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### Review of Die Wiener in China. Fluchtpunkt Shanghai-Little Vienna in Shanghai

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Daniela Pscheiden and Danielle Spera, eds., *Die Wiener in China. Fluchtpunkt Shanghai – Little Vienna in Shanghai*, Jüdisches Museum Wien, Amalthea, 2020.

*Die Wiener in China / Little Vienna in Shanghai* is an excellent bilingual volume compiled in conjunction with an exhibition at the Jewish Museum Vienna (October 21, 2020–June 27, 2021) about the little-known exile of Austrian Jews in Shanghai. According to co-editor Danielle Spera’s introductory chapter “The Viennese in China: From the Danube to Shanghai,” over 6,000 Austrian Jews survived the Holocaust by finding refuge in Shanghai (13). Comprising 18 chapters and 22 family profiles, the book is a stellar example of combining *Geschichte* and *Geschichten*, weaving history together with witness accounts and individual stories. The book, beautifully arranged and meticulously produced, includes copious black-and-white and color photographs and is written in concise, accessible language. The chapters contain a great deal of original material and insightful observations, making it a true treat for readers.

Three chapters focus on the Jews’ escape from Vienna and arrival in Shanghai: “Escape to Shanghai” (Angela Libal), “The role of diplomat Feng Shan Ho,” and “Baghdadi Jews: Tycoons and benefactors.” Soon after the *Anschluss*, many Austrian Jews were deported to the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps, but the Nazis would release families if they could present a valid visa along with emigration papers and tickets. The visas that Feng Shan Ho, the Chinese consul general in Vienna, issued functioned as exit visas and saved thousands of lives. Whereas the US and other desirable destinations maintained stringent immigration quotas, there were no authorities regulating immigration in Shanghai, for the Nationalist government had relocated to Chongqing following the Japanese occupation of China. Thus, Ho was able to issue visas for Shanghai to anyone who asked (28–29). As Manli Ho reveals in her chapter about her father, however, Ho was defying orders from the Chinese ambassador in Berlin and thus suffered personal consequences. Maisie J. Meyer, an expert on the Sephardic Jewish community in Shanghai, demonstrates the instrumental role Sephardic Jews played in hosting the new refugees. Wealthy families such as the Sassoons, Hardoons, and Kadoories welcomed their coreligionists and helped them to ease their way into living, working, and learning in Shanghai in all kinds of ways: offering tips and warnings and hosting dinners in private homes, sponsoring soup kitchens and “little outings,” and adopting refugee children, and arranging access to housing,

kindergartens, schools, sport clubs, adult English lessons, vocational training, hospitals, business loans, and employment.

The refugees struggled to adapt to their new environment. For example, when they were transported on open trucks from the port to their lodging, some perceived this as “undignified ‘freighting’” (25), although it was common for Chinese to ride on open trucks. One of the Baghdadi Jews, D. E. J. Abraham, found it “overbearing” when new arrivals sneered “‘we did/had it better in Europe’” (35). Vivian Kaplan described a similar phenomenon in her family memoir, *Ten Green Bottles: Vienna to Shanghai – Journey of Fear and Hope* (2002): some Jewish refugees forgot the humiliation and brutality they suffered under the Nazis the moment they arrived in Shanghai and felt repugnance and arrogance due to the horrible living conditions they faced. For many, an appreciation of life in Shanghai only came after the war, when they learned about the extermination camps.

Ten chapters focus on “Little Vienna” and its cultural life. Among the Austrian refugees were “many prominent Viennese from the world of art and culture, the media, restaurants, medicine, and business” (41), and they were engaged and persevering, recreating a little piece of *Heimat* on foreign soil. In “Little Vienna in Shanghai,” coeditor Daniela Pscheiden gives an overview of the legendary “Little Vienna” with the many bars, cafés, and restaurants where *Heurige* were organized so as to “bring a piece of Grinzing to Shanghai” (40). Sophie Fetthauer writes about the musicians Geza Werner and Gino Smart and the entertainment scene during the Shanghai exile. Here we learn, “In May 1939, *The North-China Daily News* already spoke of a ‘Little Berlin’ and a ‘Little Vienna’” (55). Brian Haman considers two playwrights, Mark Siegelberg and Hans Schubert, and the Jewish exile theater. Siegelberg’s autofiction *Schutzhaftjude 13877* (1940) is considered “one of the earliest verified concentration camp reports in German literature” (61). But interestingly, the antifascist play *Die Masken fallen*, coauthored by Siegelberg and Schubert, was criticized by both the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Committee, to avoid “anything provocative of discussion,” as well as by “the German consulate in Shanghai, which successfully pressured local authorities to ban subsequent performances” (63–64). *Fremde Erde* also touched on a morally taboo subject, namely, prostitution, a situation that Kaplan’s *Ten Green Bottles* also mentions. In “Shanghai – Camera!,” director Paul Rosdy shares the history behind the groundbreaking documentary *The Port of Last Resort – Zuflucht in Shanghai* (1998). Albert Lichtblau writes on sport as a distraction that “protect[ed] juveniles

from disorientation, degeneration, and criminality” (75). Other chapters cover media diversity (Michael Frischler), freemasons in Shanghai (Marcus G. Patka), the cartoonist Friedrich Schiff (Gerd Kaminski), and the photographer Arthur Rothstein and his believed-to-be-lost Shanghai photos (Ann Rothstein Segan and Brodie Hefner). Gerd Kaminski’s chapter on the “History of the Jews in China” is extremely informative about the Kaifeng, Sephardic, Russian, and European Jews in China, but a caption on p. 96 contains an error: the Kaifeng stelae were written in Chinese, not Hebrew.

The last four chapters cover the final years of the community of refugees and their departure from Shanghai, mostly in 1947 and after. Themes include the arrival of the US army in Shanghai, the liberation of the Jews and the dissolving of the ghetto (the English text unfortunately reads “The ghetto was liquidated,” [124]), news of the Holocaust, repatriation of the émigrés, witnessing Vienna’s war destruction, the difficult—if not impossible—retrieval of “Aryanized” properties, lingering anti-Semitism, Shanghailanders in diaspora, and reunions. In “‘Vienna – Shanghai and Back’: Returnees from Shanghai,” Elisabeth Buxbaum shares the belated delivery of “letters with the propaganda stamps of the German Reich, the Generalgouvernement [in Poland], and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, franked between 1939 and 1942,” noting that “Most of the senders had long been turned to ash in the extermination camp crematoriums” (124). Buxbaum also explains that the Jewish returnees were “unpopular witnesses of Austria’s past crimes and of Austrian antisemitism, ignorance, and malevolence” because their experience contradicted Austria’s self-portrayal as the “first victim of Nazi Germany” (125). Christa Prokisch reconstructs the life of Artur Eisenberg based on nineteen documents. In a brutally honest manner, Steve Hochstadt writes about the privileged life his grandparents had in Shanghai and the discordance in their family. In “Viennese remain Viennese: Who came back and why,” we learn that the young republic of Austria extended no *Willkommenskultur* to former Austrian Jews coming back to Vienna, and some returning emigres expressed nostalgia for Shanghai.

The book reveals the two faces of Shanghai: the glamorous and decadent, on the one hand, and the sordid and poverty-stricken, on the other, or as Michael Frischler puts it, “Shanghai was a unique exile destination in Asia that was full of contrasts and contradictions. It was described variously as the ‘Paris of the East’ or a ‘Babylonian Moloch’” (83). There is a clear discrepancy between the ways in which adult refugees and their children remembered their

exile. Whereas adults suffered from the dangers of the war as well as the climate, hunger, disease, vermin, and unhygienic conditions, children were, relatively speaking, sheltered from these hazards. But the Chinese fared the worst: “A lot of refugees were disturbed by the poverty and despair of the Chinese population” (45–46). In the profile of the Hirsch family in the second part of the volume, we learn that Joschi Hirsch was beaten with rifle butts by Japanese soldiers when they confined the Jews to the ghetto. For the rest of his life he was never able to forgive the Japanese, especially on account of their brutal treatment of the Chinese civilian population (188).

Since the book is the companion volume to an exhibition, it highlights material culture from the exile experience: in addition to photographs of important personages, the illustrations feature the Kadoorie School sports team (79), the Hongkew cinema (66), the entrance to the Hongkew ghetto (115), refugees wading the flooded streets of Shanghai (181), and Viennese cafés; documents such as tickets for the Lloyd Triestino ship *Conte Biancamano* and the Trans-Siberian railway, birth and marriage certificates, and ghetto passes; contemporary publications, cartoons, drawings; and objects the refugees brought back from Shanghai: a cooking pot, a rice bowl, a dough rolling pin, a mahjong game, a violin, among others. This book is a treasure trove for researchers and interested readers.

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