as a fundraiser and Pollack's *Hongkew Chronicle* as a joint publication of the Judaic Studies Association and the International Assembly of Jews in China. These wishes and hopes seem so utopian today in the wake of China's return to the brutal imposition of orthodox ideology, but in the last days of openness at the end of April, they represented a Chinese attempt to reconnect its own history with the rest of the world, to recreate Chinese international relations from the most appropriate locale, Shanghai.

The international city Xu Buzeng described, where the world's people mingled in stateless liberty, had suddenly died on 7 December 1941. The bombing of Pearl Harbor that morning was one facet of a coordinated Japanese military attack in Asia. On that same day, the Japanese fired on a British gunboat in the Yangtze and occupied Shanghai. "Jews felt fear again," as Loewenberg recalls:

> I remember exactly Pearl Harbor. Up to that date the police were Sikhs, Indian police with the turban, because the International Settlement was really British. And one day the British are out, and the Japanese are in. And all the Sikhs were gone, and Japanese police were there. From that moment on, the situation became a little frightening, because we were in enemy territory again.[23]

The next day, printed bulletins proclaimed that Japan was at war with the United States and Britain. Troops and tanks moved menacingly through Shanghai streets, Japanese editors took over newspapers, short-wave radios were confiscated, and foreign businesses were monitored or directly managed.

The extraordinary attitude of the Japanese toward Jewish refugees must be credited with saving the lives of many thousands who would have perished had they remained in Central Europe.[24] This tolerant behavior persisted through the onset of the Pacific war. The Jews of Shanghai were not enemies of Japan, like the American and British citizens who were immediately interned in camps. In the prosperous streets of the former

foreign concessions and in the crowded alleys of Hongkou, Jewish life quickly adapted to Japanese domination. The absence of Japanese antisemitism was remarked by every Shanghai Jew. Halevy recalled that "the Japanese were really good to the Jews, and the Chinese were good to the Jews, but the Japanese were terrible to the Chinese. That's why the Chinese hated them." Very few incidents of Japanese physical brutality against Jews could be remembered. Shanghai Jews did not feel secure, however, especially the refugees from Hitler. Gestapo agents were known to be in Shanghai, and Jews believed they were trying to convince the Japanese to adopt a harder line, even to set up gas chambers outside of town. For fourteen months, the Japanese resisted the pressure of their allies.

On 18 February 1943, life for refugee Jews suddenly worsened. Japanese authorities proclaimed that all "stateless refugees" who had arrived since 1937 from Germany and Eastern Europe had to move within three months to a "Designated Area," one square mile in Hongkou where the *Heime* were located. About 8,000 German-speaking Jews had to move, while the Sephardic and Russian Jews were left untouched. Jews with houses or apartments outside the Designated Area had to trade their residences for smaller, more crowded places in what became understood as a ghetto. A mad scramble for normally undesirable housing in Hongkou began. Amalia Hochstädt went to Hongkou to search for suitable quarters. After her return, she cried for hours: "It was the dirtiest place you could find." Many Shanghai Jews today believe that every post-1937 refugee had to move to Hongkou. But luck, deception, and connections are always the friends of the oppressed. Boris Katz remembered several German Jews living out the war in his family's apartment. Others, like the Hochstädts, sought special privilege. The Hochstädts had to give up their apartment, but a Japanese lawyer procured permission for them to remain in the International Settlement. A wealthy Indian broker, whose daughter was Josef's patient, offered them a room in his house. Josef could hold his practice in the living room. Soon they received further dispensation for a telephone and extra electricity for the "office." Other doctors whose skills were needed could also remain outside the Designated Area.

The two years in the Designated Area were economically miserable for the refugees. They had to give up over 300 businesses in the rest of Shanghai. Any movement outside the area required a special pass from the Japanese, making normal commercial life impossible. The extensive aid from American Jewish relief organizations was temporarily cut off. Unemployment and malnutrition spread quickly. The harsh winter of 1943 stretched the resources of the *Heime* to the limit: the 5,000 Jews who were dependent upon the soup kitchens received only 1,350 calories per day.

Despite the ban on radios, the refugee community maintained their hopes with knowledge of the Nazi defeats after Stalingrad and the approach of US forces through the Pacific. They greeted Germany's surrender on 9 May 1945, with jubilation. On 17 July 1945, US bombers attacked the Japanese radio station in Hongkou, apparently oblivious to the dense population around it. About thirty refugees were killed and 250 wounded; the Chinese casualties were much higher. The raid was a gruesome signal

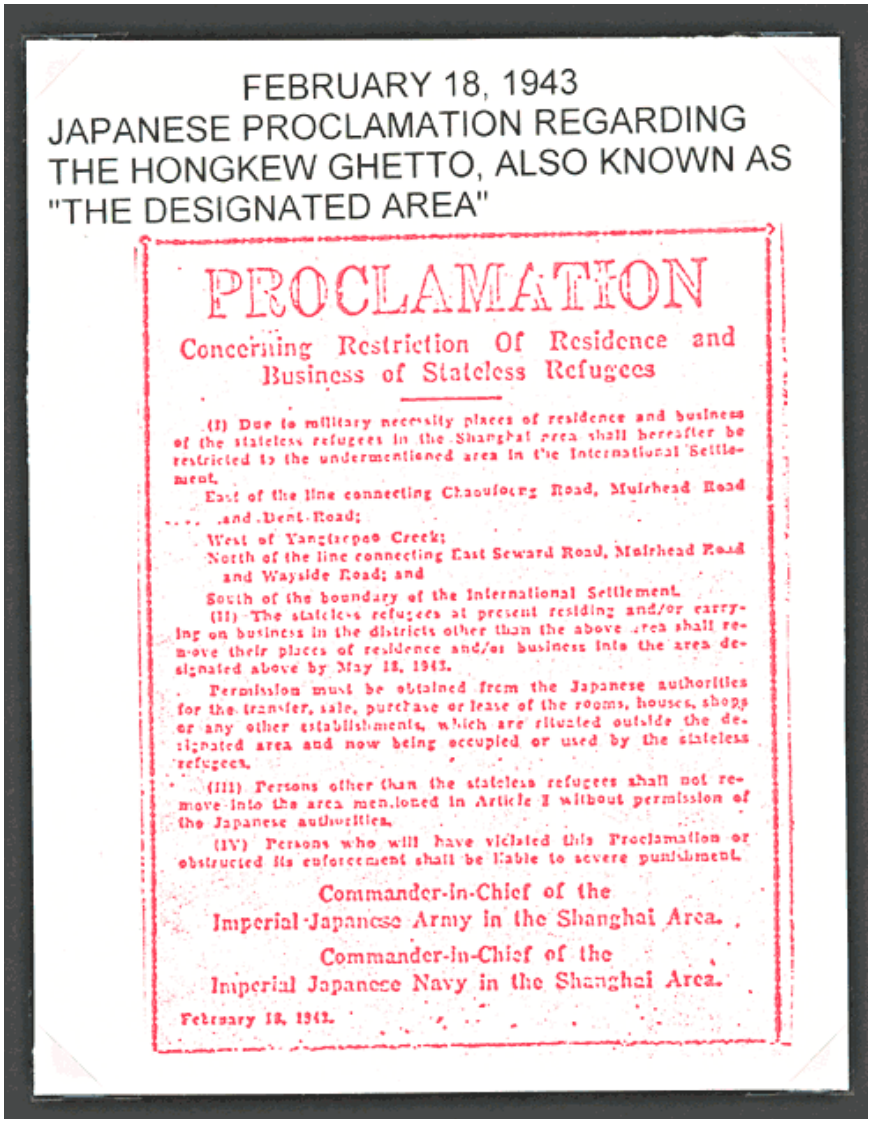

Image 0.5. The Proclamation, 18 February 1943

that the war was ending. After the bombing of Japan, peace rumors circulated freely. Loewenberg described the end of the Designated Area:

> There was complete blackout, because the city was practically out of coal and you need coal for electricity. So you could turn the electric light on only from 7 to 9 [p.m.], or something, and then you had to do without

> electric light. Of course there were little oil lamps that we used. And one night, all of a sudden—it was like a rumor spread—the war is over. And in the same moment, everybody in the whole street where we lived, in all of Ward Road, everybody turned on the lights and took down the blackout [curtains]. The lights went on. It was like a symbolic show of freedom from the complete darkness of blackout. Then it turned out that the war was over two days later, and the Japanese tried to punish everybody. But that lasted only one day; it was the next day that the war was really over. And we could turn on the lights. And the American soldiers and sailors came in. It was the Japanese out and the Americans in, just as one day the English were out and the Japanese were in, all of a sudden.[25]

The day after the war's end, the Hochstädts hurried to the apartment over the Uptown Cinema. A Korean man was living there. Josef told him that he would have to leave. He refused: this was his apartment now. Amalia described her reaction:

> "What are you talking with this man? Tomorrow the American Army is coming here. My son is an officer. He will talk with you." He was quiet and we went out. We walked a little bit, and suddenly he was running. He says, "You can have the apartment." So I said, "You move out today, not tomorrow." He walked out the same day, and we put a little bit furniture in. And so we had our apartment.[26]

How could the Korean have known that Ernst Hochstadt, an Army captain, was still in Germany, where his intelligence unit had been interrogating prisoners of war?

But the old Shanghai, cosmopolitan and racist, international and colonial, was gone forever. It was not because high-spirited US soldiers rented rickshaws, changed places with the drivers and pulled them around the city. When Chiang Kai-shek's armies reoccupied Shanghai, the city became fully Chinese. The loss of extra-territoriality in Shanghai was one of the first steps in the dismemberment of European colonial empires after 1945. The disappearance of the foreign concessions inevitably meant the dispersal of Shanghai's international population. For most Jews, Shanghai had been a last resort. Now the unbelievable revelations about Nazi genocide finally opened doors in the West that had been closed for so long. The first to leave were the young, who could obtain student visas to the United States, like Tekoah to Harvard and Katz to Berkeley. Permanent immigration to America was still difficult, so many Jews went to Hong Kong, Australia, or Canada. Palestine offered danger and hope, the end of Diaspora. After 1948, any Jew could move to the new state of Israel.

By then another threat had materialized, the advancing People's Liberation Army. Chiang Kai-shek's supporters spread horrible tales of impending rape and pillage before they fled to Taiwan. By the time the PLA entered Shanghai on 24 May 1949, about half of the Jews had departed. Of those in the International Assembly, only George Leonof remained after 1949, working as a journalist in Beijing until 1951. By the late 1950s, only a few elderly Jews were left in Shanghai.[27]

The small group who returned to China in April found Shanghai transformed by communism. Prostitutes had been reeducated, the drug trade finally closed down, gamblers and gunrunners put out of business, the enormous gulf between rich and poor, the basis of Shanghai's corruption, had shrunk since 1949. All the returning Shanghailanders remarked on the transformation of the people: gone were the beggars, the starving children, the homeless who froze to death on the sidewalks in winter. The Communists eliminated those colonial conveniences that had made European refugees feel comfortable: rickshaw coolies, parks and clubs for whites only, cooks who could copy German recipes. Shanghai was again a Chinese city, but more prosperous, happier, cleaner than at any time in its history. The Shanghainese looked comfortable, well-clothed and well-fed, busy, satisfied. George Leonof spoke for many: "You can safely say that wherever communism failed, and it may have failed as communism in China, it certainly created a situation for the population that was the difference between life and death."[27]

Although Mao's government initially asked Jews and other foreigners to stay in Shanghai, xenophobic nationalism soon overcame the Chinese Communists. In the late 1950s, the graves in the Jewish cemetery were moved outside of the city, and the space converted into a park. The Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s destroyed visible symbols of the ignominious history of foreign domination. Architectural reminders that the buildings we visited had once been Jewish had been effaced. In a final visit to the Ohel Rachel synagogue, Halevy and Jacoby wondered whether any trace of its sacred purpose survived. At the front of the auditorium, a movie screen filled the stage. Halevy, the general who had prayed there as a boy, still hoped:

> The Chinese man said, "What do you want?" So we said, "Could you just open the curtain?" "Curtain, what do you want to open the curtain for?" "Open the curtain." Everything is blocked. Up it's tightly roped, down it's tightly roped. "What do you want to get there?" So we explain this is maybe something very important, some Jewish letters or something.

Halevy followed a Chinese man under the screen. "I couldn't wait, so I crawled; I knew it from the army, so I was very good at that. I did it quickly, just like the good old days." Halevy found the holy tabernacle and its Hebrew inscription: "Know before whom you stand, before the King of Kings, the Holy Name blessed be He."

> It was so clear and so clean and so beautiful, I couldn't believe it. I got very excited. I'm excited now even when I am talking about it. So I must tell you that seeing the school, the synagogue, and my first house, gave me what I wanted from my visit. If you know the word *dayyeinu* from Passover, if only this I have come for and seen, for me it was *dayyeinu*.[28]

Those few Hebrew words, hidden from rampaging Red Guards behind a movie screen, stand as reminders of the Jewish presence in Shanghai. The high hopes for extensive cooperation between the returning Jews and the Chinese government disappeared in the last weeks of April. The International Assembly landed in Shanghai just

as Chinese students mounted an unprecedented political offensive against the government, demanding Western-style civil liberties and democratization. The xenophobic reaction of the authorities began well before the June military repression. Chinese officials kept their distance from the International Assembly. Memorial plaques for Jewish buildings never appeared. A few hours before we left Shanghai, all of the video cassettes were confiscated from the cameraman. De Krassel's Chinese connections, which seemed to fall apart during the trip, at least helped to ensure flights out of China in the midst of a national crisis.

Of course it was not the Chinese who saved the Jews, but rather the colonial power of Westerners in China, a history proudly overcome. Westerners offered Jews a Chinese haven; Chinese offered toleration and hospitality, a remarkable absence of religious prejudice. In an age of murderous nationalism, Shanghai was home to a unique mixture of races and religions free from the oppressive restrictions of chauvinist excess. Boatloads of European Jews disembarked in colonial Shanghai, while American bureaucrats, consulting their immigration lawbooks, turned away the SS *St. Louis* from Miami Beach in 1939, sending its hundreds of Jews back to the European Holocaust. Shanghai represented both the excesses of imperialism and the humanity of internationalism. Now Chinese citizens again have to think twice before approaching foreigners on the street, leading them into private buildings or devoting academic careers to studying their communities. By hiding the story of the Shanghai Jews and closing avenues of Western influence, the Chinese government impoverishes its people's past and future.

On the China Eastern Airlines plane from Shanghai to Beijing, the sound track was Western Muzak. The theme from the movie *Exodus* played over the loudspeakers to hundreds of Chinese and a small band of Jews who were once again leaving Shanghai. The Jewish part of the International Assembly was over, and we were just tourists. We returned to Israel and the United States, where the problems of racial prejudice and exclusive nationalism that had forced them to go to Shanghai are not yet solved. As long as international cooperation remains an unfulfilled vision, the experiences of Shanghai Jews are a hopeful historical example of future possibilities.

written in Lewiston, Maine, October 1989

That essay was my first composition about Jews in Shanghai. Among the hundreds of thousands of European Jews who escaped the Holocaust by becoming refugees, the Shanghai refugees are unique. The refugees who fled to the United States, Great Britain, and Palestine, and the smaller numbers who were allowed into Canada, Australia, South Africa, and various Latin American nations, began new lives upon arrival. Except for a few famous people, it was a difficult process, lasting years, but eventually resulting in assimilation into their new host societies. The Jews who managed to get to Shanghai did not intend to stay. Even when they managed to create businesses in Shanghai, their

years in China were always temporary. In the late 1940s, they again moved to other continents, finally beginning the process of assimilation ten years after most other Jewish refugees. No other sizable community of refugees from the Nazis had comparable experiences.

In the 1980s, some former refugees began to exercise a public voice about their unlikely experiences and attracted official notice in China, Israel, Germany, and the United States. I participated in that awakened interest in their collective Holocaust survival story and have been writing about it ever since.

My 1989 essay introduces the intertwined themes that structure this book. Every chapter offers synthesis and adds detail about what happened in those dozen years in Shanghai. How did these refugees make their own history as they were pushed around the world by international forces out of their control? The book's four sections consider how Shanghai Jewish experiences become Shanghai Jewish history. Sometimes explicitly, always implicitly, my family history and historical practice shape these narratives.

In 1989, little had been published about Shanghai Jews. An extensive bibliography lists no book about Jews in Shanghai until the 1976 publication of David Kranzler's *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938–1945,* which originated from his PhD dissertation.[29] A former Russian Jew published a short memoir about the Jewish community in Shanghai in 1963.[30] A few others were already engaged in researching and writing about Shanghai Jews, but in 1989, their work had not yet been published.

Organizations that focused on the history of Jews in China paid little attention to the Shanghai refugees. Igud Yotzei Sin, the Israeli Association of Former Residents of China, was dominated by Jews with a Russian background. Their newsletter, the *Bulletin,* published since 1953 in Russian, Hebrew, and English, first included a section on the Shanghai refugees, called Chusan Road Chatter, only in 1991.[31] The Sino-Judaic Institute was established in 1985 in Palo Alto, California, by a group of scholars and activists who were mainly interested in the ancient Jewish community in Kaifeng.

My own work, like that of many of the earliest writers about Shanghai Jews, began with my family story. I recorded an interview with my grandmother in 1987 and only then realized that as a tenured historian of Europe I could choose to focus my scholarly energy on Jewish refugees in Shanghai, a project which has now consumed half my life. My own Jewish family history structured everything I have produced, as did my earlier historical work, the vagaries of an academic life, and the chance connections that follow unplanned meetings with fellow historians.

Perhaps in less obvious ways, so did the worldwide revolutions of 1989 and the unpredictable turns in international relations since then. The Passover reunion in Shanghai coincided exactly with unexpected political turmoil in China. The center was in the capital Beijing, heating up as we wandered around Shanghai. When I happened upon a large demonstration in the center of downtown Shanghai on 22 April, I had no idea what I was seeing. My history of Jews in Shanghai is shaped by my ignorances, as well as my knowledge.

Image 0.6. Street demonstration in Shanghai, 22 April 1989, intersection of Fuzhou Rd. and Henan Rd.

Few reading experiences can compete with being swept along in narratives of lives. I offer here many experiences retold by former refugees. I believe so strongly in the priority of collected personal stories that I gave my voice and my space to the refugees' words in my first books about them, an unusual decision in the 1990s.

This book is shaped by the juncture of chance opportunities and my increasing identification with the Shanghai story. Here I offer my own words, using as evidence what former refugees told me.

Notes

This essay was written in 1989, soon after I returned from China. I have only lightly altered it here.

1. Gerhard Heimann was one of the subjects of the book by James R. Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*. He and Pollack published and edited the *Hongkew Chronicle*, which was begun in 1981 as outgrowth of a reunion in 1980. The newsletter was instrumental in keeping up contacts among the European Jews who had escaped from Germany, Austria, and Poland.
2. Because Yosef Tekoah had been involved with the planning of the International Assembly since its beginning, he explained to me how de Krassel invented rabbinical support and Chinese government cooperation for the sake of publicity: informal conversation with Tekoah, Beijing, 28 April 1989.
3. Information about the planning, promotion, and organization of the International Assembly comes from my telephone interview on 3 August 1989, with F. S. Moyer, who was Peter de Krassel's assistant for this project.
4. Jonathan Kaufman wrote about these families: Kaufman, *The Last Kings of Shanghai*.

5. Interview with Sasson Jacoby, Beijing, 24 April 1989, Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project. The Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project (SJCOHP) consists of 101 interviews conducted by the author with Shanghai Jews, mostly former refugees, housed in the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Transcripts of most of these interviews are available online. "Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Collection." *Scholarly Communication and Research at Bates*. Retrieved 9 September 2025 from https://scarab.bates.edu/shanghai_oh.
6. Interview with George Leonof, Shanghai, 19 April 1989, SJCOHP, 4. References to fully transcribed, printed, and bound interviews show page numbers. Where page numbers are not given, a definitive transcription has not yet been produced. The quotations reproduced in this essay mirror as precisely as possible the words spoken in the interviews. No attempt has been made to "clean up" repetitions and interruptions. Ellipses indicate the few places where sections are omitted.
7. Interview with Yosef Tekoah, Beijing, 28 April 1989, SJCOHP, 4–5.
8. Interview with Yosef Tekoah, Beijing, 28 April 1989, SJCOHP, 5.
9. Interview with Boris Katz, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 4.
10. Interview with Boris Katz, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 3–4. On the threats to Jewish life in Harbin, see Ben-Canaan, *The Kaspe File*.
11. Halevy had also been worldwide president and CEO of Israel Bonds. He later became executive vice president of Bar-Ilan University.
12. Curt Pollack was a businessman in Los Angeles.
13. Interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, 22 April 1989, SJCOHP, 1.
14. Interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, 22 April 1989, SJCOHP, 1.
15. Interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, 22 April 1989, SJCOHP, 4.
16. Interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, 22 April 1989, SJCOHP, 4.
17. Interview with Lisbeth Loewenberg, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 2.
18. Interview with Lisbeth Loewenberg, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 3. Loewenberg's niece has published a full-length memoir of Loewenberg's life: Meller, *Box with the Sunflower Clasp*.
19. Interview with Amalia Hochstadt, 5 May 1987, Santa Monica, CA, SJCOHP.
20. This estimate is explained in chapter 3.
21. Interview with Yehuda Halevy, Beijing, 25 April 1989, SJCOHP, 18–20.
22. Xu Buzeng was among the first Chinese scholars to write about the Shanghai refugees: Buzeng, "Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust." Buzeng's scholarly focus became the Jewish influence on Shanghai's musical life: Buzeng, "Influence of Jewish Refugees on Musical and Intellectual Life"; Buzeng, "Jews and the Musical Life of Shanghai"; Buzeng, *Xufang youtai ren*.
23. Interview with Lisbeth Loewenberg, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 6.
24. I explain the tolerant Japanese attitude toward the refugees in an article that attempts to counter conventional ideas about who was responsible for the survival of Jews in Shanghai: Hochstadt, "Japanese and Jews in Shanghai."
25. Interview with Lisbeth Loewenberg, Shanghai, 21 April 1989, SJCOHP, 11–12.
26. Interview with Amalia Hochstadt, 5 May 1987, Santa Monica, CA, SJCOHP.
27. Interview with George Leonof, Shanghai, 19 April 1989, SJCOHP, 27.
28. Interview with Yehuda Halevy, Beijing, 25 April 1989, SJCOHP, 21–22.
29. See "Bibliography." *Virtual Shanghai*. Retrieved 9 September 2025 from www.virtualshanghai.net/References/Bibliography.
30. A later revision is Kauffmann, "Die Juden in Shanghai im 2. Weltkrieg."
31. *Bulletin*, Igud Yotzei Sin, Jerusalem, No. 317, May 1991. Although only one or two pages of each issue of the *Bulletin* were devoted to the Shanghai refugees, there are many details to be gleaned from the issues since 1991.