

## Flight to Shanghai

(Wiebke Lohfeld, 2006)



Persecuted by the NS-State

Nearly **17.000** Jews from Germany, Austria, Poland, Czech, Hungary and a few other countries survived the Holocaust by escaping to Shanghai. The majority came in late **1938** after the Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) until August **1939**. Jews were forced to leave Germany by brutal German persecution. The only place where Jews could go with no visa, no money and no official nationality was Shanghai until it closed its doors in August 1939.

Source of all pictures: <http://www.talesofchina/shanghai/places.cmf>

## Shanghai:

The City of Shanghai was divided by the **International Settlement** and the **French Concession** since the mid 19th Century. The Police Force and Administration lay in the hands of international representatives, mainly British and American. Shanghai was one of the greatest centers for trade in the world. In the 30s Shanghai was surrounded by the **Sino-Japanese War** that hit the city hard in **1937** when the Japanese Army occupied Shanghai and parts of the city were destroyed. However, the International Settlement and French Concession were not occupied until **1941** and stayed established as before.



## Population:

In **1915** the population of Shanghai was about **1,500,000**. The two Settlements only contained **787,920** persons from which only **20,924** were foreigners and the rest Chinese. The numbers increased over the years and in **1930** there were about **36,471** foreigners in the city. A great majority of these were Japanese, followed by British, Russian and American. For the year **1934** the population of Greater Shanghai was estimated to be **3,133,782**. (**69,797** foreigners).

In **1942** the number of foreigners was about **150,931** including all stateless persons in Shanghai at this time as well.



### Leaving Germany and Austria:

Until **1940** most Jews from Germany and Austria went by train to Italy and boarded an ocean-liner to Shanghai in Trieste or Genoa. They were only allowed to carry 10 Reichsmark out of Germany; most of the refugees lost their valuable possessions. German officials watched as they packed boxes. How much they would take on the trip and send in huge trunks, and what actually would get to Shanghai varied. But most of them lost almost everything. After Italy allied with Germany, Jews could only go by train over the continent, and only with guaranteed transit-visa to pass through Russia, and this made the flight even more difficult.



Arriving in Shanghai:

When Jewish Emigrants came in boat-loads to Shanghai in **1938** and **1939**, local help organizations were established very quick, they got also international help, especially from the American Jewish **Joint** Distribution Committee, the **HIAS** (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and after the war, in 1945, from the **UNRRA** (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). The poorest emigrants were sheltered in so called '**Heime**' – where several families lived together in one room, furnished with bunk-beds. There were public **kitchens** that served one to two warm meals a day. There were about 2,500 refugees living in the 'Heime' for the whole time they were staying in Shanghai. Around 5,000 were dependent on the kitchens until the end of their stay.

### The Ghetto „Hongkew“:

After attacking **Pearl Harbor** in December **1941** Japan took over all forces in Shanghai. It had already joined the Axis with Germany and Italy but did not attack Jews in Shanghai. On **February 18<sup>th</sup> 1943** the Japanese proclaimed that those Jews who came to Shanghai after 1937 had to move into a one-mile-square section, named **Hongkew**, within a three months deadline. Japan didn't believe in Hitler's policy of Jewish annihilation. Hongkew was a separate area northeast of the city that was mostly destroyed in the 1937 battle. The Ghetto was later liberated by arrival of American forces in **August 1945**.



### The End of World War II:

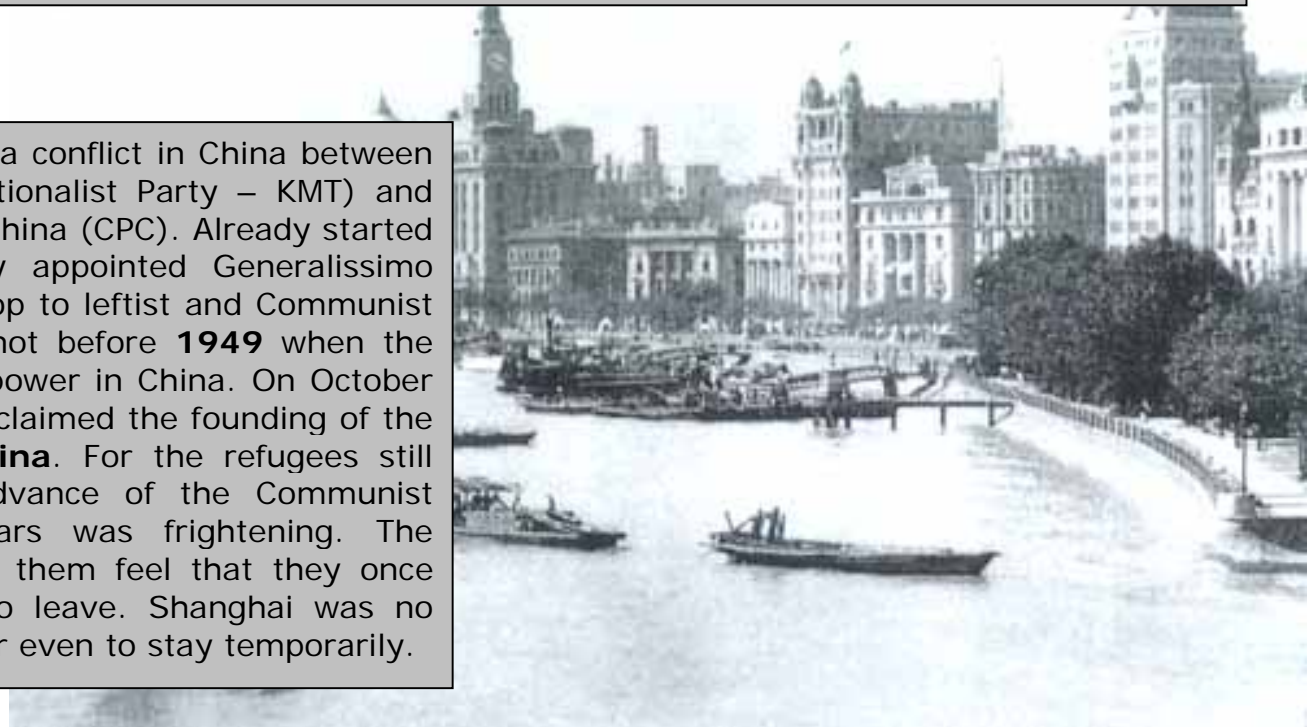
Japan surrendered on August **14<sup>th</sup> 1945** after it got hit by two atomic bombs dropped by the American Air-Force. Shanghai was then taken over by American forces.

### The Refugees' further Emigration:

The number of HIAS-registered refugees in **1946** added up to **16.300**. After being forced to stay in Shanghai through the National Socialistic regime and war in Europe as well as through the Pacific War, most refugees wanted to leave Shanghai as soon as possible. The desired destinations were the United States of America, Israel and Australia, but also Austria and other European countries including Germany. Further migration was organized by the **UNRRA** and also the American **JOINT, HIAS** and smaller splinter groups founded by Shanghai refugees themselves. Ongoing restrictions by the United States government made it still difficult to enter the United States. Only in **1949** the restrictions were loosened and emigration to the United States became easier. Until **1948** around **10.000** refugees had left Shanghai.

### Civil-War in China:

The Chinese Civil War was a conflict in China between the **Kuomintang** (The Nationalist Party – KMT) and the **Communist Party** of China (CPC). Already started in **1926** when the newly appointed Generalissimo **Chiang Kai-shek** put a stop to leftist and Communist party-infiltration it ended not before **1949** when the Communist took over the power in China. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1949 **Mao Zedong** proclaimed the founding of the **People's Republic of China**. For the refugees still living in Shanghai the advance of the Communist troupes during these years was frightening. The increasing insecurity made them feel that they once more were being forced to leave. Shanghai was no longer a safe place to live or even to stay temporarily.



Flight from Shanghai:

The UNRRA, JOINT, IRO and HIAS organized ships and airplanes to rescue the Jewish refugees from Shanghai. However, some were not evacuated before beginning of **1950**. Although the aid-organizations made a lot of effort to bring the remaining refugees out of Shanghai they had to learn that the Communists would still let foreigners leave the country. In the end the fear that Shanghai would be sealed up was baseless.



Historical timetable about the flight to Shanghai:

1935	Nuremberg Laws: Racial persecution of Jews
1937	Only 10 Reichsmark were allowed to be taken out of Germany, establishing taxes for 'fleeing the Reich', looting of Jewish capitals
March 1938	Annexation of Austria, anti-Semitic persecution, flight of Austrian Jews to Shanghai
June 1938	Evian- Conference: 32 nations close their doors to emigrants flooding in
Oct. 1938	German troops occupy parts of Czechoslovakia
Nov. 1938	Pogroms against Jews, Synagogues and Jewish stores are being destroyed, Jewish men are arrested, the flight of as Jewish persecuted people from Germany begins
Dec. 1938	Five-Minister-Conference in Tokyo. Japan is not persecuting Jews and gives out visas for German Jews
Aug. 1939	Shanghai restricts immigration: Shanghais doors are closed to more emigrants
Sept. 1939	Outbreak of the war in Europe: Hitler attacks Poland

June 1940	Italy enters the war allied with Germany. The route to Shanghai through Italy is closed
Dec. 1941	Japan enters the war by attacking Pearl Harbor. It occupies the rest of the City of Shanghai. The United States enters the war.
Febr. 1943	Proclamation of the Designated Area: Installation of the Jewish Ghetto in Hongkew
May 1945	World War II ends in Europe
Aug. 1945	Japan gets hit by two atomic bombs dropped by the American Air-Force, Japan surrenders, American forces liberate the Ghetto and take over Shanghai
1. Oct. 1949	Proclamation of the People's Republic of China
Spring 1950	Almost all Jewish refugees have left Shanghai

#### Bibliography:

Freyeisen, Astrid (2000): Shanghai und die Politik des Dritten Reiches. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Hochstadt, Steve (2000): Flucht ins Ungewisse: Die jüdische Emigration nach Shanghai. In: Armbrüster, Georg/Kohlstruck, Michael/Mühlberger, Sonja (Hrsg.): Exil Shanghai 1938-1947. Jüdisches Leben in der Emigration. Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, S. 27-34.

Hoss, Christiane (2000): Abenteuer. Wer waren die Shanghai-Flüchtlinge aus Mitteleuropa? In: Armbrüster, Georg/Kohlstruck, Michael/Mühlberger, Sonja (Hrsg.): Exil Shanghai 1938-1947. Jüdisches Leben in der Emigration. Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, S. 103-132.

Kranzler, David (1976): Japanese, Nazis & Jews: the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai, 1938-1945. New York: Yeshiva University Press.

Lohfeld, Wiebke (2005): Du bist nicht mehr Teil Deutschlands. Die Flucht nach Shanghai 1939. Einzelfallanalyse aus einem DFG-Projekt. In: Bios, Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebenslaufanalysen, Heft 2/2005, S. 264-286.