

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN JAPANESE POLICY TOWARDS JEWISH REFUGEES IN SHANGHAI, 1938-1943

In 1943, Japanese officials in Shanghai reversed an earlier, liberal policy towards Jewish refugees by relocating the community to a small designated area that became known as the “Hongkew Ghetto.” To what extent was this decision a direct result of pressure from Nazi Germany?

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ABSTRACT

During the Second World War, many Jews fleeing Europe sought refuge in Shanghai, which had been controlled by the Japanese since 1937. When Jewish refugees arrived in 1938, they were initially treated well. In 1943, however, Japanese officials forced the community into a designated area. According to some historians, this change in policy resulted from Nazi influence. To what extent was German influence the principal reason for the change in policy?

To answer this question, Japanese relations with Germans, other foreigners and Jews are examined. Nazi officials were actively promoting anti-Jewish thought in Japan and their influence became more pervasive following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. As well, the White Russians in Shanghai resented the refugees and were feeding Japanese officials with anti-Semitic propaganda. Finally, Japanese perceptions of Jews prior to 1938 and throughout the period are central to understanding the policy. Japanese government documents and secondary sources are used to interpret the three relationships.

The conclusion reached is that the establishment of the “ghetto” was based less on third-party influence than on Japanese pragmatism toward the Jews, which was characteristic of Japanese policy throughout the period. Japanese officials viewed Jewish people as superior, possessing vast amounts of power. When the refugees arrived, the Japanese believed that treating them well would result in the support of Jews in the United States. After Pearl Harbor, the possibility of gaining support from the United States became remote. Furthermore, worsening living conditions in Shanghai forced many Jewish refugees into poverty and crime. The Japanese decided that Jews were no longer useful in the war effort and created a ghetto to more closely monitor the activities of the refugees. This new policy was a pragmatic decision, rather than one based primarily on anti-Semitism from outside influences.

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Introduction

During the Second World War and in the years leading up to the war, millions of Jews in Europe were persecuted and killed by the forces of Nazi Germany. Those who tried to flee Europe often found that they were not permitted to enter their desired destinations because of strict immigration policies. Already a large and diverse city with a substantial foreign population, Shanghai was the only city with no entry visa requirements for Jewish refugees.¹ A significant number of Jews sought refuge in Shanghai. Roughly 14,000 Jews from Austria and Germany arrived between 1938 and 1940, and around 1000 Jews from Poland arrived in 1941.²

Shanghai was controlled by the Japanese, who had occupied the city since 1937.³ The Jewish refugees who arrived between 1938 and 1940 were naturally apprehensive that they might be treated harshly by the Japanese, the allies of Nazi Germany. On the whole, however, the relationship between Japanese officials and Jewish refugees was cordial and remained so until 1943. Historians have described the Japanese openness to Jews taking refuge in Shanghai as “among the most difficult historical problems to unravel.”⁴ In 1943, a change in Japanese regulations suddenly forced Jewish refugees to leave their homes and enter a small “designated area” which was under strict curfew. This area became known as the “Hongkew ghetto.”⁵ Conditions in the ghetto were poor, and the previously friendly relationship between the Jewish refugees and the Japanese authorities was no longer in place. The sharp contrast between Japanese treatment of Jews before and after 1943 has become a subject of historical research and speculation. Historians have come to various conclusions about the reasons for the formation of the ghetto. The standard explanation is that Japanese policy-makers were influenced by Nazis or as David Kranzler puts it, by “the Long Arm of the Gestapo.”⁶ But is this really the case? There are other issues, including the influence of White Russians, and the realization on the part of the Japanese that their original plan for the Jewish refugees was not working. To what extent was German influence on the Japanese the principal

¹ David Kranzler. *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 91.

³ *Ibid.*, 41

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23

⁵ Herman Dicker. *Wanderers and Settlers in the Far East* (New York: Twayne Publishers., 1962), 118

⁶ Kranzler, 477

reason for the establishment of the ghetto? In answer to this question, this essay assesses the various factors influencing the Japanese policy toward the Jews and argues that the creation of the ghetto was not principally due to Nazi pressure. Rather, the establishment of the ghetto represented continuity in the Japanese policy of trying to use the Jews for their own purposes, as much as it signalled a change that was influenced by third parties.

Japanese Perception of the Jews pre-1938

Throughout history, the Japanese have generally regarded foreigners in one of two ways: “in awe or in contempt.”⁷ Jews fell in the first category. To the Japanese, the term “Jew” became synonymous with “intellectual.”⁸ Beyond this, Japanese popular belief held that Jewish people had the ability to control “world politics, world finance and the world in general.”⁹ In particular, many Japanese leaders exaggerated the power of the Jewish community in the United States. One of the reasons for this view is that Jacob Schiff, a Jewish financier in the United States, provided large loans to the Japanese government during the Russo-Japanese war.¹⁰ These opinions existed in Japan long before the Japanese allied with Nazi Germany. The Japanese perception of the Jews was therefore very different from the German perception of Jews. The Japanese viewed the Jews with prejudice, but not necessarily anti-Semitism. This perception greatly affected the way the Jewish refugees in Shanghai were treated when they arrived in 1938.

⁷ David Goodman and Masanori Miyazawa. *Jews in the Japanese Mind: The History and Uses of a Cultural Stereotype* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 16

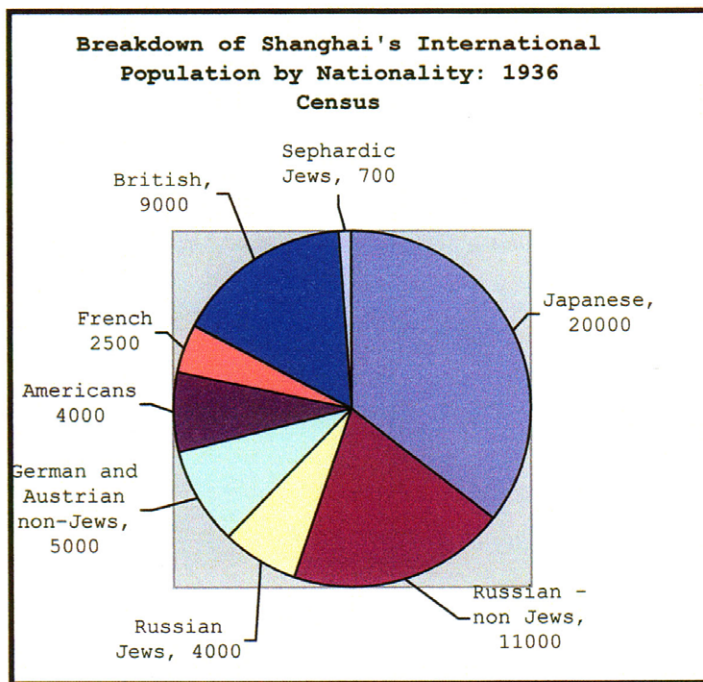
⁸ Xun Zhou. *Chinese Perceptions of the 'Jews' and Judaism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 94

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ Kranzler, 175

Shanghai, 1938

Shanghai in 1938 was possibly “the most international metropolis the world has ever seen.”¹¹ The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing, between Britain and China, opened the port of Shanghai (along with four other major Chinese ports) to



Kranzler, 42

Western trade.¹² As a result, the city became a magnet for people of all nationalities. Shanghai's strategic location and economic potential attracted foreigners from Britain, France, the United States and many other Western Countries. The city became divided between the Chinese majority and the foreigners, but Shanghai's policy-making body, the Shanghai Municipal Council, was composed solely of Westerners.¹³ The pre-existing international community in Shanghai made the city an attractive destination for refugees of all nationalities. Many Chinese refugees, fleeing first the Taiping Rebellion of 1850, and subsequently the Franco-Chinese Disturbances of 1884, chose Shanghai as their place of refuge.¹⁴ White Russian refugees also sought refuge in Shanghai, fleeing the Bolshevik revolution because of their loyalty to the tsar. This group, numbering about 15,000, became a very important and influential group in Shanghai society and proved to be one of the important influences on Japanese treatment of Jewish refugees. Among the

¹¹ Harriet Sergeant. *Shanghai*. (London: John Murray, 1991.) 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16

¹³ Kranzler, 42

¹⁴ Sergeant, 28

White Russian refugees who came to Shanghai were 1000 Russian Jews, who formed a community separate from the other White Russians.¹⁵ They were generally welcomed into an existing community of Baghdadi Jews in Shanghai who were known as the “Sephardim.” The Sephardim possessed enormous wealth and greatly contributed to the economic life of the city.¹⁶ Of the all the foreigners in Shanghai, however, the largest and most powerful were the Japanese. They had established themselves as a major power in Shanghai after the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and took control over the city in 1937 at the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War. Even though they did not hold a majority on the Municipal Council, the Japanese military had control over most of Shanghai, including the harbour at which the Jewish Refugees arrived one year after the Japanese occupation began.¹⁷

Treatment of Jewish Refugees, 1938-1943

When the refugees first arrived in 1938, the Japanese authorities in Shanghai were surprisingly open to the arrival of Jewish refugees from Europe. On the face of it, the Japanese seemed to be uninterested in the refugees, leaving the care and management of the new arrivals to pre-existing Jewish and other foreign organizations.¹⁸ In fact, Japanese officials paid close attention to the Jewish refugees, and had specific ideas about how the Jewish community could be helpful to Japanese purposes. Shortly after the first boats of refugees arrived, five leading Japanese Government officials held a conference in Tokyo.¹⁹ At the “Five Ministers’ Conference,” two military leaders were appointed to develop a policy towards the Jewish refugees in Shanghai.²⁰ Colonel Yasue and General Inuzuka were considered “Jewish Experts” in Japan, because of their research and writings on Jews and Judaism.²¹ Yasue and Inuzuka decided that supporting the Jewish refugees in Shanghai would not only be consistent with Japanese “declared policy of racial equality,”²² but could also result in

¹⁵ Sergeant, 31

¹⁶ Kranzler, 45

¹⁷ *Shanghai Ghetto*, prod. and dir. Dana Janklowicz-Mann and Amir Mann., 95 min., Docurama, 2004. Videocassette

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kranzler, 225

²⁰ Ibid. 236

²¹ Ibid., 169

²² Zhou, 141

economic and political benefits for the Japanese. One such benefit would be to win favour with the pre-existing Jewish population in Shanghai and boost their support in the city. For example, Japanese politicians attempted to gain Jewish community support in a 1940 election for the Municipal Council in order to strengthen their influence on the Council.²³

On a larger scale, Inuzuka and Yasue hoped that favourable treatment of Jewish refugees would help Japan gain support from American Jews, who they saw as having significant political and economic influence in the United States.²⁴ Many leading officials felt that the Japanese war effort in China would be difficult without the cooperation and support of the United States.²⁵ Furthermore, Japan hoped to obtain American Jewish capital to assist with this war effort.²⁶ As a result, Inuzuka and Yasue put forward a pro-Jewish policy. Inuzuka nicknamed this policy the “Fugu” plan. “Fugu” is the Japanese word for blowfish, a well-known delicacy in Japanese cuisine. When prepared correctly, it is delicious, but when not prepared correctly, it is deadly. The Japanese viewed the Jews as a resource, like the blowfish.²⁷ If they handled the refugees correctly, they would fulfill their “need for foreign capital and ... desire not to alienate America.”²⁸ On the other hand, if they mistreated the Jews, the Japanese feared aggression from the United States.²⁹ Essentially, they hoped to use the refugees to their advantage, adopting the policy they found most pragmatic. The “pro-Jewish” policy of Japanese authorities allowed the refugees to develop a viable community, which included business enterprises, a synagogue, a cemetery and several refugee newspapers.³⁰

²³ Kranzler, 155-156

²⁴ Goodman and Miyazawa, 114

²⁵ Ibid., 125

²⁶ Zhou, 141

²⁷ Goodman and Miyazawa, 133

²⁸ *Jewish Measures in view of the 1942 Situation: Plan Adopted at the Liaison Conference*. Japanese Foreign Office. (February 1942), quoted in Kranzler, David, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai 1938-1945*. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976., Appendix E. 620

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ J. R. Fiszman. “The Quest for Status: Polish Jewish Refugees in Shanghai, 1941-1949.” *The Polish Review*, Vol XLIII, No. 3. 1998: 441-460. 446

Shanghai Foreigners and their Impact on Japanese Policy Changes

The pre-existing Jewish community was the body in Shanghai most responsible for the administration of refugees.³¹ An American Jewish organisation, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), was in charge of handling refugee affairs, with the support of the wealthy Sephardic community.³² However, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and Declaration of War against the United States, all British and American citizens were interned in camps. Sephardic Jews, considered British subjects, were also interned. Thus, a major source of support for the JDC was lost.

When the Sephardic Jews were put in camps, relief workers turned to the White Russian Jews for aid. However, a large part of White Russian Jewish community in Shanghai resented the refugees. Many felt that they had suffered from a “loss of face” with the arrival of the refugees. The poverty-stricken refugees were seen as an embarrassment to their well-established, successful Jewish community.³³ A former refugee, Ernst Heppner, describes the feelings of the Russian Jews in an article called “Western European Refugees and the Shanghai Resident Jews.” He claims that some of the Russian Jews in Shanghai would say, “We did not call [the refugees], we are not responsible for [the refugees.]”³⁴ It did not help that there were historic tensions between European and Russian Jews that added to the conflict in Shanghai.³⁵ As a result, the JDC received little help from the majority of the Jewish community, which made it difficult to provide adequate support for the refugees. Refugees were destitute and lived under very poor conditions.

To make matters worse, the Jewish refugees were resented by not only their coreligionists, but also by the local Western community as a whole. Other foreigners in Shanghai were jealous of the support that the refugees gave to the Japanese authorities. In the 1940 municipal election, many Jewish refugees openly campaigned for the Japanese. The Japanese were not successful in winning a majority on Council, in spite of refugee support.

³¹ *Shanghai Ghetto*

³² Kranzler, 99

³³ Ernest Heppner. *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Heinz Dawid. “From Berlin to Tianjin.” From *The Jews of China*. Vol. 1, edited by Jonathan Goldstein, 110-122. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.

Nevertheless, this episode created a backlash among the British and American majority, who resented that the fact that refugees chose to support the Japanese, who were allies of Nazi Germany.

The accumulation of anti-refugee sentiment eventually spread to the Japanese community as well. The challenge of accommodating 15,000 refugees led to partial immigration restrictions in 1939, followed by a total closure of the open door policy in 1942.³⁶ Japanese relations with the refugee community remained cordial for a while, because the Japanese government was still concerned about the potential of the Jewish community to influence the United States.³⁷ In due course, however, the other foreign communities in Shanghai began to have a greater influence on Japanese policy toward the Jews. White Russians, the second largest foreign community in Shanghai after the Japanese, were particularly influential in Shanghai at the time. Many White Russians held high profile positions in Japanese organisations, including Eugene Pick, who was Central Advisor to the Japanese Naval Intelligence Bureau (JNIB), responsible for security in Shanghai. In a personal letter to Commander Otani, the head of the JNIP, Pick gave recommendations for handling the Jews (“they need a good whip and a clenched fist,”) and suggested interning the Jews in a small area.³⁸ Japanese leader Colonel Yasue also reported White Russian anti-Jewish propaganda in 1940. He said that White Russians informed him that Jewish refugees were spreading negative allegations about the Japanese.³⁹ It was alleged that Jews had telegraphed Sir Victor Sassoon, a prominent Sephardic Jewish leader who was at the time travelling in the United States, and informed him that “the Japanese navy was oppressive.”⁴⁰ Regardless of the truth of these rumours, the role of White Russians in generating anti-Jewish propaganda was an important factor in changing Japanese views about a pragmatic and utilitarian policy towards the Jewish refugees.

³⁶ Kranzler, 270

³⁷ *Shanghai Ghetto*

³⁸ Wasserstein, Bernard. *Secret war in Shanghai*. (Boston, Mass : Houghton Mifflin, 1999.) 148

³⁹ Dicker, 92

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The Creation of the Ghetto

Faced with growing stresses in the city due to the poor living conditions of the refugees, Japanese officials formed a new committee in 1942 to deal with the “Jewish Problem.”⁴¹ The Pacific war led to a shortage of basic commodities and living space for the growing number of refugees in Shanghai. Many refugees were destitute, and were forced to turn to crime and prostitution. Anti-refugee sentiment among foreign communities in Shanghai was growing, and there was pressure on the Japanese to respond.⁴² On February 9th, 1943, Japanese officials in Shanghai requested that “the residential and business areas of stateless refugees in the Shanghai Area be restricted to an area within the International Settlement.”⁴³ The district to which the proclamation referred was an area known to the Chinese and Jews as “Hongkew.”⁴⁴ This had formerly been the neighbourhood in which the poorer refugees lived. Interestingly, the proclamation did not mention either the words “Jew” or “ghetto.”⁴⁵ Instead, it referred to “Stateless refugees” and “designated area,”⁴⁶ consistent with the Japanese stated policy of racial equality. Regardless, living conditions of the Jews in Shanghai deteriorated after this change in policy. In the ghetto, there was a “lack of privacy, physical closeness and worries about where the next meagre meal would come from.”⁴⁷ To make matters worse, the person put in charge of the ghetto, Mr. Ghoya, was a power-hungry tyrant who physically abused many of the refugees.⁴⁸ The creation of the ghetto led to a sharp change in the lives of the Jewish refugees. Many of them were surprised at the sudden reversal in Japanese policy and suspected that it was due to the influence of Nazi Germany, which was an ally of Japan.

Nazi Influence

Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ subsequent declaration of war in December 1941 strengthened Japan’s alliance with Germany. The Japanese were thus subjected to a greater degree of Nazi

⁴¹ Kranzler, 478

⁴² Ibid, 151

⁴³ Yano (Consul-General), “Top Secret Foreign Office Paper No. 130,” February 9, 1943 as cited in Kranzler, Appendix G., 623

⁴⁴ *Shanghai Ghetto*

⁴⁵ James Ross, *Escape to Shanghai: A Jewish Community in China*. (New York: The Free Press), 1994.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ilio Heppner. “Shanghai: A Woman’s Eyewitness Report.” From *The Jews of China*. Vol. 2. edited by Jonathan Goldstein. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 52

⁴⁸ Wasserstein, 150

influence at home and abroad.⁴⁹ In Japan, an anti-Semitic Japanese Official, General Shioden Nobutaka, was elected to the Japanese Government.⁵⁰ There were a growing number of anti-Semitic writings published and circulated in both Japan and Shanghai, facilitated by the German Embassy.⁵¹ In Shanghai, the first large scale demonstration of anti-Semitism took place in 1941, when Nazis attending a football game between the Jewish and Portuguese teams threw anti-Semitic pamphlets into the crowd.⁵² Finally, in 1942, three high-ranking Nazi officials from Germany paid a visit to Shanghai.⁵³ These examples illustrate that there was Nazi influence on the Japanese in Shanghai and provides one explanation for the decision in 1943 to create a ghetto for the Jewish refugees.

There is some first-hand evidence -- from Japanese, refugee and German sources -- to support the claim that the Germans not only encouraged, but proposed and actively supported the creation of a designated area for the refugees. In August of 1942, Shanghai Japanese Vice Consul Shibota organized a secret meeting with leaders of the Jewish Community informing them that the Japanese were under pressures from the German Consul to isolate the Jews.⁵⁴ Secondly, the widespread opinion among Jewish refugees themselves was that the ghetto was created as a result of German influence.⁵⁵ Yet a third primary source is the testimony of the former German Consul of Tientsin, China, Fritz Wiedemann. He stated: "the Japanese were not anti-Semitic, and we [the Germans] were under orders to instruct the Japanese authorities about the racial policies of Germany and to suggest appropriate measures... the internment of the Jews had been instigated by German authorities."⁵⁶

The dominant view among historians is that German influence was the principal cause of the Japanese decision to create the ghetto. In his book *Japanese, Nazis and Jews*, David Kranzler dedicates a chapter to what he calls "The Long Arm of the Gestapo," -- the German influence in Japanese occupied Shanghai. He bases his argument specifically on Weidemann's testimony, and on an assortment of German-funded anti-Semitic

⁴⁹ Kranzler, 477

⁵⁰ Ibid., 286.

⁵¹ Ibid., 325, 487

⁵² Zhou, 147

⁵³ Dicker, 114.

⁵⁴ Dicker, 116

⁵⁵ Kranzler, 1976. 480

⁵⁶ Robert Michaelis. *Testimony*. (Manuscript), 27, quoted in Kranzler, 489.

propaganda conferences. Zhou Xun, a Chinese historian, supports the theory that Japanese policies were inspired by and imitative of the German policies towards Jews. He even refers to the “designated area” in Shanghai as a “concentration camp.”⁵⁷ Prior to Kranzler, Herman Dicker also published a book that implied that Germans were the primary influence on Japanese policy-makers. He focuses on Weidemann’s testimony as well as Shibota’s secret meeting with Jewish leaders.

Problems with the Gestapo Theory

Although there is some support for what Kranzler calls a “nefarious Nazi influence on the radically changed Japanese policy,”⁵⁸ the theory contains several key problems. Some primary sources are unreliable. For example, Shibota, the Japanese official who spread the rumour that Nazis had pressured the Japanese, may have been partially trying to protect himself from Jewish animosity over the decision. In addition, Jewish bias against Germans, coupled with their initial kinship with the Japanese, led them to believe Germans were responsible for their suffering. Finally, the historian Xun Zhou’s analysis of Japanese behaviour is interesting, since he spends much of the article comparing the Japanese and Chinese treatment of Jews in Shanghai. As a Chinese person, his bias in favour of the Chinese and against the Japanese is evident throughout the text. In aligning Japanese conduct with Nazi conduct, he portrays the Japanese in a more negative light. Therefore, calling the ghetto a concentration camp is partially a reflection of Xun Zhou’s pro-Chinese bias. Another key problem in the Gestapo theory is that the Shanghai ghetto was unlike the internment practices of the Germans.⁵⁹ One of the important differences is the fact that in 1943, the Japanese had already begun interning “Enemy Nationals” -- British and Americans -- in similar, if not stricter, camps.⁶⁰ The Japanese decision to create a ghetto, therefore, was likely not based principally on the influence of German anti-Semitism.

The broader evidence suggests that Japanese policy-makers were influenced not only by the Nazis but also the White Russians. This essay has established that White Russians were anti-Semitic and attempted to

⁵⁷ Zhou, 142

⁵⁸ Kranzler, 488

⁵⁹ Goodman and Miyazawa, 113

⁶⁰ *Shanghai Ghetto*

influence Japanese policy. However, their influence on the policy to create the ghetto is questionable. In 1942, when Japanese officials formally abolished the “fugu” plan initiated in 1938, the Japanese classified stateless German Jewish refugees in the same category as stateless White Russians.⁶¹ In fact, the first proposals for the ghetto suggested the disposition of the White Russians as well as Jewish refugees.⁶² If the White Russians did influence Japanese officials in creating the Jewish ghetto, they surely would not have expected to be targeted for the same treatment.

Continuity and Change in Japanese Policy

Despite third party influences on Japanese policy, the introduction of the ghetto in 1943 was as much about continuity in Japanese thinking about the Jews as it was about change. Japanese policy toward the refugees was based on a desire to use the Jews for their own purposes in Shanghai and in the larger war effort. In 1938, the Five Ministers’ Conference developed a policy that sought to use the Jews “for the dual purpose of encouraging American Jewish capital to invest in the Far East and to create a more favourable atmosphere in the United States toward Japan.”⁶³ The Japanese eventually came to have doubts about this plan.⁶⁴ Not only did they fail to raise capital from American Jews, but relations between the two countries deteriorated sharply when they went to war in late 1941. At a meeting in 1942, known as the *Liaison Conference*, Japanese officials reassessed the policy they had developed in 1938 and decided on a less liberal approach to the treatment of Jewish refugees.⁶⁵ However, the “Policy Plan” adopted in 1942 was a preliminary step towards the creation of the ghetto in 1943.

Japanese officials created the ghetto as a practical measure to prevent what they perceived to be a “danger of incurring unforeseen adversities”⁶⁶ from the growing Jewish Refugee population. While the Policy Plan did not specifically mention a ghetto, the plan called for the implementation of “appropriate security measures.”⁶⁷ In 1943, these measures were implemented through the creation of a ghetto for the refugees. In the proclamation of

⁶¹ *Jewish Measures.*, in Kranzler, 620

⁶² Yano, quoted in Kranzler, 623

⁶³ *Jewish Measures.*, in Kranzler, 620

⁶⁴ Yoshiuori Inuzuka, “Explanation for Doubts In Operations on Jews in America,” 1940, quoted in Kranzler., Appendix D, 620

⁶⁵ *Jewish Measures.*, in Kranzler, 620

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the ghetto, the Japanese clearly state that it was established out of “military necessity.”⁶⁷ By placing the Jews in a restricted area, the Japanese could more closely monitor their activities in an effort to prevent prostitution, crime and civil unrest.⁶⁸ Kubota, the head of the Japanese Naval Intelligence Bureau, explained the creation of the ghetto with claims that a number of Jewish refugees were a “hindrance to the greater war effort.”⁶⁹

At the same time, the Japanese were selective in their treatment of the Jews. Japanese officials used a double standard in the relocation of Jews to the ghetto. Jewish refugees who were “persons of property, wealth and some community influence”⁷⁰ were exempt from relocation. This double standard also has its roots in the “Policy Plan” of 1942, which stated that “Jewish people who can be used by Japan ... will be given good treatment.”⁷¹ Japanese officials did, in fact, attempt to use the Jews later in the war to communicate with American Jews in order to “mediate a peace with the US.”⁷²

The creation of the ghetto can be seen as a continuation of the pragmatic “fugu” approach that the Japanese had taken since the Jewish refugees arrived. The initial approach was to treat the Jews well, in an attempt to “prepare” the Jews to best suit Japan’s purposes. When it became clear that this approach was not working, Japanese policy-makers changed their focus to the other side of the “fugu” strategy – where the deadly poison is released because the blowfish is not cooked in the right way. After 1941, Japan increasingly feared what they perceived to be the dangerous power of the Jews. The ghetto was in part a preventative measure to ensure that the Jew’s “deadly poison” could not be released.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Jewish Measures.*, in Kranzler, 620.

⁶⁸ Ross, 167

⁶⁹ Wasserstein, 148

⁷⁰ Fiszman, 451

⁷¹ *Jewish Measures.*, in Kranzler, 620

⁷² *Ibid.*, 174

⁷³ Goodman and Miyazawa, 133

Conclusion

1938-1943 was a unique period in Japanese-Jewish relations in Shanghai. What was at first seen as a very liberal and open policy on the part of the Japanese changed almost overnight with the creation of the ghetto. Historians have attributed this change to the influence of Nazi Germany and to a lesser extent, the influence of White Russians living in Shanghai. While these two influences were important, they mask the fact that Japanese policy throughout the period was in fact consistent and that the decision to set up a ghetto was based as much on changing Japanese priorities as it was on the influence of third parties. Prior to 1942, the Japanese were mostly interested in using the Jews as a way of building good relations with the United States. After the two countries went to war, the Jews became less useful. As conditions in Shanghai worsened, the Jewish refugee community was increasingly seen as a problem, which the Japanese sought to address by creating a ghetto. Even so, their actions never took on the anti-Semitism that was widespread in Germany and which led to the extermination of millions of Jews. Throughout the period, the Japanese did not significantly change their view of the Jews, or their policy of pragmatism towards the Jewish refugee community. The establishment of the ghetto was merely an extension of their earlier policy, which was to do what was best for the Japanese. Why the Japanese held an inflated view of Jewish power and influence for so many years remains an unanswered question. Nevertheless, it was this exaggerated impression of Jewish power that coloured much of Japanese thinking between 1938 and 1943. In this sense, the “mystery” that surrounds the change in policy in 1943 is not quite as mysterious, but is part of a larger story about Japanese-Jewish relations that predates the arrival of Jewish refugees in Shanghai, and which persisted even after the creation of the ghetto.

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