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Resistance Among Jewish Refugees in China: 1938 – 1948

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An essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in History at Pomona College

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I. Introduction

From 1938 to 1941, roughly thirty thousand Jews escaped Nazi-occupied Central and Eastern Europe to Shanghai and stayed in the city for the duration of the war.¹ They chose the faraway city as their unlikely haven because no other countries would issue visas for them, but the colonial port of Shanghai did not require a visa for entry.² Initially, with the help of Jewish-American charities and Baghdadi Jewish merchants who had established business empires in the Far East prior to their arrival, the refugee community flourished in the foreign city despite immense difficulties.³ Their years of misfortune, however, began when the Japanese took control over the entire city in 1941.

Since their victory in the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, the Japanese had dominated the city politically, occupying the Chinese sections. Before Japan declared war on the Western powers in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the British and the Americans controlled the International Settlement and the French governed the French Concession. Following the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Western colonizers in Shanghai were either evacuated or interned as the Japanese marched into their enclaves. Many Jewish refugees who had worked for British or American businesses lost their jobs, and essential aid from Jewish charities in America was cut off.⁴ Worse, in 1943, the Japanese ordered the stateless refugees, a category that included the vast majority of German, Austrian and Polish Jews in Shanghai, to move into the “Designated Area” of Hongkew (now known as Hongkou), effectively establishing a ghetto.⁵ Though Hongkew differed from its contemporary Jewish ghettos in fascist Europe in that no walls were

¹ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City* (Berlin ; De Gruyter, 2008), 40.

² *ibid*, 4.

³ *ibid*, 24.

⁴ *ibid*, 170 - 171.

⁵ *ibid*, 169.

ever erected around the area and the Jews inhabited the space alongside the Chinese locals, the refugees suffered from hunger, infectious diseases and constant abuse from Japanese officials.

Although the Jewish refugees did not revolt against the Japanese occupiers *en masse* or stand in solidarity with the more disadvantaged Chinese populace, they resisted Japanese power by engaging in everyday civil disobedience and subverted the Western colonial order by radically empathizing with the Chinese in the Levinasian sense. In this essay, I first explore the policy of indirect rule and perceived Japanese leniency that resulted in the refugees' lack of motive to revolt against the invaders. Secondly, I study the factors that prevented the formation of a solidarity movement between the Jewish refugees and the Chinese populace, namely, colonial racial stratification and anti-foreign sentiment. Thirdly, applying Foucauldian analysis, I examine the ways in which Jewish refugees resisted forms of Western and Japanese power exercised in the city.

II. Literature Review

In his essay "The Subject and Power," French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984) proposes that instead of analyzing direct attacks on institutions of power, it would be more helpful to dissect the ways in which a subject resists more immediate techniques and forms of power.⁶ Given that the modern state exercises its power by assigning individuality to its subjects, "[imposing] a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize," "struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission" should be categorized as a vital form of resistance.⁷ Hence, the refugees' everyday refusal to recognize themselves as prisoners in the Hongkew ghetto or as guards acting on behalf of the Japanese

⁶ Michel Foucault. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* (8:4 1982), 781.

⁷ *ibid.*

authority was a meaningful way of resisting the forms of subjectivity imposed by the Japanese. Though there is an outpouring of scholarship from both the US and the PRC on the Jewish refugees in Shanghai, no existing scholarship discusses the everyday resistance to the Japanese power amongst the refugees.

In her book *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, the field's leading American scholar Irene Eber comes to the conclusion that there were little political activities among the refugees.⁸ She briefly mentions that the majority of Polish Jews attempted to resist the Japanese order of confinement in the Hongkew ghetto but judges that their defiance was “not politically motivated.”⁹ Besides, Eber brands the communist and underground movements in wartime Shanghai as inactive. It seems that in Eber's framework of analysis, only ideologically motivated actions were deemed “political” and only attacks aimed directly against the ruling powers were worthy of further discussion. Furthermore, although she identifies that there was little political action among the refugees, she does not offer a theory to explain their inactivity. Hence, without paying adequate attention to the refugees' everyday Foucauldian resistance against the more immediate forms of power, she gives her readers a wrongful impression that the Jewish refugees were generally collaborative and submissive to the Japanese invaders.

Another American scholar who researches extensively on this topic is Steve Hochstadt, whose excellent interviews with former Shanghai refugees are used as primary sources in this essay. In his book *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich*, that thematically organizes excerpts of refugee testimonies to create a collective story of exile, Hochstadt fails to

⁸ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 176

⁹ *ibid.*

establish “resistance” as a common theme in refugees’ Shanghai experience.¹⁰ Additionally, it should be mentioned that both American scholars ignore the stories of Jewish refugees who, radicalized by their experience of Nazi persecution in Europe and inspired by the communist ideals, joined the Chinese communist movement.

On the other hand, Chinese scholars, perhaps politically motivated to increase China’s global soft power, seem to be rather eager to create the narrative of international friendship and solidarity between the Chinese and the Jewish people, often resorting to cherrypicking stories that emphasize Japanese brutality and friendly relationships between the Chinese and the Jews. The Dean of Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai Pan Guang’s recent book *A Study of Jewish Refugees in China* serves as a perfect example of this practice. In his “Preamble,” Pan states:

the word “Shanghai” has become synonymous with “salvation” and “haven” in documents about the Holocaust. The unforgettable history of Shanghai’s generosity to rescue Jewish refugees and the mutual support of Chinese and Jewish people during the darkest years have become a hot subject of academic research and artistic creation.¹¹

According to his statement, Pan sees the Shanghai stories as a heroic episode in the history of the Holocaust in which the Chinese and the Jewish people supported each other while facing a shared experience of suffering. But contrary to Pan’s narrative, Hochstadt’s interviews clearly show that many Jewish refugees bought into the perverse logic of colonialism and despised the Chinese.¹² Besides, the Chinese harbored strong anti-foreign sentiment and at times threatened the physical safety of the refugees.¹³ In fact, the two groups experienced Japanese occupation very differently and “mutual support” only took place on the individual level. With Hochstadt on

¹⁰ Steve Hochstadt. *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012.)

¹¹ Guang Pan. *A Study of Jewish Refugees in China (1933-1945): History, Theories and the Chinese Pattern*. (Gateway East, Singapore: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press. 2019), vi

¹² Steve Hochstadt. “Borenstein, Fanny and George oral history interview.” (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*, 1990), 34.

¹³ Steve Hochstadt. “Schnepf, Otto oral history interview” (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*. 1990), 36.

his research team, it could only be inferred that Pan willfully ignored the less rosy aspects of the Shanghai stories. Furthermore, instead of the ambiguous “Shanghai’s generosity to rescue Jewish refugees,” the Jews fled to Shanghai with their own volition often as their last resort.¹⁴ Far from receiving ready “salvation” upon landing, they sustained their lives in the foreign city mainly through their hard work and resourcefulness. Here, instead of granting the Jewish refugees the deserved historical agency, Pan credits their “salvation” to the city of Shanghai and by extension the Chinese nation. Thus, with willful ignorance and misleading interpretation of historical realities, one suspects that Pan prioritizes presenting a righteous and inclusive image of modern China over historical accuracy.

In the book’s chapter “Sino-Jewish Friendship Amid the Anti-fascist Fight and Jews in the Chinese Revolution,” Pan continues his narrative of “Sino-Jewish Friendship” and tells the story of Jewish communists who participated in the Chinese Revolution.¹⁵ Yet, not to mention his ignorance of commonplace Foucauldian resistance, Pan’s privileging of politics over facts compromises his scholarship. Quite the polar opposite to his American colleagues, Pan focuses exclusively on the Jewish communists who worked with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He provides biographical accounts of seven Jewish communists during the era, but curiously includes several Jews who came to China as inspired revolutionaries prior to the intensification of Nazi anti-Semitism. By all accounts, they should not be categorized as political refugees. Instead of offering a truthful representation of Jewish exile, Pan exploits non-asylum-seeking Jewish communists’ stories to strengthen his narrative that the Chinese communist movement

¹⁴ Steve Hochstadt. “Blumenthal, Michael oral history interview” (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*, 1995), 15

¹⁵ Guang Pan. *A Study of Jewish Refugees in China (1933-1945): History, Theories and the Chinese Pattern*, 69. In the chapter, Pan talks extensively about the abandoned “The Jewish Settlement Plan of the Republic of China,” which has arguably little historical consequence, to prove that China was prepared to extend more help to the Jews.

was internationally appealing, and in turn legitimizes the CCP's leadership through the Western gaze. Still, Pan provides a generally useful biography for Jacob Rosenfeld, a Jewish-Austrian refugee doctor who joined Mao Zedong's (1893 - 1976) army to fight fascism, whose memoir will be examined in this essay.¹⁶ However, Pan's account proves facile as he seems to be only interested in Rosenfeld's zealous support for the CCP and does not explore his deeper motives and convictions. Moreover, he ignores the rather sorrowful later years in Rosenfeld's life in Austria and Israel when he was repeatedly denied entry to China, the country to which he felt the strongest sense of belonging.¹⁷ This further showcases that Pan's primary concern is to advance his political agenda and not to write the most honest history.

Unfortunately, Pan's rosy narrative that sacrifices academic standards in pursuit of political agendas is typical of Chinese scholarship on Jewish refugees in Shanghai. With a preface tellingly titled "Real and Moving Stories of China," *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai: 26 Stories of Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II* substitutes original refugee testimonies with tales interpreted by CCP historians that force-feeds the message "Japanese bad, Chinese good. Chinese, Jews love each other" down readers' throats.¹⁸ Changing the subjects of discussion, the book bizarrely claims that the 26 Jewish refugee stories "collectively showcased Chinese people's natural love for peace, spirit of friendliness and inclusivity, and character that commit to righteousness."¹⁹ Moreover, Chinese scholars have carried the nationalist politicization of the subject into American academia. In her essay "Interactions Between the Chinese and the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II," which was published in

¹⁶ *ibid*, 76 - 77.

¹⁷ Jacob Rosenfeld, 中国的大时代：罗生特在华手记, *China's Epoch: Rosenfeld's China Memoir*. (China Social Science Press. 2003), 190.

¹⁸ Pu Zukang and Xie'an Huang, eds. *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai: 26 Stories of Jewish Refugees in Shanghai during World War II*. (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2016.), Preface I.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

Penn History Review, Zou Qingyang echoes Pan's methods, themes and talking points to propose the insipid and preposterous thesis that the firm and friendly bond established in wartime Shanghai between the Chinese and the Jewish people ensures that the "two civilizations could continue to maintain harmonious relationships with each other to the present day."²⁰

To conclude, Practically all scholars overlook the Foucauldian resistance and offer no theory on the lack of political activities among the refugees. The PRC scholars exaggerate the reality and significance of Sino-Jewish friendship as well as Jewish support for the CCP, politicizing the history of Jewish refugees in Shanghai to create an inclusive image of China and provide historical legitimacy for the current communist regime. In light of the shortcomings of existing scholarship, this essay will first provide a theory on the absence of mass uprisings in Shanghai, then debunk the myth of Sino-Jewish solidarity propagated by Chinese nationalists, and finally analyze Jewish resistance in Shanghai utilizing the Foucauldian framework.

III. Collective Jewish Response to Japanese Rule: 1941 - 1945

Although Jewish refugees faced increasing adversity beginning with the Japanese occupation of the foreign concessions in 1941 and imposition of draconian measures to control the city's population, as Irene Eber noted, there was never an uprising against Japanese oppression from the Jewish community.²¹ The reason for this general inactivity was twofold: one, relative to the murderous Nazi regime in Europe, from which the refugees had escaped, the Japanese and the Germans in Shanghai were lenient and even friendly towards the Jews; two, the

²⁰ Qingyang Zou. "Interactions Between the Chinese and the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II." (*Penn History Review* 25 2019): 81.

²¹ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 176

Japanese successfully employed the refugees to impose an indirect rule on themselves in order to divert resentment.

Although lenient compared to the Nazis, the Japanese undoubtedly oppressed the refugees. As stateless Jews were forced to move to Hongkew, the Japanese jailed resisters in prisons infected with deadly diseases,²² and confiscated many of the established refugee-owned houses outside the area.²³ While in the ghetto, the Japanese restricted the refugees' freedom of movement, punished those who listened to American radio broadcasts,²⁴ and broke into homes for surprise inspections.²⁵ But the most staggering example of Japanese oppression is personified in Kanoh Ghoya (date unknown), the Japanese official charged with issuing passes for refugees who wished to leave Hongkew during daytime. Calling himself the "King of the Jews," his brutal and capricious behaviors earned him near universal hatred among the refugees.²⁶ While their residency was restricted to Hongkew, many refugees still worked or operated businesses outside the Designated Area. Anyone who wished to go out, however, was required to have an audience with Ghoya to obtain their pass. Sadistically, Ghoya "used physical violence whenever it suited him"²⁷ and arbitrarily determined whether an applicant should be granted their pass, apparently often based on their height. As Jewish-German refugee Ernest Culman recalled: "He was short and hated anybody that was tall. A tall man came in looking for a passport, he'd jump up on the table and say, 'Me big potato, you short potato, out, no passport,' without any reason."²⁸

²² Steve Hochstadt. "Culman, Ernest oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*, 1997), 6.

²³ Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Paul and Gertrude oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1997), 5.

²⁴ "Eric Rosenow - August 5, 1982" *Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive*.

However, it should be mentioned that because Japan was not at war with the USSR until late 1945, Hongkew residents could still listen to Soviet radio broadcasted in Russian.

²⁵ Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Paul and Gertrude oral history interview," 10

²⁶ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 181.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ Steve Hochstadt. "Culman, Ernest oral history interview," 16.

Counterintuitively, while fully aware of Japanese oppression in Shanghai, Culman did not view the Japanese treatment of Shanghai Jews negatively: “the Japanese were not really that cruel to us. Compared to Germany, I mean, it was nothing.”²⁹ Indeed, with his father arrested and tortured by the Nazis during the notorious 1938 pogrom of *Kristallnacht*, Culman considered Japanese abuse of the Shanghai Jews to be almost insignificant. Many refugees shared his opinion that the Japanese were far less brutal than the Germans. Martin Friedlander, another refugee from Germany, also compared the Japanese favorably to the Germans: “They were not, they were not Germans, where you would be picked up, no, no, not, not the, not Japanese. They didn't do that. They were most of the time friendly to us, most of the time. So I, I had, I personally had no, no complaint whatsoever.”³⁰ Refugees who had worked for the Japanese even reported positive experiences. For instance, one refugee, whose American employer had come under Japanese management after 1941, remembered: “the Japanese treated, they treat us very well, were educated fine people. We had it good.”³¹ Another refugee overlooked the fact that her husband had been slapped by Ghoya and described the petty official as “such a fine man... [who] was paying very good.”³² After experiencing the madness of Nazism firsthand, the refugees were generally untroubled by the relatively lenient Japanese control. Thus, they had little motivation to revolt against the occupiers.

Another reason that the Japanese did not garner much resentment from the Jewish community was that they imposed an indirect rule. From late 1942 onwards, instead of policing the refugees themselves, the Japanese conscripted all young able-bodied males in the refugee

²⁹ *ibid*, 17.

³⁰ Steve Hochstadt. "Friedlander, Martin and Susie oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1990).. 33.

³¹ Steve Hochstadt. "Benger, Kurt oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*, 1990), 7.

³² Steve Hochstadt. "Borenstein, Fanny and George oral history interview," 55.

community to staff an auxiliary police force called *Pao Chia* (alternatively spelt as *Bao Jia*) that conducted day-to-day policing.³³ After the creation of the Designated Area, although Ghoya issued passes to the refugees, it was actually *Pao Chia* that “guarded the entrances, insuring that refugees had the required passes to enter and exit.”³⁴ Moreover, the occupiers sanctioned a Jewish “mediation board” that resolved disputes within the refugee community without taking them to the Japanese authorities.³⁵ Notably, the Japanese established the infamous Shanghai Ashkenazi Collaborating Relief Association (SACRA) which consisted mainly of wealthy Russian Jews to organize the relocation of stateless refugees into Hongkew.³⁶

The indirect Japanese rule proved effective as it directed the refugees’ discontent towards the Jewish-run puppet organizations that did the dirty work for the invaders. In a telling instance, Jewish refugee from Poland Shoshana Kahan wrote in her diary: “SACRA is hated by all the refugees because the refugees believe that SACRA should not have accepted the ugly task of helping to push us into the ghetto.”³⁷ From Kahan’s record, it seemed that the refugees were more indignant at the collaborators at SACRA than the behind-the-scenes Japanese. To further illustrate, given that the Poles had an exile government in London, the Polish yeshiva students protested the decision to categorize the Polish Jews as stateless. But instead of targeting the Japanese authority, they vandalized the facilities of SACRA. The following day, the rich Jews of SACRA retaliated by temporarily closing the communal kitchen for the Polish refugees, igniting another round of protests.³⁸ Therefore, by utilizing puppet organizations to exert their power, the

³³ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 180.

³⁴ Steve Hochstadt. “Friedlander, Martin and Susie oral history interview,” 32.

³⁵ Steve Hochstadt. “Culman, Ernest oral history interview,” 9

³⁶ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 179.

³⁷ Irene Eber. *Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 2008), 111.

³⁸ *ibid*, 111.

Japanese transferred the refugees' resentment to infighting among different factions within the Jewish community. As the Jewish dissenters devoted their energy to fighting against the collaborators, they acquired enemies who were less physically intimidating and more immediate than the Japanese. As a result, instead of directly opposing Japanese rule, the refugees let out their frustrations at the collaborator, the ready whipping boys. Hence, the Japanese authority was rarely challenged by the Jewish refugees directly.

Learning about the apocalyptic horrors of the Holocaust after the war, some refugees even considered themselves lucky to have suffered under the lesser of the two evils. Looking back, Culman was reluctant to identify himself as a survivor on a par with those who survived the Holocaust in fascist Europe simply because "things weren't that bad."³⁹ Truly, unlike the hateful German Nazis who had made exterminating the Jewish people their mission, the Japanese were not motivated by anti-Semitism and regarded the Jews as "merely another group of foreigners that had to be controlled."⁴⁰ For this reason, the intention behind the Japanese decision to sequester the Jewish refugees in Hongkew was not to persecute the Jews but to please the Germans. Given their ideological division, when the Nazi Gestapo proposed to the Japanese a plan of starving off the Jews on a remote island as part of the Final Solution, the Japanese refused.⁴¹ Hence, though not excusable, the Japanese abuse of the Shanghai Jews was more spontaneous than ideologically driven, resulting in a relatively low degree of cruelty, below the threshold of provoking a general rebellion from the Jewish population.

³⁹ Steve Hochstadt. "Culman, Ernest oral history interview," 17

⁴⁰ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 187.

⁴¹ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 170 - 172.

It should be noted that there is also alternative theory to the ideological division: the ultimate reason why the Japanese refused to execute the Final Solution in Shanghai was that they were afraid that the Americans would retaliate by mistreating or even potentially murdering the *nisei* Japanese-Americans interned in concentration camps.

Interestingly, perhaps out of sympathy to their fellow Europeans in Asia, the Germans in Shanghai acted conciliatorily towards the Jewish refugees and did not display an exceeding degree of Nazi anti-Semitism. While none of the refugees mentioned Nazi presence in their interviews, several had friendly personal relationships with the Germans in Shanghai. For example, a German manager who “didn’t mix politics with anything” offered Jewish-Viennese refugee Paul Reisman a well-paying job and Reisman’s Jewish identity “didn’t make any difference to him.”⁴² In a more dramatic episode, Melitta Colland, another Jewish refugee from Vienna, had a caring personal relationship with the wife of the German Consul General, who was “the biggest Nazi in Shanghai.”⁴³ In Colland’s tailor shop, the wife of the town’s top Nazi was her most generous customer. In Colland’s own words: “I don’t know whether it was her guilty conscience or, or what, but she loved me as if I had been a daughter of hers. She brought on the customers, not only from Shanghai, but she told them in Tokyo at the German consulate about me.”⁴⁴ Soon, with the help the Nazi’s wife, Colland was expanding her business and making large shipments of dresses to Tokyo. Before the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Nazi’s wife even urged Colland to marry a Western colonial official as quickly as possible so she could be promptly evacuated to Australia and not suffer in Shanghai under Japanese occupation.⁴⁵ Since Colland did not want to get married, she remained in Shanghai and was eventually forced to close her tailor shop and move to Hongkew. Even then, the wife of the German Consul General still supported her financially until Shanghai was liberated by the Americans in 1945. The Germans in Shanghai were not hostile to the Jewish refugees; conversely, they were at times

⁴² Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Paul and Gertrude oral history interview," 5.

⁴³ Steve Hochstadt. "Colland, Melitta oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*, 1989), 8.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 9.

quite supportive of those who fled from their fascist government in Europe. As a result, the Jewish refugees were unmotivated to protest the German establishments in Shanghai.

In all, because compared to the Nazis' genocidal tyranny that the refugees had suffered in Europe, the Japanese's spontaneous cruelty was almost insubstantial and because the Germans in Shanghai did not mistreat the Jews, the Jewish refugees did not revolt against the Japanese occupation or the German establishments during the war.

IV. Sino-Jewish Relationship in Shanghai

Exploited by the Western colonizers and mistreated by the Japanese, the most unfortunate and underprivileged demographic in Shanghai was the Chinese. As the majority of the Chinese in Shanghai were migrant workers from nearby provinces or refugees of the ongoing Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945), they shared a common experience of displacement with the Jewish refugees. Though genuine friendships on the individual level were not uncommon between the Chinese and the Jews, the two groups never forged a wider solidarity in the face of hardship. In actuality, the Chinese's resentment of foreign dominance was at times translated into hostility towards the Jews, while some Jews despised the poor and "primitive" Chinese.

Jewish-German Michal Blumenthal remembered Shanghai as a place of extreme stratification along racial and ethnic lines.⁴⁶ He described the strict division of positions in the French colonial police force: "you had the Chinese, their own country but they were at the bottom, the Vietnamese on top, sergeants, White Russians on top of that, and the people with French passports on top of that."⁴⁷ Indeed, beyond the French police force, practically all public

⁴⁶ Steve Hochstadt. "Blumenthal, Michael oral history interview," 15

Blumenthal later became the US Secretary of the Treasury under the Carter Administration.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, 16.

institutions in Shanghai were racially stratified with the Chinese at the very bottom. Under the colonial system, the Chinese were the beasts of burden in a highly unequal economy, working demeaning jobs as coolies, prostitutes, and rickshaw pullers for “a handful of rice.”⁴⁸ With meager and unstable income, poverty was widespread, theft was rampant, infanticide was practiced on a daily basis, and some beggars even crippled their children to evoke sympathy from the passersby.⁴⁹ A report from an American charity stated that as “an indication of the extent of the misery which prevails amongst the poorer classes of the Chinese population,” “534 dead bodies were picked up in the streets” after one cold winter night.⁵⁰

Understandably, the Chinese had deep grievances against the foreigners who invaded their country and exploited their labor, a phenomenon picked up by many refugees. Particularly, a Jewish refugee from Berlin, Doris Grey, who “lived among the lowest Chinese” upon her migration to Hongkew, was troubled by the fact that the Chinese only shed tears when their compatriots were buried but laughed at the deaths of foreigners.⁵¹ After the Japanese were defeated, Otto Schnepf, a Jewish refugee from Austria, was attacked by a Chinese mob, only to be saved by his ability to speak fluent Chinese. He identified the anti-foreign nature of the attack: “on the part of Chinese towards foreigners, great animosity, deep seated animosity.”⁵² He further theorized that the animosity towards Westerners only surfaced after the war because the Chinese had previously concentrated their efforts on opposing the Japanese.⁵³ Given the cruelty of colonialism, the Chinese were justified in resenting foreigners. But such resentment sometimes

⁴⁸ Steve Hochstadt. “Borenstein, Fanny and George oral history interview,” 8.

⁴⁹ Steve Hochstadt. “Culman, Ernest oral history interview,” 17.

⁵⁰ Irene Eber, et al. *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai 1933–1947 A Selection of Documents*. (Auflage. Archiv Jüdischer Geschichte Und Kultur Band 003. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 2018), 463.

People who have lived in Shanghai know that it doesn’t even get very cold during winters there.

⁵¹ Steve Hochstadt. “Grey, Doris oral history interview” (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1991), 20.

⁵² Steve Hochstadt. “Schnepf, Otto oral history interview,” 26.

Schnepf later served as Director of the USC East Asian Study Center.

⁵³ *ibid.*

unwarrantedly manifested into antagonism towards the Jewish refugees, who were not colonizers but victims of war. Consequently, as the Chinese resented the Jews for their foreign origins and the Jews were alarmed by the locals' hostility, the Chinese's anti-foreign sentiment obstructed the formation of Sino-Jewish solidarity.

While the Chinese were the undisputed underclass, the Jewish refugees, a group of new arrivals in the colonial society, were characterized as “‘white trash’ sort of one step above Chinese” by Blumenthal.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, some members of the Jewish community accepted their placement as “above Chinese” and felt a sense of superiority to the locals. One refugee called China “not interesting” and “primitive.”⁵⁵ Commenting on the many Chinese practices that he found peculiar, another refugee described the Chinese as lacking hygiene, prone to theft and cruel to children.⁵⁶ Alfred Zunterstein, a Jewish refugee from Vienna, disapproved of the members of his community who “had a very bad attitude towards the Chinese” and attributed their racism to the colonial legacy in Shanghai, pointing out that it was a “handdown [*sic*] from the British colonial manner.”⁵⁷ Recalling Foucault's interpretation of modern state power as the governance of individuality, Shanghai's colonial legacy had imposed upon the Jewish refugees from Europe “a law of truth” that placed Europeans above the Chinese.⁵⁸ The refugees in turn recognized themselves as belonging to a higher social caste and looked down upon the Chinese residents. Needless to say, certain refugees' adoption of the racist colonial mindset was not only unhelpful to the formation of Sino-Jewish solidarity, but it also might have contributed to the intensification of Chinese anti-foreign sentiment.

⁵⁴ Steve Hochstadt. “Blumenthal, Michael oral history interview,” 14.

⁵⁵ Steve Hochstadt. “Borenstein, Fanny and George oral history interview,” 38.

⁵⁶ Steve Hochstadt. “Culman, Ernest oral history interview,” 17.

⁵⁷ Irene Eber, et al. *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai 1933–1947 A Selection of Documents*, 210.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault. “The Subject and Power,” 781.

Moreover, many refugees who did not hold racist views against the locals also had little contact with the Chinese beyond buying daily groceries. As the Jewish community in Shanghai was sizable, numbering around 30,000 residents, many of the refugees did not have to interact with people outside their community in any significant ways in order to survive.⁵⁹ Over the years, the Jews in Shanghai built their own schools, synagogues, hospitals, restaurants, cafés and shops.⁶⁰ The Jewish presence around Changyang Road in Hongkew was so strong that the area was dubbed “Little Vienna.”⁶¹ Even a vibrant cultural scene emerged from the Jewish exile community. In total, the Jews published more than a dozen newspapers and journals in six different languages from 1938 to 1948. The refugees frequently staged theater productions in German and Yiddish, often featuring original scripts written by themselves.⁶² Seeking to recreate the familiarity of home in a foreign country, the refugees generally preferred to socialize amongst themselves.⁶³ Besides, since survival, and not cultural learning, was the primary concern for the less privileged Jews in Shanghai, many refugees demonstrated little interest in the local culture. Otto Schnepf lamented his fellow refugees’ general voluntary segregation from their Chinese surroundings: “the refugees kept completely apart from China. It was just a, too, too far to go, they had so many problems.”⁶⁴ Remarkably, although the Jewish refugees lived in close proximity with the Chinese in China, Schnepf metaphorically described China as a place that was “too far to go to” for the refugees who “had so many problems,” highlighting the substantial distance between two communities both facing tremendous adversity. Indeed, under the threat of food and housing insecurities, many of the refugees did not find the initiative or

⁵⁹ Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 1.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 17.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 230.

⁶² *ibid*, 169.

⁶³ Steve Hochstadt. “Colland, Melitta oral history interview,” 20.

⁶⁴ Steve Hochstadt. “Schnepf, Otto oral history interview,” 28.

spare energy to investigate the local culture during their sojourns. On the communal level, given the gap in cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the differentiated treatment by the Japanese regime and the racist legacy of colonialism, and despite the physical proximity between the two groups, the Jews and the Chinese remained in separated communities with little sense of unity.

On the other hand, a significant number of refugees built meaningful relationships with the Chinese. These refugees were typified by an interest in local language and culture, conduction of mutually beneficial businesses, and development of genuine friendships with their Chinese colleagues and neighbors. In particular, Otto Schnepf studied Mandarin and the local dialect while attending Shanghai's St. John's College;⁶⁵ Paul Reisman, who learned to speak Chinese on his first job as a mechanic, ran a successful wholesale business between the Chinese vegetable vendors and a refugee communal kitchen in Hongkew;⁶⁶ Ilse Greening, a Jewish refugee from Hannover, initially judging the Chinese to be unapproachable, eventually "mixed with the Chinese" and developed a sense of affinity towards the locals: "Chinese are like Jews in many respects . . . family lines and education and all that. We felt quite close to them."⁶⁷

Though sympathetic refugees gradually accepted that they could not solve the most deprived Chinese's dire situation and grew "callous" to their misery,⁶⁸ some still lent a helping hand at critical moments. Greening, who worked as a nurse in a refugee-staffed hospital, treated numerous wounded Chinese civilians in the wake of deadly Americans air raid on Shanghai.⁶⁹ During the war, Doris Grey, who dwelled among the Chinese in Hongkew, was assisted by her

⁶⁵ Steve Hochstadt. "Schnepf, Otto oral history interview," 12.

⁶⁶ Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Paul and Gertrude oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1997), 7 - 8.

⁶⁷ Steve Hochstadt. "Greening, Herbert and Ilse oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1997), 30.

⁶⁸ Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Eric oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1997), 16.

⁶⁹ Steve Hochstadt. "Greening, Herbert and Ilse oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1997), 27.

Chinese neighbors to adapt to the life in the ghetto.⁷⁰ After the war, as Allied aid targeted at the Jewish refugees arrived in Shanghai, Grey repaid her neighbors' kindness by sharing the American cigarettes and canned food with them.⁷¹

However, despite the apparent affinity between the two groups, there were surprisingly few interracial marriages as such unions were strongly frowned upon by both the Jewish community and the middle-class Chinese families.⁷² In comparison, it was rather common for Jewish refugees of different national origins to get married in Shanghai.⁷³ In his realist 1947 short story, "A Wedding," told through the lens of one refugee family in Shanghai, Polish Jewish refugee writer Jacob Fishman explores the manifold complications surrounding interracial marriages.⁷⁴ In the story, as the family's daughter turned to socially conservative Orthodox Judaism after arriving in Shanghai, she vehemently opposed the interracial relationship between her brother and a Chinese woman. Eventually, under the pressure from the Chinese woman's father who "had a very low opinion of foreigners," the interracial couple got married.⁷⁵ But the marriage led to the dramatic estrangement of the Jewish siblings, tearing the refugee family apart. Fishman's story showcases that both Chinese anti-foreign sentiment and Jewish conservatism impeded the establishment of interracial relationships.

In another example involving literature, a play titled *Foreign Soil*, written in Shanghai by Jewish-Viennese refugee Mark Siegelberg, depicts a Jewish wife's extramarital affair with a Chinese man. The play's subject was considered so scandalous by the Jewish community that *Foreign Soil* was only performed twice before further bookings were cancelled, and the play

⁷⁰ Steve Hochstadt. "Grey, Doris oral history interview," 16.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Steve Hochstadt. "Greening, Herbert and Ilse oral history interview," 39.

⁷³ "Eric Rosenow - August 5, 1982" *Vioce/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive*.

⁷⁴ Irene Eber. *Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China*, 121 - 130.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 126.

never to be staged again.⁷⁶ The intense backlash against *Foreign Soil* reflected the Jewish community's deep anxiety over the contamination of racial purity and the decline of European womanhood in the foreign land. Siegelberg's work represented the lived reality of the Jewish exile community in which Jewish wives, as white women considered highly desirable in Shanghai society, were often earning much more than their husbands working in the service industry, overturning the traditional family patriarchy.⁷⁷ More distressing to the conservative elements, some Jewish women became sex workers out of financial desperation, often servicing Asian clients.⁷⁸ Hence, in such circumstances, the Jewish patriarchs who no longer dominated their families economically were further emasculated by the fact that women from their community could be sexually involved with men who, according to the colonial racial stratification, were of an inferior race. Hence, often affirming the logic of colonial racism, conservative Jewish patriarchs developed a sense of sexual xenophobia and passionately opposed interracial relationships.⁷⁹ Given these examples, in addition to the obvious language and cultural barriers, the rarity of interracial marriages in Shanghai between Chinese and Jews could be attributed to the Chinese anti-foreign sentiment and Jewish patriarchal xenophobia. Thus, although many cooperative personal and professional relationships were established among members of the two groups, in terms of marriage, the Jews and the Chinese could not overcome their racial prejudice, demonstrating internalization of colonial hierarchy.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Mark Siegelberg, et al. *Das Zweite Gesicht = The Face of Pearl Harbor: German and English Parallel Text*. (Iaponia Insula ; Band 33. München: Iudicium 2017), 66.

⁷⁷ Xi Li 李茜. "犹太流亡戏剧在上海 : 1939-1947. Jewish Exile Theater in Shanghai" (Master Desertion, Peking University. 2013), 141.

In the *Foreign Land*, the wife worked as a barmaid. She met her Chinese lover on her job. Incidentally "A Wedding" also , but with the children subverting their father as they more successfully adapted to Shanghai society.

⁷⁸ Steve Hochstadt. "Westheimer, Susan oral history interview" (*Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection* 1990), 23.

⁷⁹ Mark Siegelberg, et al. *Das Zweite Gesicht = The Face of Pearl Harbor: German and English Parallel Text*, 22.

⁸⁰ Perhaps it is worth mentioning that by counting three cases of interracial marriage between Jewish men and Chinese women, scholar Qingyang Zhou comes to the ludicrous conclusion that: "These intermarriages demonstrate the extent to which Jewish refugees accept Chinese culture and attempt to integrate into Chinese communities" (68).

Here, it should be noted that the Jewish community ought not to be treated as a monolithic entity. As represented in the aforementioned conflict between Polish yeshiva students and rich Russian Jews in SACRA, the Jewish community was deeply divided along national and class lines. There were innumerable causes for divisions and grievances among the Shanghai Jews. Just a few examples: upon their arrival in Shanghai, the Central European Jews received far better reception than the Eastern European Jews;⁸¹ in the wake of the Pacific War, the Baghdadi Jews were interned because they held British passports, while the Russian Jews did not even have to move into the Designated Area because they were not considered stateless.⁸² As a consequence, given that the various groups of Jewish refugees had had different experiences prior to their arrival and continued to be treated discriminately while in Shanghai, tensions were strong among the different Jewish groups despite the persistence of a vague sense of unity.

Regardless, the ultimate reason why the Jewish refugees did not stand in solidarity with the Chinese locals and protest against the power of Western colonizers and the Japanese was perhaps not the aforementioned factors that drove the two communities apart, but the original purpose of the refugees' sojourn: they had come to Shanghai to evade Nazism, not to partake in an uprising on the side of the oppressed. Far from the CCP historians' fiction of golden solidarity between races in the face of adversity,⁸³ the Chinese and the Jews were separated by their cultural barriers, anti-foreign sentiment and colonial prejudice while indulging in a sense of familiarity in their respective self-sufficient communities. Nonetheless, countless warm friendships were cultivated on the individual level in wartime Shanghai.

⁸¹ Irene Eber. *Voices from Shanghai: Jewish Exiles in Wartime China*, 105.

⁸² Irene Eber. *Wartime Shanghai and the Jewish Refugees from Central Europe : Survival, Co-Existence, and Identity in a Multi-Ethnic City*, 69.

⁸³ Qingyang Zou. "Interactions Between the Chinese and the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II," 81.

V. Jewish Resistance in Shanghai

In the oppressive society of Shanghai, members of the Jewish community, sympathizing with the plight of the Chinese and facing abuse from the Japanese, resisted both the logic of Western colonialism and the techniques of Japanese occupation.

Jewish refugees resisted Shanghai's colonial ideology that assigned individuality according to one's race and adopted a more sympathetic mode of subjectivity. Specifically, by radically empathizing with the most deprived Chinese in Shanghai, Otto Schnepf defied colonialism's dehumanization of the colonized. During an interview, after reflecting upon a day when he mysteriously got the urge to see the heaps of bodies dead from an American air raid, Schnepf described his experience of dehumanization witnessing the plight suffered by the most vulnerable people in Shanghai:

... in retrospect, I was, I was pretty dehumanized in many ways, for years, because the life there was so dehumanizing. You know, the thing is, you had on the streets beggars. You had people diseased, starving in the streets of Shanghai, Chinese. Elephantiasis, this disease, you know. And people died in the streets.⁸⁴

Notably, when Schnepf said "life there was so dehumanizing," he was referring to not only the lives of the Chinese dying on the streets, but also his own life and by extension the sorry state of human life in colonial Shanghai. According to Schnepf's account, although he had not been "starving in the streets," he was dehumanized simply by witnessing the suffering of others. His secondhand dehumanization evokes the Levinasian notion of the "inter-human" subjectivity.

In his essay "Useless Suffering," Jewish French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906 - 1995) draws on his experience as a victim of torture under Nazism to argue that though the experience of suffering is "intrinsically meaningless" and any attempt to empathize with the

⁸⁴ Steve Hochstadt. "Schnepf, Otto oral history interview," 33

Other's suffering must fail, one can still nullify the uselessness of the Other's suffering and release the Other from ethical loneliness by suffering the Other's suffering. In his own words: "The suffering of suffering, the suffering for the useless suffering of the other person, the just suffering for the unjustifiable suffering of the Other, opens upon suffering the ethical perspective of the inter-human."⁸⁵ By "inter-human," Levinas signifies a form of subjectivity that reflects the sensibility of "non-indifference of one to another, in a responsibility of one for another."⁸⁶

Under Levinas' framework, Schnepf's account was an iteration of his "inter-human" subjectivity as he suffered for the useless suffering of the Chinese colonial subjects: witnessing the dehumanization of the Chinese under colonialism, he himself felt dehumanized. He experienced secondhand dehumanization because he was not indifferent to the Chinese, but rather felt a near obligatory responsibility for them as fellow humans. His own dehumanization ran so deep that after leaving Shanghai that he had to receive psychotherapy for years to "get back to humanity."⁸⁷ From a broader perspective, in order to justify the brutal subjugation of the colonized, the perverse ideology of colonialism required the colonizers to regard the colonized as inherently inferior, less than human and unworthy of sympathy. But an "inter-human" subjectivity that affirmed the "responsibility of one for another" subverted the colonial ideology as one cannot accept the colonial caste assignment that dehumanized the colonized when bonded by the "non-indifference" for the colonized. In this sense, as he replaced the Shanghai's default colonial subjectivity with an "inter-human" subjectivity, Schnepf's secondhand experience of dehumanization was the antithesis of Western colonial subjugation.

⁸⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, et al. *The Provocation of Levinas, Rethinking the Other*. "Useless Suffering," 158.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 165.

⁸⁷ Steve Hochstadt. "Schnepf, Otto oral history interview," 34.

In practice, Schnepf turned his subversive thoughts into resistance against the colonial order as he actively boycotted rickshaws: “it was terribly dehumanizing to take a rickshaw, which was an everyday occurrence, that's a dehumanizing experience. You must say to yourself, ‘This man is not human.’ Otherwise how can you do it?”⁸⁸ To be sure, the barbaric existence of rickshaw was only sanctioned under the ideology of colonialism. To be pulled by a barefoot coolie across the busy streets of Shanghai, scolding and even hitting him if he doesn't run fast enough and then bargaining over what insignificant amount of money to pay him, was only possible under the assumption that the puller “is not human.” Therefore, boycotting the colonial product of rickshaws, Schnepf refused to recognize himself by his placement according to the colonial system as “above Chinese” and affirmed the common humanity among races. Besides, when Schnepf called riding a rickshaw “a dehumanizing experience,” the indication was that it had been simultaneously dehumanizing for both the puller and the passenger. By uniting the experience of dehumanization between the servant and the master, such indication released the Chinese subjects from their ethical loneliness in suffering. Hearteningly, Schnepf was not alone in his defiance, as Alfred Zunterstein recalled that: “many refugees would refuse to ride rickshaws because they found it inhuman to be pulled by a coolie.”⁸⁹ With the experience of dehumanization under Nazism, the refugees found it easier to empathize with the dehumanized Chinese colonial subjects. Although they were unable to alter the dire situation suffered by the Chinese, by engaging in Foucauldian resistance against colonialism's governance of their individuality, the refugees undermined the colonial ideology that had placed the Chinese in dehumanizing situations in the first place.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ Irene Eber, et al. *Jewish Refugees in Shanghai 1933–1947 A Selection of Documents*, 210.

In addition to defying colonialism, during their confinement in Hongkew, Jewish refugees resisted the mechanisms of Japanese power in their everyday civil disobedience. According to Alfred Zunterstein, either because they were not granted a pass by Ghoya or because they would not withstand the humiliation of an audience, refugees frequently snuck out of the Designated Area: “there were areas that were open and there weren’t any barbed wires holding you back, you know, you could just go and if you had the guts ... if the *Pao Chia* was looking the other way, you could be gone.”⁹⁰ As for Zunterstein himself, he abused his position as a Youth *Pao Chia* leader and went out of Hongkew to enjoy himself without having a pass.⁹¹ Almost in a tacit understanding, some *Pao Chia* men purposefully overlooked the escapes. Martin Friedlander, a conscript in the *Pao Chia*, reported that he had “never checked anybody.”⁹² In this way, with the escapees violating the rules restricting their freedom of movement and the *Pao Chia* conscripts refusing to recognize themselves as collaborators loyal to the Japanese, the Jewish refugees were Foucauldian resisters to the Japanese rule.

Curiously, across interviews with former Jewish refugees in Shanghai, a pattern emerges in which the refugees who compared the Japanese to the Nazis despite the aforementioned relative Japanese leniency, were also the ones who most consciously resisted Japanese power. For instance, Paul Reisman, who described the Japanese as “just like the Nazis” in their surprise house searches, expressed that he “wouldn’t have worked for the Japanese” during the war.⁹³ Because in both experiences, he felt “completely powerless” before the authority, Otto Schnepf was reminded of Nazi-occupied Vienna when he was arrested and “scared silly” by the Japanese

⁹⁰ Steve Hochstadt, et al. "Zunterstein, Alfred and Eva oral history interview" (Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection, 1995), 17.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 19.

⁹² Steve Hochstadt. "Friedlander, Martin and Susie oral history interview," 32.

⁹³ Steve Hochstadt. "Reisman, Paul and Gertrude oral history interview," 5.

for returning late to the ghetto despite having a pass.⁹⁴ After his arrest, his freedom to move freely outside the Designated Area was revoked. However, the traumatic experience emboldened him to break the rules that had been imposed on him, as he recalled:

... at the time, you know, there was this resistance to being so controlled. I said, "Piss on them." And I went to the French Concession, and I continued tutoring, teaching. And I, it was interesting, I actually took off that badge when I went to the French Concession. ... it was an important thing for me to have a, you know, to rebel, and not to, where I, within the frame of where that I could, where not to conform to their rules, more than a certain.⁹⁵

When Schnepf said "Piss on them" to the Japanese, he was not only disregarding the restrictions out of necessity or desperation, he was asserting his personal agency and self-consciously defying the authority of the Japanese. In that moment when he took off the badge that signified his identity and moved around freely in the French Concession, he rejected the state's power to govern not just his individuality, but also the exercise of the assigned individuality. While the state dominates its subjects with its physical force, it sends the message to its subjects that they were powerless before the state. However, Schnepf's act of defiance proved that the state was not all-powerful, and its fictitious power largely rests on people's collective perception of its ability to coerce. With his experience of Nazi persecution, the defiance against the less extreme Japanese regime was an "important thing" for him because Imperial Japan largely operated on the same principles of power as Nazi Germany. Thus, by opposing the power of the Japanese, Schnepf was indirectly also challenging the logic of the Third Reich. Hence, by asserting his own sense of individuality and agency, Schnepf was not only fought against the oppressive reality in Shanghai, but also rectified the abuse suffered by his past self in Vienna.

Jewish-Austrian refugee doctor Jacob Rosenfeld took the fight against domination to another level by joining the fight against fascism with the Chinese communists. Rosenfeld was

⁹⁴ Steve Hochstadt. "Schnepf, Otto oral history interview," 27.

⁹⁵ *ibid*, 29.

arrested in post-*Anschluss* Austria for being a leftist Jew and sent to Dachau concentration camp and later transferred to Buchenwald. As a result of his radicalization during his time in the camp, after he fled to Shanghai in 1939, he joined the local communist circle. Establishing a connection with the CCP, he was smuggled out of Shanghai in 1940 to serve as a doctor in Mao's army. In rural Jiangsu Province, at the reception for his arrival in the army, Rosenfeld had a Proustian experience of involuntary memory about his time in the concentration camp:

My sight landed on the left corner of the stage: a segment of half-burned beam extending from a shabby old house, a rope hanging on it, maybe to fixate the light — it looked like a gallows... Buchenwald, evening of December 23, 1938. Machine guns pointing at us from the watchtowers in the middle and on the four corners. Ten thousand inmates were standing up straight. At the center of the gallows, supervisor of the concentration camp shouted our death sentences in his pretentious Hanover German.⁹⁶

His experience of involuntary memory suggested that his experience in the concentration camp ran deep into his subconscious, informing decisions including joining the communist army. Further, Rosenfeld made a more direct connection between his experience of Nazi persecution and his part in the war against the Japanese. Calling Jiangsu Province the “easternmost fortress of the anti-Fascism, the easternmost fortress of the free world,” he identified the Chinese resistance against the Japanese as the same fight as the war against the Nazis in Europe from the global perspective.⁹⁷ Thus, he believed that by joining the fight against the Japanese invaders in China, he was in effect also partaking in the larger struggle against the world fascist movement. Adhering to the internationalist ideal typical of communism, his Chinese comrades shared his view of global anti-fascist struggle. Rosenfeld reported that “as early as 1937, every soldier in the CCP army clearly knew that they were fighting against fascism, against the Japanese

⁹⁶ Jacob Rosenfeld, 中国的大时代：罗生特在华手记, *China's Epoch: Rosenfeld's China Memoir*, 7.

Because the book is not yet translated in to English, this is my translation. The ellipsis is Rosenfeld's original.

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 9.

jingoists! Back then, many European countries and governments didn't even know what fascism was."⁹⁸ In a 1943 conversation with his superior Liu Shaoqi (1898 - 1969), leader of the New Fourth Army who later became the Chinese president, Liu said to Rosenfeld: "Almost the entire Western Europe and part of Russia is still controlled by Hitler, most of China is still occupied by the Japanese, but we will prevail, and together we will build a brave new world."⁹⁹ As his Chinese comrades affirmed his belief that he was fighting against Nazi regime that "shouted [his] death sentences," Rosenfeld found his purpose and belonging in the Chinese army and worked tirelessly for the cause. However, he also did not conceal the particularity of his own experience of Nazi persecution. While serving in the army, Rosenfeld educated his Chinese comrades about horrors of fascism in Europe and reassured them that many Europeans were also taking part in the anti-fascist movement: "I talked about Hitler, talked about Dachau and Buchenwald, talked about the growing number of resisters, and talked about the inhumane regime of terror and its beastly mass killings."¹⁰⁰

Informed by his own particular experience, and inspired by communist ideals, Rosenfeld's commitment against injustice was not limited to the fight against Nazism. After the Second Sino-Japanese War ended, Rosenfeld chose to remain in the communist army to assist the communist effort in the Chinese Civil War (1946 - 1950) against the Nationalists government (also known as the Kuomintang) which he considered to be "fascist, totalitarian bandit group."¹⁰¹ After the communist victory in China, Rosenfeld returned to Shanghai in 1949 and was pleased to find that the colonial establishment had left the city in anticipation of the communist

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 125.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 9.

However, Rosenfeld might be committing an historical anachronism in his memoir since the "mass killings" of the Holocaust was largely unrevealed until the end of the war.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 131.

takeover.¹⁰² His opposition to the totalitarian and colonial powers demonstrated that through his radicalization in the Nazi concentration camps and his experience in the Chinese communist army, Rosenfeld had become committed to eradicating all forms of oppression in the world. Although Rosenfeld was an extraordinary example of Shanghai Jewish refugees' resistance against oppression, his story showcased the furthest extent of possible action that could potentially be taken by a member of the Jewish refugee community.

VI. Conclusion

Although the vast majority of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai survived the war, their stories were still heartbreakingly tragic. They escaped Nazi Germany to an unfamiliar place that must have seemed like the end of the world only to face economic deprivation and oppression by Germany's Asian ally. More painfully, the refugees learned that their friends and relatives had been murdered in the diabolical Nazi concentration camps. However, with perseverance and resourcefulness, the refugees built a flourishing community in Shanghai that enriched Shanghai's commerce and culture. Moreover, although Japanese rule was lenient and crafty enough not to provoke a general revolt, the refugees resisted the mechanisms of Japanese power through civil disobedience; although full solidarity with the Chinese populace was never achieved, they resisted the logic of colonialism by refusing to partake in the cruel exploitation of Chinese labor.

Today, as killers and bigots preach on the high alters of national governments across the world, 75 years after the demise of Nazi Germany, the fight against fascism is far from over. In his address to a 2019 University of Chicago conference on the Shanghai Jews, Hongkew ghetto

¹⁰² *ibid*, 171.

survivor Michael Blumenthal compared Trump's America to the Third Reich, and called on those who know the story of Jews in Shanghai to fight the oppression of minorities:

I learned at firsthand how it feels to be rejected, forgotten and turned away. Heeding the lesson of history, I would suggest that all of us, who understand and have studied this history, must be on the forefront of those fighting to help these new minorities who are facing particular problems in this day and age.¹⁰³

However, academia is plagued with cynical career academics like Pan Guang, who on the surface tells the story of peace and inclusivity, but in reality contribute to the “success” of the communist regime that has long betrayed its noble ideals of Rosenfeld's days. As a matter of fact, the ethnocentric Chinese government is currently interning millions of Uighur Muslims, amounting to “the largest mass internment of an ethnic-religious minority” since the Holocaust.¹⁰⁴ Especially at a historical moment when an individual is made to feel helpless before the increasing power of the modern state, it is perhaps more urgent than ever to reflect on the tactics of forging true solidarity in racialized societies and resisting state power to reveal its emptiness. On a personal level, it would be incumbent on the resisters of fascism to start taking on the simple “responsibility of one for another.”¹⁰⁵ Perhaps then we could collectively begin to move towards a sense of commonwealth of humankind.

¹⁰³ The University of Chicago. “The Shanghai Jews. Michael Blumenthal, Rachel DeWoskin, and Civitas Ensemble.” YouTube video, 1:56:54. Apr 25, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQTUVBMLFQY&t=3058s>

¹⁰⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, et al. *The Provocation of Levinas, Rethinking the Other*, 158

¹⁰⁵ Emma Graham-Harrison, et al. “‘Allow no escapes’: leak exposes reality of China's vast prison camp network” (*The Guardian*, 24 Nov 2019).

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