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It must remain incomprehensible to us that we,
the victims of the recent Germany,
must again sleep on straw mattresses.

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Representatives of the Shanghai Group¹

“Back on Straw”: The Experience of Shanghai Jewish Refugees in Bremen after Escaping German National Socialism, Enduring a Japanese “Designated Area”, and Fleeing Chinese Communism

The Arrival of the Shanghai Group

On Sunday, 3 July 1950 the U.S. Army Transporter *General Sturgis* arrived from New York to the German port of Bremerhaven carrying 106 refugees. These refugees disembarked after a three-month journey that had taken them from China through the United States of America. The majority of the members of what would become known as the “Shanghai Group” (*Shanghai-Gruppe*) were Jews who had fled the Nazis for Shanghai, China. Given the city’s long tradition of not requiring an entry visa, Shanghai had become the last safe haven when the countries of the world (including the United States) had closed their doors to the Jews. In China the new “stateless” Jews had attempted to start a new life only to find that the persecution that had forced them to flee their homeland eventually caught up to them on the other side of the globe. During the course of the Second Sino-Japanese War, much of China, including Shanghai, was occupied by Japanese forces. In February 1943 the Japanese occupation forces in Shanghai

¹ Letter from Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 7 XI 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

decreed that all “stateless” persons who had arrived in China after 1 January 1937 were to be placed into a “Designated Area”² in the Hongkou³ section of the city. As a result, approximately 18,000–20,000 Jews were interned in the Designated Area, of whom some 15,000 were still alive at the end of the war.

After the war many of those who had been interned in the Designated Area decided to immigrate to the United States and were successful in doing so.⁴ Some of the Shanghai Jews stayed in Shanghai and once again tried to rebuild their lives. However, China was anything but a stable environment in which to do so, as the Communists and the Nationalists fought over control of the country. After the Communists eventually won this war, most of the remaining Jewish refugees decided to leave with hopes of moving to the United States. In April 1949, however, the United States had closed its consulate office in China. In Spring 1950 a group of 106 Jews decided to head out to the United States. The International Refugee Organization was able to procure a ship to carry these refugees on their journey. The SS *General Gordon* left Tientsin (Tianjin) on 24 April 1950.⁵ It voyaged to Hong Kong, Manila, Yokohama, and Honolulu and eventually arrived in San Francisco on 25 May 1950. The question that arose, however, when they arrived was whether the United States would accept these refugees. It should be noted that in the years immediately following the Second World War, American immigration policy toward Jews did start to open up.⁶ President Truman had taken the lead in this regard, starting with a directive in December 1945 that expanded the number of displaced persons

² “Designated Area” has been used throughout the text except for when “Ghetto” was used by the refugees in their testimonies. “Designated Area” was the official term for the area. Although the Designated Area has often been referred to as a “Ghetto” in the historiography, the Designated Area in Shanghai was not technically a ghetto due to the fact that the Jews lived amongst the Chinese population in Hongkou.

³ The Pinyin “Hongkou” has been used throughout the text, including the translations of refugee testimonies.

⁴ The description of the journey presented in this section is based on the reports given in the Bremen newspapers *Weser-Kurier* and *Bremer Nachrichten*; “Last Hope Gone, Refugees Must Sail for Europe,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 VI 1950; “108 D.P.’s From Shanghai Win a 12-Day Respite on Deportation,” *New York Times*, 29 V 1950; “All Hope Vanishes for 106 D.P.’s Here,” *New York Times*, 20 VI 1950; “Truman Speeding Refugees’ Return,” *New York Times*, 21 VI 1950; “106 Refugees Sail for German Camp,” *New York Times*, 22 VI 1950; and the account provided in James R. Ross, *Escape to Shanghai: A Jewish Community in China* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 250–253.

⁵ Historian James R. Ross notes that this was the last such voyage and explains that they had to take a train to Tientsin and then be taken out to the *General Gordon* on a barge. Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 250–251.

⁶ On the restrictive measures during the war see David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 124–142 and Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 18–21.

that could enter the country.⁷ It was under Truman's guidance (and in the face of restrictionist opposition) that the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 had opened the doors for some 202,000 persons (of whom over 40,000 were Jews).⁸ The problem that faced the 106 Jews from Shanghai was that they did not possess entry visas and for this reason they were immediately put onto a train in San Francisco and sent directly to New York. In New York the refugees were to board the *General Ballou* but their departure was delayed and, through the assistance of Jewish organizations, they were permitted to stay on Ellis Island until government officials (under pressure from the Jewish organizations) decided whether they would be allowed to stay in the United States. Eventually the decision was made that the Shanghai Jews would have to leave. This decision was based on the grounds that American entry visas could only be granted by American consulates in foreign countries as well as the fact that America had a strict quota of only 4,000 refugees from China. After two and a half weeks, the news came from the State Department that the Shanghai Jews would have to go. Last minute attempts to receive entry visas in Canada or Cuba were unsuccessful and the refugees boarded the *General Sturgis* for Germany. President Truman had taken a personal interest in the plight of the 106 refugees and contacted the United States High Commissioner in Germany, John J. McCloy, to designate the refugees as temporary residents when they got to Bremen so as to fast-track them toward admission to the United States.⁹ Ironically, during the very month in which the Shanghai Jews stayed in the United States, an extension of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was passed with a new goal of admitting approximately 415,000 persons.¹⁰ Nevertheless, if the Shanghai Jews wanted to join these numbers of new immigrants, they would first have to go to Germany.

The arrival of the Shanghai Group in July 1950 had been set up in advance by German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Adenauer had informed the Mayor of Bremen, Wilhelm Kaisen, and had requested that Bremen accommodate the refugees. When the Shanghai Jews arrived in Bremerhaven, they were greeted by the European director of the American Joint Distribution Committee, Charles H. Jordan, who had already looked after the refugees in Shanghai. The refugees were then transported to the Bremen International Refugee Organization (IRO) Camp Tirpitz, where they were greeted by Mayor Kaisen and Undersecretary Dr. Kleeberg, who acted as Adenauer's representative.¹¹

⁷ Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 103. Daniels points out that based on a Gallop poll, Truman's directive was not in tune with the sentiment of the American populace and "showed some courage" on his part.

⁸ Daniels, *Guarding the Gold Door*, 103.

⁹ "Truman Speeding Refugees' Return," *New York Times*, 21 VI 1950.

¹⁰ Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 109.

¹¹ That it was Kleeberg who represented Adenauer comes from Telegram by Gotthardt, 5 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

As the Shanghai Group arrived in Bremen, newspapers were running stories on the emerging conflict in Korea and a new historical era known as the Cold War was emerging. Along with the shift of course in geopolitics, the German stance toward Jews was turning. The arrival of the 106 Jewish refugees put one question front and center: What debt did the Germans owe Jews who had fled to Shanghai, China and had been forced to live within a Designated Area by the Japanese occupying forces? While it was true that the hardships that these Jewish refugees had endured in China had been at the hands of the Japanese, the reason they had had to flee to Shanghai in the first place was clear: due to their persecution at the hands of the Nazi regime. Given the interest of Chancellor Adenauer in their plight, it looked initially as if the Germans would start making amends. In fact, during the previous year, Adenauer had made his first public comments on Jewish relations in the Bundestag. Nevertheless his comments were awkward and critics had focused more on what he had failed to say on the issue than on anything else.¹² The fact of the matter was that the question of Jewish reparations in Germany had not yet been resolved. The first reparations of any kind started with a policy to reclaim Jewish property in the American Zone in 1948. This would be followed by fledgling programs and policies in various German states in the West.¹³ The Luxemburg Agreements between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel would not be signed until September 1952. Thus, when the Shanghai Group arrived in Bremen in July 1950, there was not much of a road map to follow with respect to compensating Jews for the misdeeds of the German past. It appeared though that both Adenauer and Kaisen knew that *something* needed to be done with respect to this group of Jewish refugees.

Shifting the Focus within the Historiography

To date the historiography of the Shanghai Jews has largely been focused on the Jewish experience in the Designated Area primarily through the publication of memoir accounts by those who survived the ordeal.¹⁴ The subject received its first substantial scholarly treatment in David Kranzler's trailblazing work of 1976,

¹² Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945–1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186–187.

¹³ Menachem Z. Rosensaft and Joana D. Rosensaft, "The Early History of German-Jewish Reparations," *Fordham International Law Journal*, Volume 25, Issue 6, 2001, S-2.

¹⁴ See, for example, Ernest G. Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) and the collection of accounts in Berl Falbaum, ed., *Shanghai Remembered: Stories of Jews Who Escaped to Shanghai from Nazi Europe* (Royal Oak, Mich.: Momentum Books, 2005)

Japanese, Nazis & Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938–1945.¹⁵ In recent years more and more scholars and even filmmakers have turned to the topic. Perhaps most significantly, in 2007 a museum dedicated to the history of the Shanghai Jews was opened in Shanghai. The museum has not only been spreading awareness of the history of the Shanghai Jews within China but also throughout the world with its travelling exhibition. This exhibition has appeared most recently in Stuttgart during November 2013. It is fair to say that the historiography of the subject has arrived at a point where the Jewish experience in Shanghai has been recorded in great detail.¹⁶ The challenge that now presents itself is for scholars to either start approaching the history from new perspectives or to expand the temporal boundaries of the history to include the *consequences* of the Jewish refugee experience on subsequent history. With respect to perspective, historian Gao Bei has broken new ground in her 2013 book *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II*.¹⁷ Here Gao eschews what she says has been a hitherto myopic, even “Eurocentric”, focus on the Jews.¹⁸ By contrast she explores the subject of the Jews in Shanghai from the perspective of Japanese and Chinese officials. In effect, she has done much to show that there were more roles for the Chinese and the Japanese in this history than simply those of faceless coolies and the sadistic Kano Ghoya, respectively.¹⁹ With respect to the *consequences* of the Jewish refugee experience, coverage has predominantly been limited to the specific life stories of individuals or individual families in the post-War years or coverage of Jewish refugee reunions in the United States. This, for example, is the way in which the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum presents the post-1945 history. Post-War coverage then tends to jump to the significance of the history of the Shanghai Jews for present-day relations between China and Israel and of the restored Ohel Moshe Synagogue in Shanghai as a symbolic focal point of commemoration for world leaders. To date there has been little written on the subsequent impact of the Shanghai

¹⁵ David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938–1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ The high water mark in the description of the Shanghai Jewish experience has recently been reached with Steve Hochstadt, *Exodus to Shanghai: Stories of Escape from the Third Reich* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁷ Gao Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Gao, *Shanghai Sanctuary*, 7.

¹⁹ “Coolie” was the word used for members of the poor, laboring class, which comprised the overwhelming majority of the population in the Hongkou District. Ghoya was the diminutive Japanese official who was in charge of distributing passes that allowed Jews to leave the Designated Area on a temporary basis. Ghoya was an unstable man who was wont to humiliate and physically harm Jews for no apparent reason other than for personal pleasure. Ghoya, who called himself the “King of the Jews,” would become the face of the Japanese people to many of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai.

experience on the relations between Jews and Germany. The question arises as to what extent Germany was ever held accountable for the loss and misfortune experienced by those Jews who had had to flee the country to China. One is struck by the absence of such discussion of German-Jewish relations in the post-1945 period both within printed works and in the displays at the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum.

The Significance of the Shanghai Group for Historians

By following the narrative of the arrival of 106 Jewish refugees in Bremen in 1950 we can start to move beyond the specific confines of the Designated Area and explore the consequences of the history of the Shanghai Jews for Jewish-German relations. The arrival of the Shanghai Group was obviously seen at the time to be important (as Chancellor Adenauer's personal interest attests). Nevertheless, the Shanghai Group arrived at a time before an official reparations agreement between Germany and Israel had been settled and it was by no means clear what was to be done for the Shanghai Jews. The present article is intended to serve as the first step in documenting the history of the Shanghai Jewish Refugee experience *after* the Jews left China. Given that the article is breaking new ground, its main focus is placed more on providing foundational information than conclusive interpretation. The article is based on a large file (4,22/2-178) devoted to the Shanghai Group that is located in the Bremen State Archives. The file is comprised of documents produced by the Chancellor's Office, the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Federal Ministry of Interior, and the Bremen Senate. The file also contains the correspondence of representatives from the Shanghai Group with various government officials. The hope is that the article will stimulate more research in this direction. Although the article is centered on the negotiations of the Jewish refugees with German officials during the early 1950s, the main source upon which it is based does reveal important details of the refugees' past experiences (both within Nazi Germany and Shanghai). The context for this was that the Jewish refugees were documenting these experiences in order to justify their demands for restitution from Germany. The significance of this for scholars is that the accounts provided within their correspondence with the German officials constitute some of the earliest chronicles of the horrors they experienced both within Germany and China. For the purposes of this brief article, the accounts of the refugee experience in Nazi Germany and life in Shanghai have been limited to a narrative of the concentration camp experiences of thirteen of the members of the Shanghai Group and translations of three of the fullest refugee accounts of Shanghai. With respect to the post-Shanghai history, the article depicts the journey to Bremen, the names (and birthdates when available) of 104 members of the Shanghai

Group, the number of the Shanghai refugees in Bremen over time, the health status of the members, the conditions in the Tirpitz Camp in Bremen, and the activities of German federal and state officials to address the immediate needs of the Shanghai Jewish refugees during the time when the issue of German reparation payments to Jews had yet to be determined.

The arrival of the refugees in Bremen occurred at the time when the government of the new Federal Republic of Germany was only beginning to navigate its way through the tricky waters of German-Jewish relations in the wake of the Holocaust and the documents reveal a certain tension as government officials tried to figure out how to respond to the awkward presence of the Shanghai Group. Ultimately, the examination of the plight of the Shanghai Group in Bremen during 1950–1952 reveals that despite the initial good intentions of Chancellor Adenauer and Mayor Kaisen, the less than ideal accommodations and foot-dragging on the part of various government offices ultimately meant that the Germans missed an early opportunity to show that they were genuinely interested in atoning for the sins of their immediate past. The Jewish refugees grew increasingly frustrated as days turned into weeks and weeks into months and the best Germany had to offer them was straw. The time when Germans really started to confront their dark past would come well after the last members of the Shanghai Group had already left.²⁰

Who Were the Members of the Shanghai Group?

The Shanghai Group was comprised of 106 Jewish refugees. The overwhelming majority of the group originally came from Germany. Eight of the members came from Austria and one was from Italy.²¹ Most of the Jews had journeyed to Shanghai via Italy on ships of the Lloyd Triestino.²² Three members of the group were children who had been born in China. Of the 106 members of the group, 87 had actually been detained in the Shanghai Designated Area. The remaining had lived in different cities in China.²³ The names of 104 (and the birthdates for 77) of the

²⁰ Although not the main focus of the article, the history of the Shanghai Group also shows yet another unfortunate consequence of the restrictive immigration policies of the United States; the said policies prolonged the refugee experience for these mostly elderly and/or infirm persons. As such, the article provides additional testimony against U.S. policy as the one provided so effectively in Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*.

²¹ Report by Breyhan sent to Dr. Vialon, 29 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

²² For descriptions of such journeys, see Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, esp. 51. In Ross's work the experience of the Heimann family (of whom Gustav Heimann, Julie Heimann, and Sally (or Saly) Pape would later find themselves in the Tirpitz Camp in Bremen) is chronicled. For a description of their journey to Shanghai, see 39–50.

²³ Letter from W. Joachimsthal and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 10 VIII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

remaining 104 refugees appear in the archival file.²⁴ The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum has been compiling the names of all the Jewish refugees who lived in Shanghai in a database. The following list should help to this end.

Name	Birthday (month, day, year)	Name	Birthday (month, day, year)
Willi Bein	N/A	Raimond Krueger	7/18/1944
Hedwig Berg	5/22/1890	Elias Lawenda	11/14/1884
Jenny Berg	6/1/1895	Dagobert Lewithan	7/17/1891
Samuel Berg	1/9/1889	Hugo Lewinsohn	N/A
Siegfried Berg		Mathilde Lewinsohn	N/A
Selma Bergmann (geb. Cohn)		Caete Lissner	8/17/1894
Frieda Bernstein	4/2/1898	Georg Lissner	10/19/1888
Max Brandris	N/A	Elise Loewenstein	4/8/1887
Claudia Brann	9/22/1883	Eva Luedecke	10/8/1913
Max Brann	N/A	(Hans) Achim Luedecke	5/25/1914
Natalie Brann	1/2/1925	Jeanette Luedecke	9/27/1939
Margarete Carstens	12/4/1893	Jerry Mahrer	N/A
Herta Cohn	8/25/1899	Leopold Mahrer	N/A
Rosa Cohn	11/6/1877	Ruth Mahrer	N/A
Erich Conin	7/31/1905	Anna Metz	4/28/1898
Else Elguther	9/7/1875	Josef Metz	4/3/1877
Ernst Elguther	8/9/1896	Arthur Michelson	N/A
Georg Elguther	10/9/1881	Mary Neufeld	12 (?)/5/1925
Hans Elguther	8/26/1914	Robert Neufeld	10/18/1919
Georg Finkenstein	10/7/1878	Roger Neufeld	1/6/1947
Erna Fleskes	5/21/1910	Kurt Nothenberg	10/16/1904
Walter Fleskes	4/3/1895	Saly Pape	11/25/1879
Rudolf Friedlaender	N/A	Heinz Wilhelm Paul	N/A
Emil Fruehling	N/A	Molly Paul	N/A

²⁴ Most of the names for the table come from 1) List (with handwritten date 22 I 1951) most likely included in a letter sent by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178; 2) The rest of the names have been culled from a number of other documents within Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178. Mathilde Lewinsohn comes from the file "Officials signing visa papers authorizing a refugee to enter the U.S." American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee website: <http://archives.jdc.org/> (accessed 12 IV 2014).

Arnold Fuchs	5/1/1910	Annelise Pinkus	3(?) / 20/1924
Gertrud Fuchs	10/18/1879	Elisabeth Pinkus	8/26/1894
Hans Goldschmidt	5/26/1928	Heinrich Pinkus	1/31/1893
Eberhard Gordon	8/20/1895	Peter Pinkus	7/27/1925
Hilde Gordon	N/A	Jacob Poczter	10/12/1890
Margarete Gruenfeld	12/15/1903	Joachim Israel Riess	N/A
Werner Gruenfeld	10/17/1909	Isabella Samuel	10/26/1873
Heinrich Hauer	3/8/1907	Charlotte Schnell	11/14/1889
Metha Hauer	12/2/1899	Max Schnell	7/30/1883
Dr. Bernard Hellmann	N/A	Paul Schnell	8/10/1890
Gustav Heimann	N/A	Paula Silbermann	2/27/1902
Julie Heimann	10/6/1913	Renate Silbermann	8/25/1931
Franziska Hirsch	7/11/1892	Herbert Simonsohn	?/26/1921
Flora Hochstein	10/16/1895	Gerda Stein	3/25/1915
Max Imber	1/18/1903	Heinz Stein	11/3/1911
Charlotte Jacobsohn	N/A	Kurt Sternberg	N/A
Herbert Jacobsohn	2/15/1895	Willi Tarnowski	11/5/1895
Evelyn Joachimsthal	12/22/1915	Josefine Tschaplitzki	N/A
Miriam Joachimsthal	8/1/1904	Arnold Unger	5/19/1894
Walter Joachimsthal	N/A	Erna Vogel	3/12/1889
Herbert Karo	N/A	Gerhard Vogel	9/24/1922
Adolf Keibel	N/A	Gloria Vogel	5/18/1918
Thekla Keibel	N/A	Walter Vogel	10/27/1910
Charlotte Kleemann	7/9/1878	Friedrich Wartenberger	9/16/1888
Ernst Kleemann	6/13/1876	Margot Wartenberger	3/25/1899
Herbert Kohn	N/A	Otto Weihs	1/25/1904
Alexander Konitzki	N/A	Leopold Zimmermann	3/28/1884
Rosa Koppelkowski	3/21(?) / 1879	Maria Zimmermann	9/13/1884

Housing the Shanghai Group

After arriving in Germany, the Shanghai Jewish refugees were housed in the Bremen emigrant depot station, Tirpitz Camp (*Tirpitz Lager*) under the direction

of the International Refugee Organization (IRO). Although the emigration depot was a place intended to accommodate persons for a few days at most, the stay for the Shanghai Group turned out to be much longer than had been anticipated. The refugees would trickle out of the camp over the next year and a half with the last members of the group leaving by 1 March 1952.²⁵

Within the Tirpitz Camp the Shanghai Jews were housed in a special section. Men and women were separated into rooms for between six and ten persons. The rooms were barren with no decorations, floor coverings, or window curtains. The refugees had to make do with wooden stools and chairs, an iron cot with straw mattress, and two blankets. Meals were taken together with the other emigrants in a large mess hall. After visiting the camp, Dr. C. Breyhan, a representative of Bremen in the Federal Government in Bonn, remarked that “[the food was just as monotonous [as the accommodations] and in the long run not sufficient. On the day of my visit the supper consisted of a bowl of noodle soup, a few slices of bread with a piece of butter, along with white cheese”. He noted that in addition to obtaining such living materials as soap, clothes etc., the members of the Shanghai Group wished to go into the city in order to visit a café or movie theater. He pointed out that illness was a particular problem because for serious illnesses patients had to go to the city hospital, where costs had to be paid privately²⁶. The Shanghai Group members were none too pleased with the accommodations. Their sentiments were relayed to Dr. Breyhan in a letter which pointedly compared the accommodations to those afforded them under the Nazi regime: “It must remain incomprehensible to us that we, the victims of the recent Germany, must again sleep on straw mattresses”.²⁷

Attempts to improve living conditions foundered in a bureaucratic morass. For example, after an armchair was brought in for one of the older ladies – a significant number of the refugees were elderly and had serious health conditions – Bremen Senator for Labor and Welfare, Gotthard, the man who had made the request, was informed by the administrators of the International Refugee Organization that bringing furniture into the camp was prohibited and that the armchair had to go.²⁸ After the first six months, the representatives of the Shanghai Group expressed their concerns that conditions in the Tirpitz Camp had worsened. They petitioned for an increase in the funds to be provided for each refugee so that they could take some meals outside of the camp and purchase more supplies for haircuts, clothes, shoe soles, travel fare, toiletries, postage, repairs, theater, cinema,

²⁵ Report “Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe” by Gotthard, 12 VI 1952, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

²⁶ Report on the Shanghai-Gruppe by Dr. C. Breyhan, 7 XI 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

²⁷ Letter from Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 7 XI 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

²⁸ Letter from Gotthard to Dr. C. Breyhan, 19 I 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

and tobacco. The restrictions in the camp were such that the refugees were not even able to prepare a cup of tea or coffee.²⁹ Their petition for an increase in payments, as we shall see below, was ultimately denied.

The following table shows the number of Shanghai Jewish refugees in the Tirpitz camp (or the general area)³⁰ over time starting from the date of arrival.³¹

Date	Number of Refugees
3 July 1950 (arrival)	106 (sometimes recorded as 108) ³²
14 July 1950	95
20 November 1950	81 (approximate)
22 January 1951	77
14 February 1951	60
21 April 1951	48
4 September 1951	30
9 November 1951	11
28 February 1952	3
1 March 1952	0

The majority of the refugees required medical care at some point during their stay in Bremen. In a report drafted on 20 November 1950, a Bremen official noted that of the original group approximately 70, at one point or another, had to visit

²⁹ The requests of the Shanghai Group representatives are discussed in Dr. C. Breyhan's report to the President of the Bremen Senate, 23 I 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

³⁰ At certain times some members were not technically to be found in the camp. For example, at times members were housed in a sanatorium (due to their tuberculosis) or in a home for the elderly. These members were still counted in the general tallies. See Report by Gotthard "Weiterzahlung der Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe," 9 XI 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2–178.

³¹ All documents come from Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2–178. The documents for the individual dates are as follows: For 14 VII 1950: Letter from Wilhelm Kaisen to Dr. Karl Carstens, 14 VII 1950; For 20 XI 1950: Report by Dr. Vialon "Shanghai-Gruppe," 20 XI 1950; For 22 I 1951: List (with handwritten date 22 I 1951) most likely included in a letter sent by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d.; For 14 II 1951: Letter from G. Heimann and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 14 II 1951; For 21 IV 1951: calculation based on 240 DM payment at 5 DM per person, Letter by Gotthard to Herr Lüdecke, 21 IV 1951; For 4 IX 1951: Report by Gotthard "Weiterzahlung der Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe," 4 IX 1951; For 9 XI 1951: Report by Gotthard "Weiterzahlung der Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe," 9 XI 1951; For 28 II 1952: Report by Gotthard "Weiterzahlung der Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe," 28 II 1952; For 1 III 1952: Report by Gotthard "Fürsorgeunterstützung an die Angehörigen der Shanghai-Gruppe," 12 VI 1952.

³² Most documents reported the number of refugees as 106; a few documents, such as an official report by Dr. Vialon, refer to 108.

the hospital (especially for lung-related illness). At this point it was reckoned that around 20 of the refugees were still not suitable for emigration either due to health or political reasons.³³ In the 30 August 1950 report given by Dr. Hugo Lewinsohn, a refugee himself and the former chief doctor of the Jewish refugee hospital in Shanghai, 25 of the original 106 refugees sustained permanent health problems as a result of their internment in the Shanghai Designated Area.

Illness	Number of Refugees
Tuberculosis	12
Malaria	6
Serious Stomach and/or Intestinal Illnesses	6
Skin Disease	1

In addition to these cases, Lewinsohn noted that many of the refugees also suffered psychological problems due to how they had been treated by the Japanese in the Designated Area.³⁴

Opening Requests for Restitution

Within two weeks of their arrival, the members of the Shanghai Group compiled testimonials regarding the losses that the members suffered as a result of the Nazi policies within Germany, the emigration process from Germany to Shanghai, and the internment in the Shanghai Designated Area to their 1) body, health, and liberty; 2) property and fortune; 3) financial advancement; and 4) pensions. These testimonials were sent along with a cover letter by two representatives of the group, Dr. H. Lewinsohn and Dr. B. Hellmann, to the Ministerial Director Dr. Kleeberg of the Federal Chancellor's Office on 14 July 1950. The members of the Shanghai Group intended to initiate the process by which they would be compensated for their losses. Lewinsohn and Hellmann wrote, "We know that the Federal Chancellor especially seeks to secure our wellbeing, and we are confident, that our proposals will be resolved the soonest with your friendly support". The need was urgent, Lewinsohn and Hellmann claimed, for the journey had been long and arduous. They expressed the hope that the state would deal with the claims rapidly.³⁵

³³ An example of a refugee who was encountering difficulty for "political" reasons was a man who had worked as a musician in a Russian establishment. Report by Dr. Vialon "Shanghai-Gruppe," 20 XI 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2-178.

³⁴ Report by Dr. Hugo Lewinsohn, "Gesundheitschaedigungen zurueckzufuehren auf den Aufenthalt im 'Ghetto' in Shanghai," 1 IX 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

³⁵ Letter from Dr. H. Lewinsohn and Dr. B. Hellmann to Ministerial Direktor Dr. Kleeberg dated 14 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2-178.

Three days later, on 17 July 1950, Hellmann along with another representative of the Shanghai Group, H.A. Luedecke had a series of meetings with various Federal Government officials in Bonn. For example, they met with representatives from the Refugee Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Interior. In the latter ministry they were told that the care of the Shanghai Group fell under “Welfare Affairs” and that although it was desired that their demand that each person be granted 100 DM would be met, such compensation would have to await the decision of the Interior Minister.

Meanwhile, Dr. C. Breyhan, the Bremen official who served as the liaison between the Bremen Senate, the Federal Government, and the Shanghai Group met with President Öftering from the Federal Ministry of Finance. Öftering was already informed on the matter and told Breyhan that “sufficient funds were currently not available in the federal budget and that the care and the completion of refund claims are to be a matter for the states”. In response Breyhan pointed out that the Shanghai Group in West Germany had no state status.³⁶ Given that the Jews had been placed into the Designated Area in Shanghai on the grounds that they were “stateless”, it seems that history was now repeating itself as farce.

Given their desire to claim restitution from the Federal Government, the Shanghai Jews set to documenting their suffering in Germany and China. As such, the correspondence between the representatives of the Shanghai Jews and the German officials reveals some of the earliest accounts of the Shanghai Designated Area and German concentration camps to be written after the Second World War.

Documenting the Shanghai Experience

Two representatives of the Shanghai Group, Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, sent a long report of the Shanghai Designated Area to government officials in Bremen.³⁷ In their report Hellmann and Luedecke described the Hongkou section as having been “densely populated” by the Chinese, the majority of whom were of the “*Kuli*” (coolie) class. Hellmann and Luedecke characterized the coolie class as generally making about one-twentieth of a European. The houses in the district were of Chinese construction style and were “almost completely without plumbing, without bathing or showering opportunities and infested with vermin of all sorts”. In the same area that would suit six European houses, there were 100 Chinese houses. Roads and alleys were simply used as toilets and the terrible sanitary conditions led to high mortality rates among this group of poor

³⁶ Breyhan report dated 20 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2–178.

³⁷ Report “Memorandum ueber die Ghetto-Internierung der juedischen Fluechlinge in Shanghai” by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

Chinese “and consequently also for the European refugee population”. According to Hellmann’s and Luedecke’s reckoning, some 19,000 refugees had to reside in the Designated Area. Those who still had the means paid inflated prices for their new dwellings, while the rest of the refugees moved into refugee barracks. Each of these barracks housed approximately 1,500 refugees in quarters in which there were 10 persons living together in 20 square-meter rooms.

Hellmann and Luedecke pointed out that the Hongkou section was a particularly dangerous place in which to live. First, given that it is a port and industrial area, it was always in jeopardy of bombardment. Second, the coupling of the unsanitary living conditions and the Chinese climate always posed a latent threat of an epidemic outbreak. Third, the administrators of the Designated Area handed out severe punishments that often led to death. Hellmann and Luedecke explained that the Designated Area was only partly bordered by walls with other areas being marked instead by signposts that announced that it was forbidden to pass. All the entrances were guarded by police and military. A specific section of the Office for the Shanghai Stateless Refugees Affairs was in charge of granting permission for certain refugees to cross. Permission was only granted for specific reasons and for designated hours along a designated route. Every transgression of the proclamation had hard consequences and punishments including physical beatings and confinement. A prison sentence was tantamount to a death penalty for the majority of those confined became infected with typhus.³⁸

Hellmann and Luedecke included individual testimonies of the Shanghai experience in their report. Of the testimonies provided with the report, those of Ernst E. Elguther, Dr. Hugo Lewinsohn, and Hans Achim Luedecke himself, are particularly informative and are presented here in English translation:

Ernst E. Elguther³⁹: (writing on behalf of himself, his father, mother, and brother)
...This regulation [the Japanese proclamation that created the Designated Area for Stateless Persons] forced us to abandon our apartment at the greatest financial loss...thus, to exchange an apartment equipped with every modern luxury for a small room in a completely squalid, Chinese house under the pressure of the Japanese and with the payment of a great indemnity to the so-called trade partner... I myself received no such pass [to enter and leave the Designated Area] from the Japanese, so I was completely without work. My brother was so impeded by the restrictions associated with his pass that he was not once in the position to earn half his livelihood. On account of this deprivation of liberty, we became impoverished at this time because we had to live off our assets and support our elderly parents. Violations or alleged violations were punished severely by the Japanese. From inhumane imprisonment, physical abuse to sadistic torture, the latter

³⁸ Report “Memorandum ueber die Ghetto-Internierung der juedischen Fluechlinge in Shanghai” by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

³⁹ Individual testimonies accompanying report “Memorandum ueber die Ghetto-Internierung der juedischen Fluechlinge in Shanghai” by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

especially in the so-called Bridge House, the headquarters of the Japanese police. I myself repeatedly witnessed how men and women were struck, kicked, and even pistol-whipped, especially upon the application for the special pass.... In particular I am aware that many of those who were imprisoned under inhumane conditions died as a result of this imprisonment, particularly of epidemic plagues and infectious diseases that they contracted during their detention.

Dr. Hugo Lewinsohn⁴⁰:

In my position as chief physician of the Hongkou Hospital and Outpatient Department, I had a good view into the state of health and the hygienic conditions of the emigrants living in the Ghetto.

The assigned living space was so small that the rooms had to be overfilled to the extent that sometimes four to six people had to find accommodation in one room. Consequently, the transmission of the frequently occurring infectious diseases found in Shanghai, such as tuberculosis, typhus, typhoid fever, dysentery and coeliac disease was very great.

Through the detention in the Ghetto, the opportunity to work was taken away from most emigrants. As a result of the Pacific War, the relief funds could no longer be transported to Shanghai in the necessary scale. The supply of essential food and medicine was inadequate, so that soon malnourishment and allergic illnesses set in. Public parks, baths, and recreation sites were forbidden.

Already in the summer of 1943, a large number of deaths could be reckoned among the malnourished emigrants. The extreme low-calorie diet and the weakened bodies were not able to withstand an infectious disease.

During the years 1944–1945, the living conditions had become even worse. The Hongkou emigrant community of approximately 16,000 people had registered a decline of approximately 3,000 deaths. [This was an] alarmingly high mortality rate.

The Ghetto decree of the Japanese and the resulting deprivation of liberty with all its consequences came about, according to the best of my knowledge and experience, from pressure by the resident German authorities in Shanghai, China.

Hans Achim Luedecke⁴¹:

[Note: The top of the original document is missing; thus, the translation starts in mid-sentence.]

...forced to move into a marked off sector in Hongkou, Shanghai. Despite months of effort it was not possible for me to leave this sector for half a year. In the sector I took on the volunteer leadership of the so-called Work Department, a division of the Church Fund of the emigrant-founded Organization for the Control of Distress. Through [my] participation on the board meetings of this organization the following things are known to me.

⁴⁰ Individual testimonies accompanying report “Memorandum ueber die Ghetto-Internierung der juedischen Fluechlinge in Shanghai” by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁴¹ Individual testimonies accompanying report “Memorandum ueber die Ghetto-Internierung der juedischen Fluechlinge in Shanghai” by Dr. B. Hellmann and H.A. Luedecke, n.d., Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

The sector for the Ghetto was arranged so that air strikes to vital areas would have to encounter the emigrants first. On the one side the area bordered on the most vital docks and on the other side were plants and other important firms. Directly adjacent in the Wayside Road was the only factory that dealt with the manufacture of airplane parts. Obviously, this location was selected so that the American air force would avoid bombing these districts. In fact, this assumption was correct save for one exception in which an attack claimed the lives of over two thousand people when the Ghetto was hit⁴².

The selected sector was in every respect unsuitable for Europeans, as there were no buildings according to normal standards there for Europeans to use. The sector was formerly occupied exclusively by Chinese workers and coolies, whose living standards lay completely beneath that of Europeans. There was in the whole area no sewage system, which often had disastrous consequences, especially during the hot summer months. Consequently, deadly cases of dysentery were daily occurrences during six months of the year. Washing and bathing facilities were not consistently available and skin diseases of the gravest kind prevailed among children.

Food, which according to the laws of war should have been provided by the Japanese, was entirely left to voluntary charity, mostly of the emigrants themselves. Given that, after the Ghetto decree almost everyone in this group was without work and income, relief was necessary after a few months. After six months it had progressed so that at least the elderly and children each could be provided with one warm meal per day, however still only with the most primitive means.

The application of funds was achieved at times only from the sale of the goods and chattels of the emigrants. The streets in the district were filled daily by hundreds of emigrants, who traded the last [of their possessions] to the Chinese. Everything was sold to the extent that ultimately thousands of emigrants were seen on the streets only with clothes made out of flour sacks.

Forced Labor: Columns of emigrants were drafted into forced labor by the Japanese. It consisted for the most part in clean-up work but also inside the area all emigrants were obligated to dig ditches that were intended for defense.

Demarcation and Security: The district was in places circumscribed by walls, while in other places guard posts were stationed where streets crossed the sector. The security was primarily carried out by the emigrants themselves, if the so-called *Pao Chia* was used⁴³. These posts were in turn supervised by the police and the Japanese armed forces. It was a constant terror sustained through control and supervision. Fustigation and detention were common. A number of emigrants died during the detention, while others disappeared completely without a trace, and the corpses from still others were found in the river.

Remarks: In Hongkou Mr. Luedecke contracted a skin disease that will reduce his capacity to work for the remainder of his life⁴⁴.

⁴² Luedecke clearly was reporting total deaths (Jews and Chinese) with this figure. Historian David Kranzler notes that the bombing claimed a total of 250 lives (31 of them being Jews). Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews*, 552.

⁴³ *Pao Chia* (the current Pinyin is *Baojia*) refers to a community watch system. Although *Pao Chia* is not italicized in the original document it has been italicized here to adhere to standard usage.

⁴⁴ The "Remarks" are part of the original document.

Documenting Concentration Camp Experiences⁴⁵

Thirteen members of the Shanghai Group had been imprisoned in German concentration camps prior to fleeing to Shanghai. Their combined duration of detention was roughly 168 months (or 14 years).⁴⁶ The representatives of the Shanghai Group hoped that these thirteen men would be compensated for this time of imprisonment. The bleak history of these thirteen men began on 9 March 1933 – about a month and a half after Hitler took office as Chancellor and just days after the Reichstag fire and March elections – when the newspaper advertisement representative Dagobert Lewithan was arrested for political reasons and detained in the infamous Columbia House Prison in Berlin for nearly a year and a half.⁴⁷ It ultimately took the intervention of the District Mayor, Mr. Beetz, for Lewithan to be released in August 1934. Four years later, on 11 June 1938, Lewithan was arrested again and taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp where he stayed until 9 February 1939.

Heinz Wilhelm Paul, a married salesman, was arrested in January 1936 at the border town Bad Schandau as he was returning from a trip to Czechoslovakia. Paul was charged with the crime of *Rassenschande* (“racial defilement”) and sentenced by the State Court in Dresden to a prison term of 18 months. Racial defilement was a crime according to the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor that was promulgated on 15 September 1935 as one of the infamous Nuremberg Laws. The law forbade sexual relations between Aryans and non-Aryans. When the term of Paul’s sentence ended in mid-August 1937, he was transferred by the Gestapo directly from the prison in Bautzen to the Dachau Concentration Camp.⁴⁸ In Dachau he was quartered in Block 6, Room 3. The block leader was Heinz Eschen⁴⁹ and the room leader was August Cohn.⁵⁰ The whole room was later transferred to Block 4, Room 3 in newly constructed barracks.

⁴⁵ Although the general issue of reparations had not been settled, a law had been promulgated pertaining to the payments to be issued to those who had been interned in German concentration camps. The majority of the information provided in this section comes from signed testimonies that accompanied a letter by Shanghai Group representatives Dr. H. Lewinsohn and Dr. B. Hellmann regarding the compensation due to thirteen members of the Shanghai Group as a result of this law: Letter from Dr. H. Lewinsohn and Dr. B. Hellmann, 3 VIII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178. Additional footnote citations have been provided for any information within this section that has been drawn from documents other than the testimonies that accompanied the 3 VIII 1950 letter.

⁴⁶ Handwritten notes by Dr. Breyhan accompanying report addressed to the Präsidenten des Senats, 9 VIII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁴⁷ On Lewithan’s occupation: Document signed by Dagobert Lewithan, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁴⁸ Such transfers to concentration camps after the conclusion of legal sentences became all too normal and were indicative of the disintegration of the rule of law in Germany.

⁴⁹ Eschen would later be found hanged in Buchenwald.

⁵⁰ Cohn was eventually freed from Buchenwald in 1945 and he moved to America.

Among those imprisoned with Paul were the Communist Reichstag Deputy and editor of the leading Communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), Werner Scholem; the SPD Reichstag Deputy, Ernst Heilmann; the Communist politician and journalist, Emil Carlebach; and Max Nelki (who would also later immigrate to Shanghai).⁵¹ It was also in Dachau that Paul met Artur Michelson.

In the second week of July 1936 – two weeks before the opening of the Summer Olympic Games – the fishmonger Artur Michelson was returning to his hometown of Deutsche Krone when he was met on the train platform and arrested by the Gestapo. The terms of Michelson’s arrest were that he was officially put under Gestapo surveillance, had to register with the Gestapo every day, and was no longer allowed to carry out any employment. The following year Michelson was taken to Schneidemühl, where he was locked up for around four weeks and then after being transported to the police jail Alexanderplatz in Berlin, Michelson was ultimately sent to Dachau. After his arrival in August 1937, Michelson was given a concentration camp number (around 12600 or 12800 – he later could not remember the exact number) and taken to Block 6. In Dachau Michelson was mistreated to the point that he was “blinded and paralyzed”. In September 1938 both Heinz Paul and Michelson were transferred from Dachau to Buchenwald, where they were quartered in the same block but different rooms. Due to the blindness that he had sustained while he was in Dachau, Michelson had to be led around while in Buchenwald.⁵² On 17 December 1938 Heinz Paul was released from Buchenwald. For the last month and a half of his detention he had been forced into a disciplinary battalion due to his designation as a “race defiler”. It was because of this designation that Paul had to wear a black and yellow star. As a result of mistreatment during his detention, Paul sustained an injury to his left foot, a pulled tendon, and frostbite.⁵³ Artur Michelson’s detention in Buchenwald continued for another eight months after Paul’s release during the second week of August 1939. As a result of his detention, Michelson’s twelve fish stores and twelve fish farms in Deutsch Krone, Grenzmark Province and Pomerania were confiscated.⁵⁴

On 23 December 1936 Josef Metz was arrested and detained in the police prison, Alexanderplatz. From there he was sent to the prison in Plötzensee,

⁵¹ In 1940 both Scholem and Heilmann were killed in Buchwald. Nelki was a resident of Hamburg who was sent to the concentration camp for the charge of racial defilement. Information about Nelki is to be found on the Wiener Library website: <http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cats/104/7831.htm> (accessed 1 II 2012).

⁵² Michelson’s eyesight was later restored by an operation performed in Shanghai. Document signed by Artur Michelson, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁵³ On Heinz Wilhelm Paul’s health: Document signed by Heinz Wilhelm Paul, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁵⁴ On the confiscation: Document signed by Artur Michelson, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

where he received an indictment for racial defilement. From Plötzensee he was then sent to prison in Tegel. In April 1937 his case came up and he was given the sentence of nine months. In June 1938 Metz was newly arrested and sent to the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. During the last few months of Metz's imprisonment in Sachsenhausen, he was joined by another future member of the Shanghai Group, Samuel Berg.

The goldsmith Samuel Berg was arrested during early June 1938 in Leipzig and sent to Sachsenhausen after staying a night in the police jail. In Sachsenhausen Berg was given the camp number 1428 and at first quartered in Block 1 and then Block 7. During his detention he sustained a fracture from which effects he would still suffer years later in the Bremen IRO Camp.⁵⁵ In Sachsenhausen Berg met Josef Metz as well as another inmate, who would eventually flee Germany for Shanghai, Rudolf Joryez. Berg was released from Sachsenhausen on 5 September 1938. When Berg returned from the camp he found that his precious metal business had been emptied. A warehouse and machines worth approximately 40,000 RM had disappeared.⁵⁶ Josef Metz was released from Sachsenhausen two days after Berg, on 7 September 1938. As a result of the mistreatment that Metz endured during the period of his detention, his health was such that he required medical therapy and his capacity to work was diminished. As a result he would later have to be supported by others in Shanghai.⁵⁷

On 26 May 1937 Werner Philipp Gruenfeld was arrested by the Gestapo in Bremen and held in a remand prison until September. At that time he was sent to Berlin Moabit, where on 14 October 1937 he was sentenced to one year and three months for racial defilement. At the end of the sentence, on 4 February 1939 he was transferred directly to the Gestapo at the police prison in Berlin, Alexanderplatz, and held there until 21 June 1939. On the next day he was taken to Buchenwald, where he was detained for another month. Gruenfeld had been deprived of his liberty for over two years and suffered from a chronic heart problem as a result of his detention.⁵⁸

On 13 June 1938 the merchant Heinrich Pinkus was arrested in Neisse; the next day the design engineer Emil Fruehling was arrested in his apartment in Berlin.⁵⁹ Pinkus and Fruehling were both taken to Buchenwald. Pinkus – whose health

⁵⁵ On the fracture: Document signed by Samuel Berg, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁵⁶ On Berg's business losses: Document signed by Samuel Berg, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁵⁷ On the health and financial effects of Metz's detention: Unsigned Josef Metz document, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁵⁸ On the heart problem: Document signed by Werner Philipp Gruenfeld, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁵⁹ On Fruehling's occupation: Document signed by Emil Fruehling, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

was compromised by his detention to the point that his capacity to work was diminished – was released from Buchenwald on 5 January 1939.⁶⁰ While he was imprisoned, Pinkus' business was destroyed during *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) that took place on 9/10 November 1938 (see below) and then "aryanized".⁶¹ Fruehling stayed in the camp until 15 June 1939. Fruehling had owned two patents for door locks and was forced to sell the patents (and his claim to future royalties) for a quarter of what they were worth.⁶²

The Night of Broken Glass was one of the most notorious events for Germany's Jews. Four future members of the Shanghai Group were rounded up at this time. The women's clothing merchant Georg Lissner was arrested in his apartment in Berlin and taken to Sachsenhausen, where he stayed until being released on 16 December 1938⁶³. Lissner's women's clothing business was "aryanized".⁶⁴ The paper merchant Georg Finkenstein and the textile merchant Kurt Nothenberg were both arrested in Breslau and taken to Buchenwald.⁶⁵ Finkenstein had run a paper business in Breslau but was forced to close it in 1935 and then struggled to feed himself through playing the piano.⁶⁶ Arnold Unger was arrested in Braunschweig and taken to Buchenwald. Finkenstein – who would suffer from neuropathy as a result of his detention – was released on 20 December 1938. Nothenberg – who contracted lung disease as a result of his detention – was released on either 14 or 15 December. Nothenberg was forced to give up his textile business. Arnold Unger left Buchenwald on 1 February 1939.⁶⁷

A few days after the Night of Broken Glass, Joachim Israel Riess was arrested on 13 November at the Dutch border and was eventually sent to Dachau. In Dachau Riess was quartered in Bock 21, Room 4 (being transferred to another Block the following month). He was released from Dachau on 1 March 1939. He was not given a discharge certificate; rather he was merely given a document

⁶⁰ On Heinrich Pinkus' health: Document signed by Heinrich Pinkus, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶¹ On the destruction and aryanization of Pinkus' business: Document signed by Heinrich Pinkus, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶² On the patents: Document signed by Emil Fruehling, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶³ On Lissner's occupation: Document signed by Georg Lissner, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶⁴ On Lissner's business being aryanized: Document signed by Georg Lissner, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶⁵ On Finkenstein's occupation: Document signed by Georg Finkenstein, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178; on Nothenberg's occupation: Document signed by Kurt Nothenberg, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶⁶ On the paper business and piano playing: Document signed by Georg Finkenstein, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁶⁷ On Finkenstein's neuropathy: Document signed by Georg Finkenstein dated 13 VII 1950. Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178; On Nothenberg's lung disease: Document signed by Kurt Nothenberg dated 13 VII 1950. Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

to sign that stated that he had suffered no mental or bodily harm and had gained 20 pounds during the detention. In fact, Riess had not only *lost* 25 pounds but also had many of his teeth knocked out during his detention in Dachau.⁶⁸ Moreover, the business for which Riess had worked was destroyed and the employer taken prisoner. Thus, Riess had no job to which to return.⁶⁹

The following table records the total time that the thirteen men spent in concentration camps in Germany:

Name	Months	Days
Samuel Berg	4	
Georg Finkenstein	1	10
Emil Fruehling	12	
Werner Philipp Gruenfeld	25	27
Dagobert Lewithan	25	
Georg Lissner	1	6
Josef Metz	11	26
Artur Michelson	37	
Kurt Nothenberg	1	6
Heinz Wilhelm Paul	35	
Heinrich Pinkus	6	24
Joachim Israel Riess	3	17
Arnold Unger	2	23
Total (Based on 30 days/ month)	167	19

Disappointment and Frustration

Money quickly became a major point of disappointment and frustration for the Shanghai Group. The group not only wanted sufficient funds to be allocated for their accommodation in Bremen but, as we have seen above, hoped to be compensated for their losses and suffering in reparation payments. They would ultimately be disappointed on both accounts.

⁶⁸ On Joachim Israel Riess' teeth: Document signed by Joachim Israel Riess, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁶⁹ On Joachim Israel Riess' loss of employment: Document signed by Joachim Israel Riess, 13 VII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

When the arrangement was struck between Adenauer and Kaisen before the arrival of the Shanghai Group in July 1950, it was agreed that 130,000 DM would be allocated for the group to cover housing and medical costs. Of this total, 100,000 DM was to be supplied by the Federal Government and 30,000 by the Bremen State. The funds were to cover the costs of accommodations for a projected stay of three months; however, at the end of those three months, it became clear that the initial assumption had been incorrect and that the stay would last another three months. For this reason Kaisen wrote to Adenauer with a request for an additional 70,000 DM from the Federal Government.⁷⁰ Records show that for the period between July 1950 and January 1951 the Federal Government transferred a total of 128,500 DM to Bremen in order to cover various costs related to the Shanghai Group.⁷¹

Whereas government officials were more exclusively concerned about covering the accommodation costs of the Shanghai Jews for what was hoped to be a temporary stay, the representatives of the Shanghai Group focused their attention on both accommodation and restitution payments. By 10 August 1950, ten of the 87 refugees who had been detained in the Designated Area had already left the group in Bremen to repatriate within Germany. Thus, that August representatives of the Shanghai Group petitioned for restitution payments to be made for the 77 remaining members of their group who had been detained in the Designated Area. The period of detention had lasted 26 months and the representatives reckoned that at 150 DM per person per month the total the group was owed would be around 300,000 DM (or 3,900 DM per person). In the interest of the quickest possible rectification of the issue, representatives declared that the group would be ready to accept a lump sum payment of an additional 100,000 DM to rectify all claims of this group in the matters of the deprivation of liberty in China and in German concentration camps.⁷²

The representatives of the Shanghai Jews offered this solution with the intention of preventing a “paper war”. Moreover, they added that such a solution “would be in the interest of all, because, on the one hand, the money paid to us would be spent in Bremen and on the other hand, we would really be helped through this because with this we would have the opportunity to create things for us here in Germany that would facilitate the beginning of a new existence abroad”⁷³

⁷⁰ Letter from Wilhelm Kaisen to Dr. Konrad Adenauer, 7 X 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷¹ Letter from Dr. C. Breyhan to Herr Regierungsrat Lindert, 24 I 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷² Letter from W. Joachimsthal and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 10 VIII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷³ Letter from W. Joachimsthal and H.A. Luedecke to Dr. C. Breyhan, 10 VIII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

It appeared, however, that the government officials were not so concerned about preventing a paper war. It was reported that the Shanghai Group representatives were told in person that their request for 100,000 DM as a reparation payment had “little chance” of success.⁷⁴ Moreover, on 6 December 1950 there was a conversation in the Federal Ministry of Interior between federal officials and Bremen representatives and it was later reported that when the issue of reparation payments was broached, the representatives of the Federal Ministries placed no importance on combining payments for the general welfare of the refugees with reparations.⁷⁵ Not only were government officials in no hurry to respond to the Shanghai Group’s requests for reparation payments, it was at this time that they decided to scale back payments for the refugees’ accommodations in Bremen. From the period July to December 1950 in addition to payments for general accommodations, an additional 1400 DM had been paid, thus it was estimated that around 230 DM had been provided per month per refugee.⁷⁶ However, from 1 January 1951 on each member of the Shanghai Group would be allotted 50 DM per month. 35 DM would be paid for dependents over 16 years of age and 25 DM would be paid for dependents under 16 years of age.⁷⁷

The representatives of the Shanghai Jews found it particularly problematic that whereas their payments were being slashed, payments to the parallel group of Shanghai refugees living in the International Refugee Organization camp in Bavaria were actually being increased.⁷⁸ In his criticism, the Shanghai Jewish representative Luedecke was careful not to overstate the plight of the refugees in Bremen vis-à-vis the refugees in Bavaria. He noted that he had recently visited the IRO Camp Föhrenwald in Bavaria and had to admit that although the refugees there had more opportunities to cook for themselves, they “live in a type of filth and misery of which one from a better position cannot speak”.⁷⁹ What Luedecke did object to was the implication that, whereas living costs for refugees had increased in Bavaria, they had somehow decreased in Bremen. Luedecke contacted numerous officials either in person

⁷⁴ Report by Dr. Vialon “Shanghai-Gruppe,” 20 XI 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2–178.

⁷⁵ Report by Dr. Karl Carstens “Shanghai Gruppe...,” 7 XII 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷⁶ Letter from Dr. Öftering to the Federal Minister of Interior, 2 IV 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷⁷ The decision came from the Federal Minister of Interior on 22 XII 1950. Information on the decision can be found in Gotthard’s Report “Shanghai-Gruppe; Versorgung bis zum 31.3.1951,” 22 II 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷⁸ This was in fact the case; a report notes an increase of the payment to 500 DM a month per refugee from the old level of 300 DM. Report by Bundesminister der Finanzen Öftering addressed to the Bundesminister des Innern, 2 IV 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

⁷⁹ Letter from H.A. Luedecke to Dr. Breyhan, 15 III 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.

or in writing and hoped that the monthly allotment would be increased to at least double the 50 DM that had been decided upon.⁸⁰

Luedecke's response to the government's decision to set payments at 50 DM from 1 January 1951 on generated a mountain of paperwork as the issue moved through the warren of state and federal governments. A question that arose from the bureaucratic communications was whether increased funds could be justified if the payments were characterized as "War Relief" or "General Welfare Aid". Ultimately, such justifications were rejected by the Federal Ministry of Finance on both accounts.⁸¹ Luedecke became increasingly frustrated in his futile quest to reverse the decision to set payments at 50 DM after 1 January 1950. Eventually, in March 1951 Luedecke expressed this frustration with how the issue of payments was being dealt with by the various departments within the Federal Ministry of Finance by requesting that Dr. Breyhan make the Finance Minister familiar with the passage from Heinrich Heine's *The Grenadiers*: "And as neither wished to suffer one paying for the other, neither of the two paid".⁸²

Luedecke did score a minor victory, however, in his bid to obtain extra funds for religious ceremonies. A total of 240 DM (5 DM per person) were distributed for this purpose. The approval of these funds – funds to support the celebration of religious rituals for Jews who had fled the Third Reich some fifteen years before – ironically was granted by the Bremen Senate on 20 April 1951, the 62nd anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth.⁸³

Unfortunately, the Bremen file is not conclusive on the matter of reparations for the Shanghai members. The file ends on a bleak note in late 1953 with a few documents alluding to a lawsuit that one of the Shanghai Jews, the concentration camp survivor Arthur Michelson, opened against the Freie Hansestadt Bremen over the issue of reparations. The German road to reparations for Jewish victims would be a twisted and troubled one that would extend well beyond the Cold War that was just beginning when the Shanghai Jews arrived in Bremen in 1950. In his book *Escape to Shanghai*, James R. Ross claims that eventually the Federal Republic of Germany paid 5,000 DM to Jewish refugees who lived in the Shanghai Designated Area and an additional 5,000 DM to those who "continued their

⁸⁰ See, for example, the report that Dr. Breyhan sent to the President of the Senate after a meeting with Luedecke: Dr. Breyhan Report "Shanghai-Gruppe 1951...", 23 I 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁸¹ Letter by Hartmann and Hilde of the Federal Ministry of Finance titled "Weitere zusätzliche Leistungen für die Angehörigen der Bremer Shanghai-Gruppe" to the Federal Minister of Interior, 10 III 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178. See as well Dr. Öftering's decision not to increase the payments for the Shanghai Group of Bremern: Letter from Dr. Öftering to the Federal Minister of Interior, 2 IV 1950, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁸² My translation. Letter from H.A. Luedecke to Dr. Breyhan, 15 III 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

⁸³ Letter by Gotthard to H.A. Luedecke, 21 IV 1951, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2-178.

education”. Ross claims further that payments were eventually made decades later to those refugees who had returned to what became East Germany and had never received any reparations from the German Democratic Republic.⁸⁴

A Lukewarm Welcome and a Confidential Case

The Shanghai Group arrived in a very different Germany than the one they had left. The German eagle was still trying to emerge from the ashes of Hitler’s destructive Third Reich; Adenauer’s Germany was entering its path to normalization. Along this new course, the German stance toward Jews was changing. The Shanghai Group provided an early opportunity for the Germans to show that they were truly a new land with a new view towards humanity. Although there were those who questioned what debt Germans owed to Jews who had been interned in a Japanese “Ghetto” on Chinese soil, the federal government and the Bremen Senate took the position that Germany would have to open its doors to these returning Jews. The problem was that neither Adenauer nor Kaisen foresaw how long the Jews would have to stay in Germany. The members of the Shanghai Group – a majority of whom were sick and weary – most decidedly did *not* want to be “back on straw” in Germany but, given the slow bureaucratic wheels of American immigration policy, that is where they found themselves until they could journey back to the United States.

Although Adenauer and Kaisen had welcomed these Jews, the members of the Shanghai Group quickly became skeptical of the warmth behind that welcome. The fact of the matter was that the Shanghai Group had arrived before the issue of reparations for the Holocaust was settled; as such, no one quite knew how to provide for these refugees. The representatives of the Shanghai Group submitted request after request in hopes that their living conditions in the camp would be improved and the funds allotted to them would be increased. Although the federal and state governments did provide financial support for the Shanghai Jewish refugees, this support was not at the level the Shanghai Group representatives had requested and the slow and tangled bureaucratic mechanism by which the funds were distributed left the members of the Shanghai Group increasingly frustrated with the country in which they most decidedly did not want to be living and from which they had gone halfway around the globe to escape.

The time has come to draw more attention to the ways in which the history of the Shanghai Jewish refugees affected events and policies after the Second World War, particularly in Germany. The present article has been written with the intention of helping move the historiography of the Shanghai Jews in this direction. The case of the 106 members of the Shanghai Group who arrived

⁸⁴ Ross, *Escape to Shanghai*, 255.

in Bremen in 1950 reveals that Adenauer's Germany had an early opportunity to show the world that the new Federal Republic of Germany would start to try to heal the great wounds it had opened in Europe. But it seems that the officials missed this opportunity, choosing instead to keep the case of the Shanghai Jews under wraps. Regarding the latter, an April 1953 report by the then Bremen official and future President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Karl Carstens, is particularly illuminating. When referring to the case of the Shanghai Group, Carstens noted that Bremen officials and federal government officials had always dealt with the issue with strict confidentiality for fear that other such victims would follow the example of the Shanghai Group in requesting concessions for their suffering.⁸⁵ Although the Shanghai Group arrived in Bremen in 1950, the time for real and open healing in Germany apparently did not.

Kevin Ostoyich

“Back on Straw”: The Experience of Shanghai Jewish Refugees in Bremen after Escaping German National Socialism, Enduring a Japanese “Designated Area”, and Fleeing Chinese Communism

Summary

The article provides information on a group of 106 Shanghai Jewish refugees who returned to Germany in July 1950 after an unsuccessful attempt to immigrate to the United States. By an arrangement negotiated between German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the Mayor of Bremen, Wilhelm Kaisen the refugees were lodged in the Tirpitz Camp in Bremen until they could get permission to reenter the United States. The article provides information on 1) the experiences that thirteen of the members of the Shanghai Group had endured in German concentration camps during the 1930s; 2) the Shanghai Designated Area set up in the Hongkou district of Shanghai by the Japanese occupying forces in 1943; 3) the journey to Bremen in 1950; 4) the names (and birthdates when available) of 102 members of the Shanghai Group, their numbers over time in the Tirpitz Camp, and the health status of the members; 5) conditions in the Tirpitz Camp in Bremen; and 6) the activities of German federal and state officials to address the immediate needs of the Shanghai Jewish refugees during the time when the issue of German reparation payments to Jews had yet to be determined. The archival file upon which the article is based (Staatsarchiv Bremen 4,22/2–178) reveals that despite the initial good intentions by Adenauer and Kaisen, the experience of the Shanghai Jewish refugees became strained as their stay in the camp became prolonged and their requests for more hospitable accommodation and more funds met with bureaucratic red tape.

⁸⁵ Report by Dr. Karl Carstens to the President of the Bremen Senate, 9 IV 1953, Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4,22/2–178.