Hong Kong as Entrepot

Jewish, British, and Chinese Refugees in Hong Kong (1937-1947)

Ryan Cheuk Him Sun
HIS498H1
Prof. Doris Bergen
Fig. 1.1: Jewish refugees preparing for Rosh Hashanah at the Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, 1946.¹

The Star of David, drawn on linen cloth, hung above the small gathering of people. The women were seated on wooden chairs, their attention directed towards the front where four men wearing prayer shawls and yarmulkes stood. Beside them were candles, lit, signifying the beginning of service. Yet, amidst this solemn and serious atmosphere a little girl noticed the photographer, Fred Antman and unintentionally posed for his photograph. But what is more remarkable is the way the photograph emphasizes a distancing between the viewer and the subject: they occupied a different room, a different world from Antman and the viewers. This clash is reflected in the surroundings: as if the room had been hastily repurposed. Indeed it had, for these people were Jewish refugees from Shanghai – exiled from Europe due to Hitler’s

¹ Preparing for Jewish New Year Services, Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives, Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.
antisemitic policies and celebrating Rosh Hashanah in Hong Kong. And Antman’s photographs are a testament to both their survival and their presence in Hong Kong, a temporary and unexpected refuge.

Ceded to Britain after Qing China’s defeat in the 1840s, the new British colony of Hong Kong quickly embraced its role as a facilitator of British interests into the lucrative China trade. By the 1900s, Hong Kong had established itself as the preeminent port in East Asia – a beacon of stability and financial opportunity in contrast to the rising tide of nationalistic murmur and political divide that plagued China. Myriad business firms, shipping companies and banks were established while the movement of Chinese migrants into the colony generated an almost unlimited pool of labourers. ‘Fragrant Harbour,’ as it is called in Cantonese, is an apt name for the multitude of ships and people entering and leaving the colony. With a pre-war population of almost one million people, it is not surprising that Hong Kong would house refugees from China due to their geographical proximity. What is surprising is the Jewish connection; that Hong Kong, in maintaining its role as an entrepot, facilitated the transportation of European Jewish refugees to other places of refuge – and in some cases, acted as the refuge.

This transnational migration of Jewish refugees did not happen at once but was a steady build-up starting from the emergency laws implemented in Germany after the Reichstag Fire in February 27, 1933, which ‘temporarily’ suspended civil liberties. As further restrictions were enacted against the German Jewish population in April, the difficulty in securing employment in Germany forced many to seriously consider emigration. Those German Jews who initially left were either the young or the educated with financial means; all with an explicit belief that escape to neighbouring countries was only a temporary inconvenience as Hitler’s government would be
short-lived. Between 1933 and 1938, German Jews either sought ways to escape, or tried to remain out-of-sight. The first truly international attempt at tackling the refugee situation occurred as a response to the wave of antisemitic violence in the wake of the Austrian annexation. Held in July 1938, the Evian Conference saw representatives from twenty-three countries and various Jewish organizations negotiate and attempt to shift the burden onto their counterparts. Hong Kong, as a Crown colony, was represented by Britain. Although the British response emphasized the need for a more liberal immigration policy, the reality remained that Jews needed external support before they could get visas.

German and Austrian Jews were desperate to leave Germany for anywhere as the possibility for emigration worsened. Some fled to nearby countries like France and Britain. Other fled the continent to the Dominican Republic, Palestine, or the United States. Yet a quota system was enforced: the US did not have a category for political refugees and relied on nationality, whereas the British limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over five-years in the 1939 White Paper. Hampered by bureaucracy, those who still had the means chose to leave the West altogether and journey to Shanghai. As the only visa-free city in the world, Jewish organizations in the Shanghai International Settlement welcomed over 20,000 Jewish refugees between 1937 and 1941, and provided assistance throughout their stay. The decision to leave Europe for Shanghai was not without opposition. Dwork and van Pelt noted that the Jewish leadership in Germany was vehemently against emigration to Shanghai: that the city offered no livelihood and

---

4 Ibid, 140; Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 144.
was surrounded by war. This was true – by the end of 1938, 1.5 million Chinese refugees had entered the Settlement while another 250,000 found refuge in Hong Kong. And yet, the backlog of tickets issued by shipping companies bound for Shanghai was a testament of the hope for a better life anywhere than the prospects of a German Concentration Camp.

Where does Hong Kong situate itself with respect to the narratives of the Holocaust? As a participant, Hong Kong fits within the framework of the Holocaust as a global event, highlighting the transmigration of Jewish refugees instead of brutality and violence. But, there was no government initiative to expedite Jewish immigration like in the Dominican Republic. Visa controls reinstated by British immigration authorities affected potential Jewish immigration to the Colony – although the presence of 129 Jews in Hong Kong by 1931 is a testament to an existing Jewish connection. Of the few who did immigrate to or were granted permission to land in Hong Kong, little is known about their activities after arriving in the Colony: the exception being the oral interview with Grete Appel, an Austrian Jewish refugee who immigrated to the Colony. In the postwar refugee crisis, Jewish refugees staying at the Peninsula Hotel lacked a sense of agency as official documents and correspondences dictated the narrative. Moreover, the movement of Jewish refugees to the Far East is dominated by the image of Shanghai as the primary refuge with other destinations like the Philippines or India considered secondary; Hong Kong is mentioned in passing as a point of transit. Although there is little scholarship that deals with the intersection of Hong Kong and Jewish refugee transmigration,

---

6 Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 138.
8 Dwork and van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich*, 138-139.
there is a blog operated by Amelia Allsop, a PhD Candidate at King’s College London, who is conducting research into the history of European refugees in Hong Kong.  

This project is an attempt to understand and situate Hong Kong’s position amidst the wider narrative of European Jewish migration and refugee history, with respect to Hong Kong’s pre-existing refugee crisis. This includes the role of local individuals and organizations, in addition to state authorities, in tackling the refugee situation directly or indirectly. The presence of Jewish transmigrants also necessitates an examination into their position within Hong Kong’s colonial social structure with respect to notions of ‘European-ness’ and ‘whiteness’, as well as the social and spatial dichotomy between Jewish, British, and Chinese refugees using Hong Kong as a refuge.

Sources consulted herein comprise of government documents, newspapers, and private correspondences of Lawrence Kadoorie and the Jewish Refugee Society from the Hong Kong Heritage Project, which provide the general narrative. In addition, data regarding the number of Jewish refugees (or refugees in general) work in tandem to create a clearer picture of Hong Kong as a site of convergence. The oral testimony of Grete Appel offers a firsthand account of the Jewish refugee experience in Hong Kong, but occupies a supplementary category. This does not mean Appel’s lived experiences are diminished in value as her interview offers interesting anecdotes, but reinforces the ‘permanent-ness’ of written documents. Yet, what is not written down still factors into this analysis of Hong Kong and Jewish refugee transmigration – particularly in close readings of documents regarding money and refugee accommodations. Photographs are also integrated into this analysis – especially as visual social dichotomy of the ambiguities and anxieties caused by the presence of Jewish refugees.

---

12 See https://hongkongrefuge.wordpress.com/
Entre-what?

Figure 1.2: Jewish refugee sites of interment (black) and refuge (yellow), Chinese refugee camps (red), and British refugee camps (blue) in Hong Kong.13

Before the relationship between Jewish, British, and Chinese refugees can be examined, Hong Kong itself – how its space and geographic location encouraged trade and movement must be explained. The territory of colonial Hong Kong was acquired by the British through war and imperial ambitions. The First and Second Opium Wars in the early half of the 19th century gave Britain the island of Hong Kong along with Kowloon Peninsula; the 99-year lease of the New

---

13 A full of this map can be found at https://drive.google.com/open?id=1tA-2vFrX3316HFVAwPNIr_4hlU4&usp=sharing
Territories to Britain was a concession by the Qing Dynasty in 1898 as a response to latter’s concern over the expansion of other European powers’ influences. It is geographically located on the southern coast of China, near the Portuguese colony of Macao and the Chinese city of Canton upwards of the Pearl River. Although five more treaty ports were opened after the First Opium War, Canton remained the most important because it was originally the only port opened to foreign traders and was therefore more developed. Hence, Hong Kong, located at the terminus became a lucrative port for the British (and other states) in facilitating trade with China (and Shanghai) and the surrounding region.

*Money & Merchandise*

By the 1930s, although the effects of the Great Depression had affected Hong Kong, it was never at the scale of the United States or Europe as the Colony benefitted from the protectionist Imperial Preferences system. Unemployment, which was a known issue, was unquantifiable. Administrative reports between 1934 and 1936 noted that the migrant Chinese population who could not secure employment in Hong Kong simply returned to China to find work. The import and export of goods suffered during this period, but by 1937, trade values had returned to 1931 levels. Interestingly, commerce reports between 1934 and 1935 note that

---

15 Ibid, 11.
16 Ibid, 112.
their records only focused on the “visible trade of the Colony,” a subtle acknowledgement regarding the existence of an ‘invisible’ or underground economy.

Indeed, unrecorded transactions were not unusual in Hong Kong. By late-1937, Hong Kong became a warehouse in supplying the Chinese war effort with arms and munitions; smuggling between land and sea increased as the Japanese occupied more areas of southern China. In addition to the growing refugee problem, the Hong Kong government turned a blind eye towards the establishment of Chinese Communist and Nationalist institutions – specifically the training of reporters. Yet, the notion of ‘invisible trade’ signifies an association with currency more than with people.

The role of money – especially in the context of supporting Jewish refugees, cannot be understated. Shanghai’s capacity as a Jewish refuge was complemented by Hong Kong’s role in facilitating the movement of people and currency. In May 28, 1941, Moses Talan, the Honorary Secretary for the Jewish Refugee Society in Hong Kong sent a letter to Horace Kadoorie in Shanghai about the transfer of $151 HKD ($686.38 Sh.) to fund Jewish refugee children in Shanghai. A majority of correspondences between Talan and the Kadoorie Brothers, Horace and Lawrence, were of this nature: transactions or deposits. However, a couple of letters hinted at their participation with the underground economy. In a letter dated November 6, 1941, a month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Lawrence Kadoorie wrote to Talan that the

---

20 Carroll, Concise History of Hong Kong, 116-117.
21 Ibid, 117.
22 Hong Kong Heritage Project (HKHP), SEK-8D-002, FJ1/17.
official exchange rate between the Hong Kong Dollar and the Shanghai Dollar was $1 HKD to $4.69 Sh. However, he unsubtlety added that the black market rate was $1 HKD to $8.10 Sh.²³

Perhaps Kadoorie mentioned the black market rate because he was hinting at the possibility of smuggling the money out of Hong Kong and into Shanghai; he stated earlier in the letter that he needed permission from the Controller of Foreign Exchange to send funds out of the Colony.²⁴ As early as July 1941, currency control legislation had been implemented,²⁵ but the actual restrictions against transactions involving Chinese currency did not occur until September 1941.²⁶ Perhaps he intended on something similar to the Ha’avara Agreement between the Nazi government and Zionist organizations where funds were converted into material goods.²⁷ Or it was the slowness of bureaucracy that encouraged such actions. However, by November 1941 southern China was under Japanese occupation and the Hong Kong government was focused on strengthening its meagre defences²⁸; whatever Lawrence imagined was either already happening or unfeasible.

Regardless of his intentions, the letter encapsulates an understanding that ingenuity was required in order for the Jewish community in Hong Kong to provide continued support to the Jews of Shanghai. And often they were less than legal. The larger consequence of these ‘invisible trade’ was the undocumented movement of goods and peoples in and out of Hong Kong – interactions which we can only infer as a plausible reality.

²³ HKHP, SEK-8D-002, FJ1/28.
²⁴ Ibid.
²⁵ HKGRO Colonial Secretary’s Department. Defence (Finance) Regulations, 1940, Order prohibiting the carrying out of Chinese orders as to gold and securities (Hong Kong: Noronha & Co. Ltd., 1941). Accessed online at http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/view/g1941/304790.pdf
²⁷ Dwork and van Pelt, Flight from the Reich, 35-36.
²⁸ Carroll, Concise History of Hong Kong, 118.
**Not ‘Evacuees’ but European Refugees**

On August 15, 1937, the Shanghai Refugee Committee was formed to facilitate transport to, and accommodations in Hong Kong for British women and children following orders to evacuate Shanghai. J. H. Taggart, Manager of the Peninsula Hotel and a member of the Committee, chose the Stand at the Hong Kong Jockey Club in Happy Valley as both the initial receiving depot and the location where refugees would temporarily stay. A clinic was established nearby to assess and monitor the health of the refugees, and to inoculate them against the present cholera epidemic afflicting Hong Kong. A special centre was even arranged by the Ohel Leah Synagogue for Orthodox Jews who wanted kosher food. W. J. Carrie, Chairman of the Committee, noted that camp beds were ordered and “blankets, linen and stores were lent by the Hong Kong & Shanghai Hotels Ltd.” Later, when the new Central British School was temporarily converted to house additional refugees, Carrie reported that “mattresses, blankets and sheets were borrowed from the Military Authorities… until camp beds were sent over from Happy Valley.” The military also assisted in housing male refugees at the Hankow Barracks in Shamshuipo. All preparations were complete within 36 hours – 500 spaces were made available for refugees without prior accommodations from Shanghai.

The close cooperation between the Hong Kong government, military personnel and local businesses, and the speed at which the preparations were completed highlights their commitment to the welfare of the refugees from Shanghai. As these refugees arrived, local English-language newspapers such as the *Hong Kong Daily Press* reported on the generosity of local businesses in reducing boarding prices and were used to bring up immediate concerns like missing refugees or

---

30 Ibid, 130.
31 Ibid.
inquiries.\textsuperscript{32} Yet, it cannot be ignored that these accommodations were possible because the refugees were British citizens or associated with British relatives via marriage. The Government intervened at this precise moment due to the outbreak of hostilities between China and Japan along the Manchurian border in July 1937. By August 13, the Japanese had begun their attack on Shanghai.

Between August 20 and 28, 1937, over 4,000 refugees entered Hong Kong. A majority stayed with friends or had prior arrangements made with their employers; others were foreign nationals who transited onwards to other destinations like Macao and Saigon.\textsuperscript{33} 732 refugees chose to be housed in government-run centres: 528 resided at Happy Valley, 138 at the Central British School and 66 at Shamshuipo.\textsuperscript{34} The Hong Kong Government took great pains to ensure that they did not become a burden to the Colony. Chairman Carrie’s report stated that “during the first ten days [of the refugees’ arrival] 718 inoculations were performed and 381 persons treated for minor ailments and injuries.\textsuperscript{35}” The same report noted that prior to their relocation on September 10 to Lai Chi Kok, a neighbourhood rampant with malaria, “a considerable sum was spent on screening the sheds against mosquitoes.\textsuperscript{36}” During their stay, the Committee provided catering and entertainment; refugees were also encouraged to volunteer. The educational welfare of children was likewise not neglected even amidst war. A school was organized near the end of September by Mr. Pardoe, a refugee teacher from the Lester Technical Institute, Shanghai, along with other refugee female teachers. It operated until December 15. At its peak, the refugee school had 200 pupils in attendance. A nursery school was also established at Lai Chi Kok and was fully

\textsuperscript{33}HKGRO Carrie, \textit{Report by the Chairman}, 131, 137-138.
\textsuperscript{34}Ibid, 132.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid, 135.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
supplied by the Ladies Welfare Committee, a parallel organization to the Shanghai Refugee Committee.

   Founded on August 21 and chaired by Mrs. N. L. Smith, the Ladies Welfare Committee focused on supplying the refugees with clothing and other necessities. These included fresh fruit and milk for the children and feminine hygiene products for women. The LWC was also responsible for a relief fund from which weekly allowances between $2 and $5 were granted based on the applicant’s situation and the number of children she had. These tasks were generally ‘familial’ and reflective of their domestic and supportive roles. The LWC was maintaining the ‘home’. The men would organize the transports and the women would clothe the refugees. This supportive role was exemplified by their rationale behind fully or partially funding refugees wanting to return to Shanghai: that “the cost would otherwise fall on the Government.”

   The relocation to Lai Chi Kok signalled a change in the relationship between the refugees and the Committee. Although they were still taken care of by the authorities, the accommodations at Lai Chi Kok drastically paled in comparison to Happy Valley; it was originally constructed as a quarantine station and later used as an overflow prison. The camp also straddled the periphery of Kowloon and the New Territories: reflective of the refugee’s uncertain social status and foreshadowed the postwar situation with Jewish refugees. Throughout his report, Carrie noted how the overhead costs associated with maintaining the facilities at Happy Valley did not decrease with the gradual departure of the refugees. Catering alone amounted to $17,299.85 HKD. The new refugee centre required additional upfront costs to repurpose the existing sheds for refugee use, but presented cheaper catering possibilities. While the financial aspect was an obvious factor, the more pressing issue was their one month rent-free lease of the

---

37 Ibid, 154.
38 Ibid, 136, 141.
Stand at the Hong Kong Jockey Club was soon to expire. Horseracing was to resume on
September 25. Within a week after the relocation of 477 refugees to a more permanent location,
110 of them left the Centre to find their own accommodations.39

With the implicit approval of the Hong Kong government, the Committee began
encouraging its beneficiaries to return to Shanghai. However their return was hampered first by
the lack of ships bound for the city and later by restrictions placed on providing refugees with
financial assistance to return. In early November, either through expected increases in medical
costs due to malaria, or the growing outstanding accounts owned by the refugees, restrictions
were relaxed. Transports were chartered for those refugees who could fund some portion or
showed proof that they would repay the costs. The British Consulate in Shanghai also allowed
refugees to be repatriated, provided they had proof of accommodations in the International
Settlement or the French Concession. The last of the refugees left Hong Kong in January 9, 1938
on the S.S. Conte Biancamono.

What this event demonstrated was the importance of temporality. The Hong Kong
government was initially receptive of the refugees, forming a Committee to organize and provide
accommodations for them. Of the approximately 750 refugees using Committee-organized
housing, a quarter found accommodations outside of the centres while another half eventually
funded (partially or fully) their way back to Shanghai. As their temporary prospects became
more permanent, the Committee transferred the remaining refugees to Lai Chi Kok, supplied
with only bare necessities. Ultimately, the Committee and Hong Kong had to assume

39 Ibid, 135.
$133,841.55 HKD of outstanding refugee debt, of which, only half could be realistically recovered.\footnote{Ibid. 143.}

Carrie noted early on in his report that there was a disagreement to the use of ‘refugee’ instead of ‘evacuee’ in the Committee’s name. Yet, this naming was justified as Carrie stated: “From the viewpoint of Shanghai they had been evacuated from that port but to the Hong Kong mind they had taken refuge in Hong Kong.”\footnote{Ibid. 129} In both cases, the same idea was emphasized: temporary stay.

\textit{Jewish Refugees and Hong Kong}

On December 12, 1938, a newsletter was distributed throughout the Jewish community in Hong Kong titled ‘Jewish Refugee Society.’ It outlined the success at which the JRS was able to quickly raise $2,200 HKD in donations and in monthly subscriptions from more than half of the known Jewish community, and its immediate allotment of $2,000 HKD for humanitarian relief in Shanghai.\footnote{HKHP, SEK-8D-001, CJ1/34.} It also highlighted the generosity of the Jewish Recreation Club in accommodating some Jewish refugees awaiting transit, and encouraged its members who had the means to support but had not responded, to donate funds or old clothes. By centralizing their relief efforts, the JRS succeeded in both mobilizing its small, but tight-knit community, and by becoming another venue for Jewish refugees needing assistance. The optimistic tone prevalent through the newsletter is summarized by a phrase found within: “Let us help, and go on helping unstintingly!”\footnote{Ibid.} And help they did.
Founded after the violence of *Kristallnacht* on November 20, 1938, the JRS consisted of an elected committee made up of six prominent members of the local Jewish community.\(^44\) The President of the JRS was Albert Raymond, a trusted manager of the Sassoon Family while Moses Talan was named Honorary Secretary.\(^45\) It was Raymond who decided to appeal to the local community for assistance in raising funds. This outreach was similar to an earlier meeting of his on November 3 with the various Jewish refugee organizations active in the Far East. Raymond insisted on greater cooperation amongst the various refugee groups. In fact, the JRS and Raymond were already working closely with Lawrence Kadoorie (an influential Jewish philanthropist who worked from Hong Kong), and his brother Horace (co-ordinating relief efforts in Shanghai).\(^46\) He suggested that frequent cables should be sent in regards to the arrival or departure of steamers and refugee parties, and as to the refugee situation in their respective regions.\(^47\)

During its brief existence, the main function of the JRS was to act as an intermediary for Jewish refugees searching for job opportunities or temporary accommodations. Hans Topfer, an Austrian Jewish refugee, sent a letter to Talan with his CV/application detailing his education

\(^{44}\) Ibid. Including Raymond and Talan, the other four committee members were: Edward Maurice Raymond, E. L. Elias, A. Edgar, and Aladar Vago.

\(^{45}\) Correspondences and documents from the Jewish Refugee Society referred to him as ‘M. Talan’ or simply ‘Talan’. In the 1941 Jurors List under the ‘Common Jurors’ section, there lists a ‘Moses Talan’ and specifies his occupation as a Manager at American Lloyd Ltd.; they are most likely referring to the same person. In addition to Lawrence Kadoorie, who was a ‘Special Juror’ and exempt from jury duty, the list also included: Aladar Vago, Albert Raymond, and Edward Maurice Raymond. See HKGRO “Jurors List For 1941,” in *The Hong Kong Government Gazette, March 29, 1941* (Hong Kong: Noronha & Co. Ltd., 1941), 356-357, 424, 428. Accessed online at http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/view/g1941/303089.pdf


\(^{47}\) HKHP, SEK-8D-001, CJ1/10. This was a meeting between representatives of Jewish refugee organizations in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. At the time of the meeting, the Jewish Community in Hong Kong was reported to be supporting 25 refugee families awaiting transport.
and experience as an electrical engineer in mid-November 1938. Another Jewish refugee, Karl Glaser, sent a letter to Lawrence Kadoorie from Shanghai dated October 3, 1938 as a follow-up to their interview in Hong Kong five week ago:

“You have kindly promised me to look whether you can find out any situation for me…. While my own efforts have failed so far, your kind assistance, I feel sure, in view of your importance and influence will be most valuable help for me. As you were so extremely kind to me I take the liberty to write you to-day, asking you to kindly keep my name before you and to help me to find out something to start with.”

Refugees transiting Hong Kong, who were granted permission to land used this opportunity to improve their own positions. Yet, as Glaser’s letter demonstrates, the silence from Kadoorie implied both a lack of job prospects in Hong Kong and an influx of requests for support that overwhelmed the JRS.

The JRS also tried to attain Hong Kong visas, which proved to be extremely difficult. Restrictions on immigration were implemented as the requirement for visas were brought back by British authorities after Kristallnacht. The few who were able to acquire visas got them through family ties. Grete Appel, an Austrian Jewish refugee, recounted how she and her husband, along with some of her extended family, were able to escape Austria because one of Grete’s uncles lived in Hong Kong and had acquired visas for them before the Anschluss. But even those who got visas to Hong Kong did not initially consider the Colony as refuge. For the

---

48 HKHP, SEK-8D-001, CJ1/11A.
49 Karl Glaser was a former partner at Otto Oppenheim & Co., an Austrian grain firm. He was relieved of his position after the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany.
vast majority of Jewish refugees, Hong Kong was not the primary destination but simply another point of transit.

This idea of Hong Kong as a temporary refuge continued into the postwar period. Almost immediately after the Japanese surrender in August 15, 1945, Jewish refugees in Shanghai were anxious to leave for other destinations. Lawrence Kadoorie organized and prepared temporary accommodations for these refugees; and worked in close cooperation with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). With prior notice given, small groups of Jewish refugees from Shanghai bound for Australia were transported to Hong Kong in May 1946. Charles Jordan, a representative of the JDC, emphasized that transits to the Colony were only in ‘exception cases’ and that their itinerary would be dealt with entirely by the JDC. The JDC assumed agency of these refugees – that they “will be perfectly satisfied with the most primitive accommodations, since they realize that we [the JDC] are assuming full financial responsibility for them. Given the postwar housing shortage in Hong Kong, perhaps Lawrence was initially hesitant to fulfill Jordan’s request. However, a subsequent plea from his brother Horace in Shanghai, lamenting that the refugees should not “lose this opportunity of going to Australia” may have nugged Lawrence towards accepting the refugees.

Throughout the transmigration of Jewish refugees into Hong Kong, the Government did little to intervene. In late-1938, Moses Talan reported that he successfully negotiated with the Hong Kong government for refugees to land during resupply or as they awaited transport. On December 27, 1938, Lawrence Kadoorie received word from the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong that German-Jewish families were allowed to apply for visas to the Colony. In both

51 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/2. Other logistical matters included the JDC opening a bank account for refugee funds to be deposited in, which was then used by Lawrence whenever the JDC sent Jewish refugees from Shanghai. 52 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/1. 53 HKHP, SEK-8D-001, CJ1/10.
instances, the government only intervened so long as the burden onto Hong Kong was not too large – and indirectly for that matter. When Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, foreign nationals in Hong Kong, including Grete Appel’s husband Karl and other Jewish refugee men, were briefly interned at La Salle College. Karl was eventually released, but both Grete and her husband were told to leave Hong Kong and went to Shanghai due to her husband’s work connections.\footnote{Appel, Interview 19293, Visual History Archives. Accessed Online on Nov. 2, 2016.}

\textit{1946 Jewish Refugee Crisis}

On July 30, 1946, Lawrence Kadoorie greeted the 283 refugees disembarking the S.S. \textit{General Gordon} and helped them with their luggage to their accommodations at the Peninsula Hotel. This plan was the culmination of two months of planning, negotiations with the Government, and close contact with the JDC over logistics. Interestingly, only the Chinese-language newspaper, \textit{The Kung Sheung Evening News}, mentioned the refugees’ arrival.\footnote{"猶太難民寓玫瑰廳 [Jewish Refugees stay at the Rose Room],” 工商晚報 [The Kung Sheung Evening News], Aug. 2, 1946, p. 4.} Their stay was only until August 5. Returning to his office, Lawrence received a telephone call stating that the refugees’ transport, the S.S. \textit{Duntroon}, was being withdrawn by the Australian government; “Hong Kong now has its own refugee problem!” he wrote in his diary on that night.\footnote{HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/46}

The Jewish refugee crisis Hong Kong experienced was similar to the British refugees in 1937, albeit with major differences. In the 1946 event, the government assumed an indirect role; Lawrence mentioned that in addition to close and constant communications, the government had inquired into the availability and use of the \textit{Empire Clyde}, a large hospital ship in service of the
Royal Navy. The increasing costs associated with housing, catering, and basic necessities were funded by Lawrence Kadoorie personally or through the JDC refugee fund. Pocket money was distributed to the more destitute refugees on top of their initial grant of $30 USD per person by Charles. More importantly, the refugees never had to relocate from the comforts of the Peninsula Hotel – a comfort that cost Lawrence approximately £150 per day. It is not surprising that both Lawrence and Charles were anxious to solve the transportation issue, which luckily did not involve a visa problem as all the refugees were bound for Australia and had the proper documents before their departure from Shanghai.

By September 24, 1946, almost two month after the Duntroon was withdrawn, the China Mail reported that there were 215 Jewish refugees still in the Colony – those who left departed on transports bound for Australia or found their own ways there. The rest waited. While their departure was protracted, Lawrence Kadoorie was urgently trying to solve the issue of transportation. In a letter to Horace dated August 3, Lawrence considered the possibility of procuring an American ship; a letter to Charles dated August 10 noted his inquiries to local shipping companies and whether the Hong Kheng, a large ship in dock, could be chartered. By September 18, a report from the Australian Jewish Welfare Society to Lawrence reported that the Jewish refugees from Hong Kong had safely arrived in Sydney aboard the S.S. Yochow. The report also briefly mentioned their grand welcome and entertainments these refugees participated in – no different from the British in 1937 or the various children’s picnics at Kadoorie’s house. Although it did not give the number of refugees aboard the Yochow, it does mention that 23

57 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/49
58 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/42
59 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/48B
61 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/48B, J.1/49
62 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/74.
63 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/49
refugees were transported to Melbourne. Between October and December, the protracted
departure of small groups of refugee on ships bound for Australia continued; on December 24,
the last of the refugees finally departed Hong Kong on the S.S. *Yunnan.*

The constant flow of people and emphasis on temporariness highlights the unique nature
of Hong Kong as an entrepot and its involvement in Jewish refugee transmigration. If these
refugees, whether British or Jewish, did stay in Hong Kong, it was under the assumption that it
would be short – a couple of weeks at most. This expectation is clearly exemplified by the lavish
accommodations and catered facilities offered to British refugees in 1937 and to Jewish refugees
in 1946; both sought to offer the best that Hong Kong could provide. However, when stays
became more permanent, luxury was superseded by practicality, such as the relocation to Lai Chi
Kok with its Spartan accommodations. The Jewish refugees were fortunate that the JDC, and not
the Hong Kong government, bore the cost of housing at the Peninsula Hotel. If the government
had been sheltering these refugees, it would have been extremely unlikely that they would be
allowed to live in such opulence.

**Hong Kong, China, and Chinese Refugees**

Although Hong Kong was a completely separate political entity from China after 1846,
Hong Kong’s geographic location, economic ties, and local Chinese population made its security
and stability intrinsically dependent on the mainland. North of the Colony, the region of
Guangdong and the city of Canton (modern-day Guangzhou) became a stronghold for
Communism and a political battleground as various ideologies clashed in the 1920s: often
spilling into Hong Kong. Pro-labour and anti-British sentiments roused by the authorities in
Canton caused strikes and walk-outs in Hong Kong in the early 1920s. Perhaps the most

---

64 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/126
devastating event was the 1925-1926 Strike/Boycott. As a response to the May 30 Incident, where eleven Chinese protesters were shot and killed by British police in Shanghai, around a hundred thousand Chinese workers walked out of the Colony in June 1925 and were provided for in Canton. While the Hong Kong government was able to break the strike by July, Canton changed tactics and began a boycott of British goods and ships using the Colony. Ultimately, the boycott, started as a reaction to events on the mainland, would end as an order from the mainland. In March 1926 Chiang Kai-shek instigated a purge of the Communists and Leftist faction of the Kuomintang in order to secure his position in Canton and as the new leader of the Kuomintang. In June, Chiang ordered an end to the boycott. Without mainland support, the strikers held out until October 1926 before being dispersed by the Hong Kong authorities.

In the 1930s, new difficulties and turmoil afflicted Hong Kong in part of growing animosity between China and Japan. Reacting to Japanese aggressions in Manchuria and Shanghai, anti-Japanese sentiments grew amongst the Hong Kong Chinese population leading to small riots and the mob-murder of a Japanese family in September 1931. Hong Kong’s stability was further challenged when Japan invaded China in July 1937.

Around the same time that British authorities were organizing transports from Shanghai and preparing accommodations in Hong Kong, Chinese refugees were slowly, but constantly entering the Colony. Between September and October 1937, T. H. King, the Commissioner of Police, reported that almost 20,000 Chinese refugees crossed into the Colony to escape Japanese

---

66 Ibid., 372.
67 Ibid., 376-377.
air raids. Interestingly, a majority did return back to China after the initial panic. Perhaps they believed that the worst was over or that the immediate threat had passed. Regardless, by October 1938, the Japanese had forced the Nationalists into the interior of China and occupied the majority of the southern Chinese coast including Canton. This time return was not an opinion.

For Chinese refugees, many would have found accommodations either through familial relations or privately, similar to the British refugees from Shanghai. Those without means who were destitute would have relied on local Chinese organizations like the Tung Wah Hospital Group (a collection of three hospitals) and the Wai Yeung Association for accommodations. Both provided some form of temporary shelter. And yet, no matter how charitable these Chinese organizations were, as the refugees flowed in, their operations become less effective. The Wai Yeung Association, which offered emergency accommodations and food, encouraged its refugees to return home when the immediate threat had subsided. In the case of the Tung Wah Hospital Group, W. J. Carrie, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, reported that overcrowding and congestion were taxing their limited accommodations. The hospital group itself reported that they treated an incredible 531,547 Chinese outpatients just in 1938, increasing to 602,464 in 1939; the three hospitals together had 1,100 beds.

Those who were destitute and could not support themselves had few opportunities. Some left the Colony for neighbouring Macao or journeyed into the interior of China. For those who stayed, death was a real possibility. In the New Territories alone, 128 deaths were recorded in

---

1938 and 216 in 1939; both under the ominous cause of unusual circumstance. Although euphemistic, starvation was wholly possible; these reports emphasized that the majority were refugees – including children. In 1939, the Hong Kong Chinese population had 48,283 deaths, an increase of 9,465 deaths in the previous year: the chief causes were malnutrition and overcrowding leading to a deterioration of health. In comparison, the European population recorded 202 deaths in the same year. Although the European population naturally did get sick, it was rarely unpreventable. With the exception of Hermine Huber, an elderly Jewish refugee, who died of pneumonia in 1946, there were no other recorded deaths during the two European refugee crises in Hong Kong.

As the refugee situation worsened in Hong Kong, the government did attempt to find solutions either through housing or border controls. As earlier as July 1938, the members of the Hong Kong Legislative Council raised concerns regarding the impact refugees had on the Colony. Of the approximately 30,000 homeless Chinese residing in the Colony, between 1,500 and 3,000 were destitute refugees – the majority were women and children. N. L. Smith, the Colonial Secretary, proposed the immediate construction of three camps to accommodate up to 3,500 destitute Chinese refugees. King’s Park Refugee Camp and Ma Tau Chung Refugee Camp were constructed at the edges of Kowloon and North Point Refugee Camp to the east in Hong Kong Island – all at the peripheries of the European colonial space. Construction began in late-September and finished on November 28 (December 1 for Ma Tau Chung); Chinese destitute and

75 Ibid.
76 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/49.
refugees – not often mutually exclusive categories – were brought to their new accommodations. In the Legislative Council on October 13, Smith reported bluntly that the total number of inhabitants was 4,896: 1,512 at North Point, 1,368 at King’s Park and 2,016 at Ma Tau Chung. A report from the Director of Public Works describing the physical appearance of these camps is reminiscent of the accommodations at Lai Chi Kok: “[sheds] of timber construction with concrete floors, except the kitchen which has brick walls.” However, unlike the British refugees, beddings and other luxuries were not mentioned.

In November 1938, the issue of Chinese immigration was briefly brought up in the Legislative Council. Unlike Europeans who now required visas due to changes in British immigration policies, Chinese arriving into Hong Kong did not. And they should continue to not need one, so argued Legislative Council member Chau Tsun-Nin: proposing that either more housing be constructed or that the New Territories should be opened up for industrial development. His co-member Lo Man-Kam likewise questioned the feasibility of enforcing visas onto Chinese transmigrants. The Governor of Hong Kong, G. A. S. Northcote, even suggested deporting those who contributed nothing to Hong Kong – a continuation of the idea that the government only intervened in Chinese issues if they affected the whole Colony. Whether or not these deportations did occur, the fact remains that without effective border and immigration controls, deported Chinese could simply return to Hong Kong.

---

81 HKGRO Hong Kong Legislative Council Hansard, 10 November 1938, 153, 156. Accessed online at http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/view/h1938/3164.pdf
82 Ibid, 174-175.
The solution proposed in November 1940 was *Immigration Control Bill, 1940*. In addition to ‘closing’ the northern frontier between Sha Tau Kok and the estuary of Sham Chun River and the establishment of designated entry points, the bill also required a person to hold a valid Entry Permit or Frontier Pass. Through this, Hong Kong was finally, legally, in control of immigration on the same level as Britain. Yet whether it was effective in limiting Chinese entry is questionable. At the very least, it limited legal entry into the Colony. However, as Hong Kong is surrounded by water, a multitude of islands, and the underdeveloped New Territories, it is highly probable that illegal immigration flourished with refugees arriving undetected into the Colony onboard junks or across the frontier.

**Situating Jewish Refugees**

The three groups of refugees: British, Jewish, and Chinese, had clearly different experiences during their stay in Hong Kong. For British refugees, they enjoyed the splendours and privileges associated with their counterparts at the top of the colonial hierarchy. As for their Chinese counterparts, they were barred from participating. As a British colony, the local Chinese population faced restrictions and distrust from the colonial government: the two communities were effectively segregated through legislation. As Hong Kong’s primary function was economic, class-based distinctions must also be introduced. Similar to the racial hierarchy, the top of the class hierarchy was occupied by Europeans while Chinese labourers and servants comprised of the lower-class or the subaltern. Hong Kong’s colonial hierarchy should be straightforward. However, this simple ‘black and white’ image of colonialism in Hong Kong

---

83 HKGRO Colonial Secretary’s Department, *Ordinances passed and assented to:* *Immigration Control, No. 32 of 1940; Betting Duty Amendment, No. 33 of 1940; Advertisements Regulation (No. 2) Amendment, No. 34 1940* (Hong Kong: Noronha & Co. Ltd., 1940), 1710. Accessed online at http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkgro/view/g1940/584101.pdf
84 Carroll, *Concise History of Hong Kong*, 105-106.
ignores the gaps created by the encounter between Chinese and European. The initial reluctance of the colonial government to manage its Chinese population allowed for individuals and organizations to fill the gap and later act as representatives of the Chinese community.\textsuperscript{85} Eurasians – the frowned-upon product of miscegenation between European men and Chinese women – operated as another bridge between the two communities.\textsuperscript{86} Those who prospered by exploiting this gap could even surpass their European counterparts in wealth. Yet, within this complex and porous hierarchy, where did Jewish refugees fit?

In Ann Laura Stoler’s work regarding the Dutch East Indies, she complicates the traditional understanding of the colonial class by emphasizing the existence of ‘poor whites’ – those who were considered European but lacked the wealth associated with it.\textsuperscript{87} Stoler goes on to argue that the government went to great lengths to conceal the presence of poor Europeans through subsidised housing and work relief.\textsuperscript{88} This challenge complements the research done by John Carroll on Chinese merchants in Colonial Hong Kong. He argues that the Chinese bourgeoisie operated inside and outside the hierarchy and that “a person might be dominant at times, [and] subaltern at others, depending on the situation and context.”\textsuperscript{89} Although the refugees at Lai Chi Kok were British, they align better in the subaltern category because they were destitute, resulting in their quasi-isolation and concealment. And yet, they still participated in the expatriate social world while their children received a European education. Understanding the fluidity (and contradictions) associated with Hong Kong’s colonial social structure is crucial in situating Jewish refugees relative to their European and Chinese peers.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 36-37.
\textsuperscript{89} Carroll, \textit{Edge of Empires}, 10.
**Internment of German Jewish Refugees**

In her interview, Grete Appel, an Austrian Jewish refugee, said that after Britain declared war against Germany, her husband Karl Appel was interned at La Salle College. She remarked with glee and a hint of jealousy that the internment camp provided catered dinner the first day, but that the internees had to cook after.\(^90\) Internment was of particular interest to local newspapers. On Sept. 7, 1939, the *Hong Kong Daily Press* released a special report detailing the internment. Of the approximately 100 interned, the majority were Jewish refugees – some like Karl who immigrated to Hong Kong and others who were transiting onwards to Shanghai or the Philippines.\(^91\)

The internment of Jewish refugees is puzzling given that a majority of German Jews had already been stripped of their citizenships prior to their internment in Hong Kong. The Reich Citizenship Law of September 15, 1939 targeted Germans of Jewish descent not individually but as a collective, rendering them stateless; mass denaturalization culminated with the 11\(^{th}\) Decree in November 1941.\(^92\) Yet, the peculiar case of the only Czech internee, interned because he held a German passport, demonstrates a similar indiscriminate targeting of all ‘Germans’ regardless of status.\(^93\) ‘Germans’ changed from foreign nationals to enemy aliens at the outbreak of war – one became associated as ‘German’ through nationality, language or passport. However, the

---


\(^91\)“被拘德僑猶人可望獲釋難漢十五人昨日已赴滬喇沙書院今日照常開課 [German nationals are still expected to be released but difficult to determine as 15 Jewish refugees bound for Shanghai were detained in yesterday],” 大公报 [Ta Kung Pao], Sept. 11, 1939, p. 6. Chinese language newspapers were generally equal to their English language counterparts in disseminating information regarding the treatment of Jews in Europe to its Chinese readers. In the postwar period, local events were reported in conjunction to international ones whereas English language newspapers focused more on the latter, hence the arrival of 283 Jewish refugees was only reported by one newspaper, the Kung Sheung Evening News.


Hong Kong government was quick to establish a tribunal to review every internee’s case – specifically the Austrian and Jewish cases.94

The larger issue regarding internment was that it affected peoples’ status: although European, they became closer to the subaltern. Importantly, these were not ‘poor Whites’, but included doctors, lawyers, and journalists. Although the authorities did offer short visiting hours for the men, they were effectively isolated from the larger expatriate community. La Salle College was transformed from a regular school to a fortress of barbed wires, further highlighting their separation. Their daily lives within the camp were strictly regulated by the authorities including set mealtimes and a curfew at 10:15 pm.95 Interestingly, the Hong Kong Telegraph reported that the camp also included an Aryan and non-Aryan section, suggesting perhaps the presences of Nazi sympathizers.96 Although the Hong Kong Daily Press reported that the internees spoke “very highly of the courtesy and good treatment of the British troops,97” it is questionable whether this was genuine or that rumours of parole encouraged good behaviour.

Yet, it cannot be ignored that the location and accommodations at La Salle were anything but reflective of their status as Europeans in order to mask inherent contradictions. The internees were provided a generous ration of food by the Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotel including beef, potatoes, carrots, and the all-important coffee.98 The school’s theatre was opened and musicians were allowed to use its stage and piano while German books were donated for the internees to read. They were even allowed to access their funds, albeit limited to a weekly limit of $10, to purchase beer at the canteen. While internment did function as a means of isolating potentially

94 “First Visitors’ Day,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 5.
96 “First Visitors’ Day,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 5.
98 “Tiffin at La Salle Internment Camp,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 11, 1939, p. 2; “First Visitors’ Day,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 5.
harmful and subversive elements, the internees were not deprived of their privileges. Ultimately however, a majority of the internees were required to leave the Colony. For Grete Appel, she and her husband, along with her extended family left Hong Kong in late-1939 and made their way to Shanghai where they survived the duration of the war.

1946 Jewish Refugee Crisis

As Hong Kong began the arduous process of rebuilding after the Japanese occupation, it once again became a site of uncertain refuge as a group of Jewish refugees bound for Australia was stranded in the Colony in late July 1946. As previously discussed, the treatment of these

---

99 Jewish evacuees from Shanghai stayed in the Peninsula in 1946. Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives. Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.
refugees was representative of their status as Europeans. As Figure 1.3 depicts, refugee accommodations, although lacking privacy and slightly cramped, were on many levels greater than their living standards in Shanghai. Men and women were separated into two ballrooms converted into dormitories; makeshift beds and sheets, and even bedside tables were made available – food was catered and offered twice daily.¹⁰⁰ Instead of concern and uncertainty, it is relaxation, as evident by the two women lying on the bed partially covered by an umbrella.

One notable event that contributed to a sense of unity and shared experience amongst the Jewish refugees staying at the Peninsula Hotel was the celebration of Rosh Hashanah; two months after their transport was diverted. Religious service was held in one of the adjunct conference rooms (Figure 1.3) while a formal dinner was organized for the refugees. The event was photographed by Fred Antman, a fellow refugee. Although the number of attendees and the meals served remain unknown, Antman’s photographs provide a glimpse into these unknowns. It is possible that all or almost all the refugees attended as seen in Figure 1.4. The meal was probably a three-course dinner including soup and served with wine or non-alcoholic drinks. A speech, in addition to a toast to thank Lawrence Kadoorie and perhaps a moment of remembrance could have been interspersed during the feast. Coffee and a light dessert would have been fitting wrap-up to the celebrations.

¹⁰⁰ HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/43
Yet, unlike the sense of formality and belonging emanating in Figure 1.4, the rows of beds (some unmade), the cluttered tables and clothing hanging on the walls in Figure 1.3 betrays a sense of detachment with their surroundings. Similar to the earlier internment, cleaning and other domestic tasks were the responsibility of the refugees and not local Chinese servants. Again, ‘poor Europeans’ or refugees had to be hidden away from the local population so as to protect the image of local Europeans. Kurt Heymann, a Jewish refugee from Shanghai, was rejected from employment as “a Greaser or Oiler because our [Mollers’ (Hong Kong) Ltd.] ships carry Chinese crews.” However, social isolation was unrealistic – the refugees did and had to interact with people outside the Peninsula. The money that was distributed by Kadoorie to

---

101 Holiday meal for Jewish evacuees. Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives. Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.
102 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/232A.
destitute refugees may have been used to purchase trinkets and snacks. A letter from the Hong Kong and Kowloon Wharf & Godown Company, responsible for the refugees’ baggage, suggests that some type of exchanges did occur as refugees were daily “removing and returning, repacking and/or re-arranging their baggage.” Amusingly, even Grete Appel recalled how her grandmother, speaking no Chinese, was able to communicate with the local Chinese. Within the walls of the Peninsula Hotel, they were the subaltern – no voice and little agency; outside the Peninsula, they were viewed as members of the colonial elite.

Jewish refugees treaded along the borderline of colonial hierarchy – European enough to obtain its privileges but subaltern enough that they had to be hidden away. Their status as Europeans afforded them more considerations from the government and local individuals. Perhaps their treatment, and the amount of money spent on these refugees, was provided along a similar reasoning as given by Philip Frieder, a representative of the Jewish Refugee Committee in the Philippines: that “the community did not want them to go around like tramps.” This statement hints at the cautious reception of Jewish refugees by local Jewish communities: very much welcomed, but ensured that these migrants would not be a social or economic burden to the government.

For Lawrence Kadoorie, the harshness of the statement contradicts the history of generosity and educational endeavours championed by his grandfather and father. Indeed, the Kadoorie family were patrons to Hong Kong’s marginalized Chinese – Lawrence would later establish the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association in 1951 to assist Chinese refugees with

---

103 Each of the refugees received between $20 and $40 HKD. HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/82
104 HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/120A.
106 HKHP, SEK-8D-001, CJ1/10.
agricultural training and interest-free loans. And yet, as evident by Lawrence’s diary entry mentioned previously, Chinese refugees were not conceived as potential refugees. Does this tarnish the image of Lawrence as a philanthropist and humanitarian? No, but it does raise the possibility that by providing assistance to his coreligionists, and emphasizing them as the first instance of refugees in postwar Hong Kong, Lawrence inadvertently reinforced ‘whiteness’ and the primacy of Europeans within a colonial setting.

As mentioned previously however, the binaries of ‘whiteness’ and ‘European-ness’ for Jewish refugees were not concrete, but were in fact challenged due to their presence. Their identity as Jews points to an older conflict of identity in Europe, between local, established Jewish populations in Germany and Britain, and newly arrived, destitute Eastern European Jews. Klaus Weber noted that the ‘Othering’ of Jews from the Russian Empire by British Jews influenced local discourse regarding immigration. A similar situation to the housing of Jewish refugees at the Peninsula Hotel was present in the 1890s with the establishment of the London-based Jews’ Temporary Shelter. Weber stated that this organization, which provided accommodations to homeless Jews, attempted to conceal the presence of poor Jews from the general populace and ship them abroad. The presence and activities of local private charities sheds light into a fundamental difference between the event of internment and refuge provided in postwar Hong Kong – direct government intervention. Whereas the government was concerned

---

109 Ibid.
with enemy nationals, they were generally apathetic and hands off with Jewish refugees, both in Britain and in Hong Kong, as long as they were sponsored.\footnote{10}

Was this then British antisemitism at work?\footnote{11} Unlike the threat of physical violence not uncommon in Central and Eastern Europe, Louise London states that British social antisemitism and prejudices were wholly acceptable so long as it was ‘light’ and not official policy.\footnote{12} In fact, the stereotype of Jews as profiteers and a burden permeated within British institutions even after the revelation of genocide; senior government officials however, were on the whole sympathetic to the Jews.

Was British antisemitism then active in Hong Kong? While this question is difficult to answer, a letter sent by Kadoorie to David MacDougall, the Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong dated July 12, 1946 requesting permission to land 283 Jewish refugees can offer an insight into postwar attitudes towards the Jews. In framing the transiting and temporary housing of 283 Jewish refugees, Kadoorie emphasized two facts: that these refugees were financially supported, and that the original agreement fell apart. However, in justifying their arrival, Kadoorie wrote: “The advantages of disposing of the problem at one time instead of having to deal with it piecemeal are obvious.”\footnote{13} Although Kadoorie does provide a humanitarian reason later, the underlying nature of the passage can be interpreted as Kadoorie courting antisemitism by

\footnote{10}{London, Whitehall and the Jews, 25-26; Lawrence Kadoorie emphasized to David MacDougall in the first paragraph that the 283 Jewish refugees transiting Hong Kong to Australia were sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and that “[t]hese people have the necessary visas, their passages will be paid for, and the only difficulty is transportation,” HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/27.}

\footnote{11}{Antisemitism’ itself is a term loaded – often associated with ‘Antizionism’ and with a history of scholarship and modern discourse attempting to define it. Issues arise whether to describe Antisemitism along religious or racial lines, in addition to the complexities surrounding Jewish identity: as an ethnicity, race, or religion. For the purposes of this paper, I prefaced ‘Antisemitism’ with ‘British’ to denote a specific form of discrimination against the Jews in Britain as described by Louise London. London, Whitehall and the Jews, 275-6; Kenneth L. Marcus, The Definition of Anti-Semitism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 122-125.}

\footnote{12}{London, Whitehall and the Jews, 276.}

\footnote{13}{HKHP, SEK-8D-003, J.1/27.}
dehumanizing the refugees. They became the burden. The framework of this letter emphasized not the Jewish refugees, but circumstances beyond Kadoorie’s control and a request to the government to accept these stateless refugees to whom they had no obligations. It stressed the temporary nature of their stay with respect to Hong Kong’s postwar housing situation. It was all to convince the Colonial Secretary that the arrival of these Jewish refugees would merely be a temporary inconvenience and that the burden was on Kadoorie and the JDC.

Jewish refugees (and perhaps the local Jewish community in Hong Kong) occupied a fluid category within the colonial social structure: tip-toeing the line between ‘whiteness’ and ‘European’, and subaltern and burden. The treatment of Jewish refugees was conceivably influenced by a paradoxical desire by the local Jewish community and Kadoorie to conceal and socially elevate, and antisemitism through the inaction of local authorities.

Conclusion

As an entrepot, Hong Kong facilitated the transmigration of Jewish refugees from Europe, but also acted as a site of temporary refuge. Regardless of the duration of their stay, Jewish refugees were active in seeking out job opportunities and expanding their personal information networks. In response, the Jewish Refugee Society in Hong Kong and prominent individuals, notably Lawrence Kadoorie went to great lengths to ensure that assistance was rendered. However, Jewish refugees in Hong Kong represented only a narrow slice of Hong Kong’s history as a refuge. British and Chinese refugees escaping the conflict in China saw Hong Kong as a bastion of stability and safety. The convergence of refugee groups generated different responses from government and private initiatives. Whereas Chinese and Jewish refugees benefitted from private initiatives, British refugees saw a joint effort by the government and businesses to help their fellow Britons. As well, these efforts not only provided relief for the
refugees, but also served to reinforce the racial divide within Hong Kong. Whether or not these organizations or individuals were complicit in maintaining ‘whiteness’ there was a clear and dedicated effort in providing British and Jewish refugees with proper accommodations befitting Europeans. And yet, Jewish refugees themselves were situated at the borderline of social acceptance and rejection, reminiscent of antisemitism and discrimination found in Europe.

Unlike Shanghai, which was the primary destination for Jewish refugees, Hong Kong was a point of transit – a stopover. And yet, Hong Kong participated as a refuge and facilitator of Jewish refugee migration. The actions of the Jewish Refugee Society and Lawrence Kadoorie are testaments to Hong Kong’s oft forgotten and ignored contributions. Hong Kong, as a Jewish refuge expands and opens up the Holocaust as a truly transnational and far-reaching event, but one which occurred in tandem with the regional movements of refugees in China.

How does the presence of European Jewish refugees in a colonial environment fit within the larger narratives of the Holocaust? Was the use of Hong Kong by refugee representative of all points of passage? Was British antisemitism ‘universal’ throughout British colonies? Although these questions go beyond the scope of analysis pursued within this project, they nonetheless contribute to the growing discourse regarding refugee histories and the Holocaust.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Archives:
Hong Kong Heritage Project (HKHP)
Hong Kong Government Records Online (HKGRO)

Images:
Holiday meal for Jewish evacuees. Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives. Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.

Jewish evacuees from Shanghai stayed in the Peninsula in 1946. Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives. Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.

Preparing for Jewish New Year Services. Hong Kong Heritage Project Photo Archives. Courtesy of Fred Antman. Copyright of Hong Kong Heritage Project.

Oral History:

Newspaper:
“First Visitors’ Day,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 5.
“Tiffin at La Salle Interment Camp,” Hong Kong Telegraph, Sept. 11, 1939, p. 2.
“被拘德僑猶人可望獲釋難猶十五人昨日已赴滬喇沙書院今日照常開課 [German nationals are still expected to be released but difficult to determine as 15 Jewish refugees bound for Shanghai were detained yesterday],” 大公報 [Ta Kung Pao], Sept. 11, 1939, p. 6.

Secondary Sources:

Video Sources:
Books and Articles:


