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Tekoah (Tukaczynski), Yosef oral history interview

Steve Hochstadt

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**YOSEF TEKOAH
(TUKACZYNSKI)**

BEIJING, CHINA

APRIL 28, 1989

Interviewer: Steve Hochstadt

**Transcription: Scott Pugh
Steve Hochstadt**

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Steve Hochstadt: (Please begin) maybe by identifying yourself, and when you were born, and then . . .

Yosef Tekoah: Yes.

SH: . . . your story.

YT: My name is Yosef Tekoah. Is it like this? Is it okay?

SH: This is fine.

YT: I was born in 1925. My background is as follows. After the Bolshevik Revolution, three brothers, my father and two of his brothers, were living in a city called Perm, in the Ural Mountains, which really divide Russian, European Russia from Asiatic Russia and Siberia. That particular city and that particular region, during the Tsarist days, was the most developed industrial center of Russia. And a few years after the Revolution, Lenin instituted a policy which was known as the New Economic Policy, which recreated some private enterprise. This in an effort to bolster the economy of the country. And the family remained in Perm, until the end of that economic policy, and that was in 1929. And then it split. Two of my uncles, with their children, decided to move eastward, and cross the Chinese border, into China. My father went westward and went to Poland. The two uncles settled in Harbin, which is in the northern part of China, in Manchuria.

SH: Why did they choose China?

YT: They chose China because, first of all, they were halfway between the west European frontier of the Soviet Union, and the eastern, if you wish, Pacific borders of the Soviet Union. And they apparently considered it easier to get across the border, out of the Soviet Union, as refugees, into China, rather than crossing it in the west, into what was central and western Europe. My father, who at the time held a Polish passport, apparently felt it easier to move westward. That is as far as I understand the reasoning. Anyway, the three brothers and their families were reunited eventually in Harbin. And there they established an international business primarily in trade of commodities: exports from the north and imports into that part of China. I do remember as a child, they were importing, for instance, large quantities of textiles, from Italy, from Poland, from other parts of Europe. Probably also from Japan at that time, though it was mainly European. English, England was a supplier (coughs) of textiles. They had branches, the firm had branches in other cities of northern China and in Shanghai. And one of the three brothers eventually moved from Harbin to Shanghai. Shanghai was at that time the largest city in the entire world, a very cosmopolitan center, one of the largest ports in the entire world. And gradually the headquarters, if you wish, of the company, were moved from Harbin in the north. While there remained a branch in Harbin (coughs), and, as I said, in other cities to the north, like Mukden and Tientsin, the headquarters were installed in Shanghai itself. My uncle, who had moved there, was followed by my father and his family, and eventually by the third brother, my second uncle who had remained in Harbin for a longer time, and who eventually also moved to Shanghai. One of my uncles, the one really who pioneered really the move southward, also eventually moved to the United States.

Because once the headquarters were established in Shanghai, the entire company and its international trade became very much America-oriented, and expanded into exports from China of such commodities as bristles, that was a very, very large trade, furs, and imports into China of steel, of pharmaceuticals, of conserves, foods, and fruit, and meat, from the United States. So that a branch was eventually established in New York with one of my uncles.

SH: You know when that was?

YT: That was before World War II. It must have been, I would say, 1939, something like that. When I say "before World War II," before the United States became involved, following Pearl Harbor and World War II, when travel from the Far East to the United States was still free and possible, before the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, if you wish. So they moved there. The remaining family stayed on in Shanghai, and remained in Shanghai during the war. Immediately after the war, my brother and I took what was probably the first freighter out of Shanghai to San Francisco. And we went there to continue our studies. My brother at, at Berkeley, and I at Harvard. We divided the continent between the two of us in a sense. We were followed by another cousin of ours, who went to Juilliard Music Academy in New York.¹ The family itself remained, or the parents, let us say, my parents and my uncle and his wife, remained in Shanghai until 1949. That's when they left, my parents moving to the United States, my uncle moving to Israel. I myself concluded my studies at Harvard, and during Israel's war of independence went to Israel. I became involved in Israel's struggle for independence almost immediately after my arrival in the United States, because, in 1946 already, Great Britain decided to place the question of the future of the Palestine Mandate before the United Nations. I was studying international law. I was very much interested in the effort that was being made to establish a Jewish state. International law was a very valued field or profession in those days; there were very few experts in international law. So that when I volunteered while I was studying at Harvard to help the delegation of the Jewish Agency, which represented, really, the Jews of Palestine at the time in their political struggle, they received me with open arms, and I became a young assistant member of the delegation. And during the summer vacations, during holiday periods, sometimes here and there on an emergency basis, I used to travel from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to New York, and help them in their efforts, in preparing legal opinions, and preparing analyses of various questions, and so on. And that was really the background and the development of a life story. Once in Israel, as I said, I was the only member of the family that made *aliyah*, as we say, that left for Israel, that came to Israel. All the others, my parents, my brother, my sister, remained abroad. And having established this link with the political effort for, for the creation of a Jewish state, once independence was proclaimed, I became a member of the Foreign Ministry in Israel. First as a deputy legal advisor, which was a natural continuation of my studies. And then as director of the armistice affairs, which in the years immediately following the creation of an independent state, constituted really the framework of our relations with the Arabs. At the end of our war of independence we signed armistice agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon. And for many years, that was the framework in which we used to meet with Arab

¹ Tekoah refers here to the Juilliard School of Music, an independent school in New York City, now named simply the Juilliard School.

representatives, in which we used to deal with border problems, border incidents, conflicts, etc., etc. I was given charge in the Foreign Ministry of that field, and became also a legal advisor to our Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, and then continued with my diplomatic career, serving in a number of capitals, including Rio de Janeiro at that time, later on Brasilia, which became the capital of Brasil, in Moscow, and for a second time in the United Nations. My first stint was in 1958 when I was Abba Eban's deputy in the United Nations. And then I was, after a number of years, nine years really, came back as head of the delegation. Less than nine years. Yes.

SH: Could we go back now to . . .

YT: Certainly.

SH: . . . to the Soviet Union. What kind of business did your family, or your father and uncles, have in, in the Soviet Union before they left?

YT: I, I, as far as I know, though this is something that I'm not very clear, it was also trade, commerce. I, I'm not sure whether it was with foreign countries, but perhaps because of my father's being a Polish citizen, there may have been contacts with abroad, and possibilities of international trade. But I was not really aware of exactly what fields of trade they were involved in.

SH: Can you say anything about the decision to leave Poland and go to Shanghai, about when that was, and what kinds of preparations your family made to take that trip?

YT: Well, as I've said, what happened was that the three brothers divided. But they divided, I think, in order to get reunited, as far as I can recollect, what I heard, what I understood, in the family, in order to be reunited. So, for a number of years, there must have been contact, there was undoubtedly contact, between them, while my father was the one who was in charge of exporting from Europe various commodities, in particular, as far as I know, textiles, to northern China, to Harbin. Because I do remember that he used to visit Italy, for instance, very frequently. And Poland was, of course, a large supplier of the heavy textiles which were very important in northern China. The climate being so cold there, you know, they needed it for heavy coats, and even suits, and so on. Now the decision, therefore, to unite in Harbin, was based first of all on a desire to be united with the other part of the family. But probably also, we are talking now of the thirties, mid-thirties, because the international climate in Europe, especially those that could see beyond their town or country, and that was undoubtedly true of three brothers, two sitting in distant China, one travelling through Europe, the climate was obviously getting worse, politically from the Jewish point of view. And that, I presume, you know we never discussed it, must have encouraged my father to take the decision, to implement the desire to be reunited with his two brothers already in Harbin.

SH: And what year did you travel to Shanghai?

YT: We came to Shanghai . . .

SH: Not to Shanghai, to Harbin.

YT: To Harbin, it was the mid-thirties, mid-thirties. We stayed with the two uncles, as I said, until 1938, as far as I remember, 1938. Then we moved to Shanghai. As I mentioned already, we were preceded by one of my uncles, who had come to Shanghai earlier on several (unintelligible).

SH: Could you tell me something now about your life in Shanghai, as far as school, Jewish life, family life, community?

T; Shanghai in those days to people like ourselves was really a window to the big world, the outside. After spending some years in Harbin, an inland city in the north of China, removed from the centers of international life and trade, basically, we suddenly found ourselves in a city which was very cosmopolitan, as I said earlier, the largest city in the entire world. The large foreign population, consisting of Britishers, Americans, other nationalities, with a French town which was basically a French colony. An International Settlement dominated by the British, and the Americans, but the British were undoubtedly the dominant force, in those days, in the International Settlement. This was the big world, for everybody who, who lived in Shanghai in those days. And this expressed itself in a choice of schools, for us as children, in a choice of particular interests or social associations. It was the open world, it was the big world, in every sense of the term. Unlike the Jewish people who came as refugees from Central Europe later, we were settled there, well established. A large part of the Russian Jewish community was well off. Now, my family was very, very well off. In Jewish life, it counts what your financial position is, and the very fact, I'm interpreting it, that my father was chosen as chairman of the community, and served as such during a number of years, is an indication of that. So here we were in a city which was very fascinating from the point of view of its cosmopolitanism, from the point of view of its tremendous international business activity. In those days I think the United States, for instance, had more investments in China than in any other part of the world outside the United States. And one should check whether the volume of those investments had been overtaken, in recent years even, by American investments in any other country, presently. So here you were really in the heart of the universe, in a sense. For us children this was, children and young people, this was obviously fascinating. You could meet people from everywhere. You had friends who came from India, and you had friends who were from Australia, and you had friends who were from America. And if you went for summer to Japan, you met again foreigners that came for the summer vacation to Japan from all parts of the world. At first we went to the Jewish school, which we visited. But the Jewish school was only, as far as I remember, up to the first class of high school. And then we moved to an English school, a British school. There were universities. I had time, upon my graduation, to go to a French university. My brother went to an American university, St. John's. It was a life of high standards, I would say. Yet when I think of the Jewish aspects of it, it was also a very active and satisfying experience. There was a Jewish youth organization, Betar. There were other groups. I was involved in the establishment of the B'nai B'rith junior organization, junior B'nai B'rith organization, the Aleph Zadik Aleph, which was basically an American organization, and we were the first ones to establish such a

chapter in Shanghai, in China.²

SH: For what reason did you organize, help to organize that group? What were you hoping to achieve?

YT: Activity, expressing our interest in Jewishness, in Jewish life. You were free to stay away from all this. It's good that you're asking me that question. In other words you could lead a life, and I presume some did, of being Jewish, but basically a white person, a foreigner in China, and have very little contact with Jewish life. Our family, especially my part of the family, my father, brought us up in a spirit of Jewishness, Zionism. I personally became very, very much interested in Jewish history. I remember devouring books on Jewish history, as a child and then a youth. Not in school, because it went far beyond the curriculum of the Jewish school, and of course in the British school there were no classes, no courses in Judaica in any sense. When I realized what the Jewish people is, its heritage, what it stands for, I reacted, I think, as one who normally, objectively, if one is not burdened by complexes, would. In other words I said to myself, "This is a tremendous treasure! I have to do something about this treasure, this heritage becoming meaningful to me." So it was meaningful to me by my being a member of the Betar organization. It was meaningful to me by my, at one certain point, (coughs) saying "I want to go beyond that." I heard of B'nai B'rith and then its ideals and so on. And as I said, life in Shanghai was very much U.S.-oriented for us. Here was an American-Jewish youth organization. So we established a chapter of that. We were members of the Jewish troop of British Boy Scouts in Shanghai. (coughs) But it was all a kind of expression, if you wish, of pride in being what you are. You felt happy by being Jewish, by being able to practice Jewishness, by being able to find inspiration in Jewishness. That's at least the way I looked upon it all.

SH: You mentioned when we went to the Jewish Club that you'd given a speech there. You're, you obviously were politically engaged at an earlier age than most people.

YT: I was, I was Jewish engaged, I would say, as I said. Because the speeches I gave there were basically non-political but Jewish. For instance, if there was a meeting, or rather, a function, dedicated to Herzl's anniversary, yes, Herzl, the father of the concept of a modern Jewish state. But it was not my taking one political view or another, but my speaking about the Jewish people in general. And so it was on various occasions. I remember, for instance, when the American troops liberated Shanghai at the end of the war, and a special service was arranged for them, to welcome them, at Ohel Rachel, Rachel, which you visited, the synagogue next to the Jewish school. I was the one, young as I was at the time (Tekoah was about 20 -- S.H.), who greeted the troops on behalf of the Jewish community, in a speech from the pulpit, and welcomed the chaplain, the Jewish chaplain, an officer. I think he was the rank of major, by the name of Fine. Don't remember his first name, Alvin Fine, I think, Alvin Fine, if I'm not mistaken. So it was not really political, we were more Jewish in our attitude, and taking interest in what Jewishness meant and stood for. And in that sense I became involved, also in

² The Aleph Zadik Aleph, or AZA, is a worldwide organization of the B'nai B'rith for boys aged 15 - 21, founded in the United States in 1923.

public appearances.

SH: Could you say more about your father's activities as a head of the Jewish community?

YT: Well, to be, to be very candid, I think you must have also felt, the life, the kind of life that we led, was a life of material ease, of social activity, of interest in various groups and various organizations. As children, as young people even, one did not take the greatest of interest in exactly what your father did or didn't do. I remember visiting the huge offices of my father's firm twice.

SH: Where were they?

YT: Somewhere downtown Shanghai, I wouldn't remember the address. As I say, I must have visited them no more than twice. I remember the warehouses, next to the offices. Because, as I said, if you imported steel and imported pharmaceuticals and imported textiles, these were products that occupied a lot of space. I remember going with my father once to the port, to see how steel was being unloaded. I suddenly took an interest in it. But basically life for young people was so active, in the various fields that I indicated earlier, you have to add to it also social life as young people, that one did not really sit down with one's father and say, "Now, father, what did you do today? What are you really doing? How much are you earning? What is the turnover of the company? What's happening in the Jewish community?" I don't remember asking these questions. My interest was expressed, interest let's say in communal life, was expressed more by my devouring books on Jewish history; by my, now suddenly I remember editing an English supplement to the Jewish bul-, the Jewish paper. It was, I think, a bi-monthly.

SH: Is this "Israel's Messenger?" Was that the name?

YT: No, it was of the Jewish community. The "Israel Messenger" was published by Ezra (coughs). And slowly, it began to appear less and less. I wouldn't be able to tell you whether it reached four or two or one issues a year. But I remember that it was considered to be a dying paper, because the Baghdadi, or Iraqi community, Jewish community was very small. There were only about thousand people in that community, and about eight thousand in the Russian Jewish community. And if you look at it as an Ashkenazi community, strengthened later on by the arrivals from Poland, from Germany, from Austria, as the war broke out, as the war clouds began to appear on the horizon in, in Europe, there were about more than thirty thousand Ashkenazi Jews and a thousand Iraqi, let's say, or, Jews. The "Messenger," started out by Mr. Ezra, who for many years was editor, I think, went down very much after his death. I'm referring to a very lively, as far as I remember, paper that was being published in Russian, by the Russian Jewish community. And I began, again out of this desire to express, give expression to my Jewishness, I began to edit a little supplement in English, that was circulated as part, as an insert into that Russian bulletin. To go back to your question about my father's chairmanship, I do remember, for instance, when refugees from Central Europe began to arrive. It was a problem for the community. And though money was being received

from the Joint,³ there was never enough. And the community had to raise additional funds, and had to supplement these funds. I do remember during that period, which was really most of the period that was spent in Shanghai, because Central European Jews began to arrive in Shanghai 1938-9, I would say, our home was never just a family home. I don't remember a Friday evening or Saturday eve meal, a Shabbat meal, without guests, usually from the, from among the people that came from Europe at the time, who, who needed the warmth, the hospitality and the care. I remember my brother and I became friendly with a young man, a refugee from Poland. And we asked our parents, couldn't he, he was by himself, this young man, couldn't he stay with us? And they said okay. So we suddenly had a third brother in the family who stayed with us for a certain time. The man today is, let me see, he has been in business for many years, including the Far East, came back here. But as far as I know, he is in Israel, settled, retired in Israel. So that I do remember that, again, to sum it up, this was a very Jewish-minded community. It had its institutions in addition to the Jewish Club, that you, that we visited, and which had meetings, lectures here and there, a theater performance, in addition to social activities. But the community also set up a hospital. And, how shall I call it, the old, old folks' home, for older people.

SH: This is different from the hospital that was in Hongkew?

YT: Yes, yes.

SH: This was a hospital on the other side?

YT: This was the hospital, yes, yes. I'm speaking now really even before, these are institutions established before the arrival of the Jews from Central Europe, who added a great deal of activity, Jewish activity, to the Shanghai scene. I remember, you know, I remember being present once when there was literally distribution of money. In those days, apparently, nobody used to go and nobody had bank accounts, of the Central European arrivals. And in, in the, it may have been, as a matter of fact, not in the Club but in the synagogue itself. I happened to be there, and in one of those side rooms that we used for offices, people came in, registered to receive their allowance, their monthly allowance from the community.

SH: How did the, how did the war, and the Japanese occupation of the city affect your life, affect your father's business?

YT: There's no doubt whatsoever that as far as life is concerned, it brought about a marked change, because we suddenly found ourselves under Japanese rule. But you must bear in mind a number of things. One, when we lived in Harbin, Manchuria, then known as the Empire of Manchukuo, was under Japanese rule, Japanese control. Yes, they did have an Emperor, but he was basically a puppet, in Japanese hands. The troops that we used to see in the streets, the authorities that we were in touch with, the representatives of the authorities that participated in Jewish gatherings in Harbin, as far as I remember, were Japanese. I remember distinctly events organized by the Jewish community, and Japanese military officers,

³ The Joint Distribution Committee, an American Jewish philanthropic organization.

and Japanese who took particular interest in the Jewish people, coming from Tokyo to participate, as representatives of the Japanese government, in those events. In other words, when we found ourselves in Shanghai, under Japanese occupation, when the Japanese abolished of course the French town, French authorities, though as far as I remember, in the case of the French Concession, because of the existence of the Vichy government, they did leave some French authorities in place. But they did dismantle completely the International Settlement government, which was British-American. To us, who had lived in Harbin under Japanese occupation, from the psychological point of view, I'd start first of all from that, it was not an extreme change. It was not completely new to us. Secondly, the Japanese, and we knew that, as I said, we had contact with them, we lived under their rule in Harbin. We used to go every summer to Japan on holiday. Japan was a very beautiful, very attractive place for us. Being in touch with the Japanese was not something negative, on the contrary. In other words, even as children we were brought up in a spirit of, to use a Japanese term in those days, later on taken over by other powers in the post-World War II period, we were not strangers to coexistence with the Japanese. So that in many senses, life continued to flow. The Jewish School was the Jewish School. The British schools were put under Japanese control, but they continued to teach, because by then at least the one that we were in was more international than purely British. You had students from different nationalities. The French university, which I attended, where I started my law studies, remained intact. St. John's University, an American university, where my brother went, (coughs) was taken over by the Japanese, but the teaching continued. There were many Chinese teachers and so on at St. John's. So that life did not change radically, when war broke out in, when war broke out in 1941. This was true, if you ask my impression, also of the life of the Central European arrivals. In other words, they at first came to a Shanghai, which was an open city, which was very hospitable. Many of them, as you may have heard, even in the interviews that you made, lived in the same areas as the older residents. It was only later on that the Japanese, under German Nazi pressure, took the first step and divided the Jewish community, between the old residents, or the residents of Shanghai, and the new arrivals, the refugees, and placed the new arrivals in Hong Kong, in Hongkew. So that for us, the old residents, who went through the war, we knew of the political threats and menaces. There was a time when we heard through various sources that the Germans were demanding much more than the Japanese were ready to do, that the Germans were insisting, literally, on the liquidation of the entire Jewish community, the entire Jewish population, in Shanghai. But life continued. In Hongkew, at that time, people lived under very, very difficult conditions. And yet I remember socializing, coming over to Hongkew, being invited to parties in Hongkew. As, as young people, you know, we used to meet, we used to dance, we used to drink together. This was something that, of course, in Europe, at that time under German occupation, would've been unheard of. So that I must be fair to the Japanese. Yes, there are these memories of a man by the name of Ghoya, who called himself the King of the Jews, and who was extremely brutal.⁴ There were memories of a man married to a Japanese lady, who became a kind of contact man, and really took over even the chairmanship of the Jewish Community Association, became a link. And I think that there were all kinds of payments of moneys to the Japanese authorities by the

⁴ Ghoya was an official in the Japanese bureau for Stateless Refugees Affairs, in charge of issuing passes to leave the Hongkew ghetto.

Jewish community, contributions to this, and contributions to that, as far as I can recollect. But there's definitely no comparison between what was going on in Europe at the time, and what was going on in Shanghai.

SH: There was something I wanted to ask. Oh, when you, or the, the larger Jewish community, heard about the German pressure on the Japanese, was there any attempt to counter that pressure by talking to the Japanese, convincing them this was a bad idea? Was th- . . .

YT: Look, again I was too young to, to be able to answer authoritatively. It's the older generation at the time who were leaders of the community. There were contacts, there were contacts. But, and I know that there was talk and there was discussion. But I also remember that a few of the Jewish leaders were actually imprisoned, for no reason whatsoever, at a certain point, probably, or perhaps, I would say, as a kind of reaction to their efforts to try to pressure or influence the Japanese policies. There was this man by the name of Kohn, K-O-H-N, who was a kind of liaison, who was a doctor by profession, married to a Japanese woman, had lived in Japan and settled in . . .

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

YT: So there's no doubt that there was an ongoing contact between the Jewish community and the leaders of the community and the Japanese authorities, and they did try to alleviate the situation. I have no doubt, for instance, that the fact that one could get permits to leave Hongkew to work, go back to Hongkew, the fact that there was no restriction on movement by the old residents into Hongkew whenever they wanted, day and night, as far as I remember. There was never a problem of arranging with our friends from the German-Jewish community to have a party on Saturday evening, and we coming over. It was normal, normal life from that point of view. So that there was undoubtedly an ongoing dialogue, let's say, between the Jewish community and the Japanese authorities, a dialogue in which there were moments of unpleasantness, to say the least, and yet also a, a certain understanding on the part of the Japanese authorities, that they can treat the Jewish community here in a way different from what the Germans demanded.

SH: Now, I have, you have brought up a number of different things that I want to ask. So I have these questions, which don't have any order to them. How did, how was it that you were able to leave Shanghai and go to the United States so early? Were there any difficulties in getting a visa to go to the United States? How was. . .

YT: No, I went as a student. I went as a student and there was no problem. I was admitted to (coughs) university and went as a student.

SH: I heard you mention yesterday, as we were driving around, being able to drive and driving cars . . .

YT: Yes.

SH: . . . and that seemed to me an interesting detail.

YT: Yeah, I learned how to drive in th-, in Shanghai. But this must have been, when I think back, may have still been during the actual war period, because I do remember that for fuel they were using the special contraptions in those days for buses and for cars. They were not using oil. They were burning some other substance to drive cars and buses during the war.

SH: Did I, do I remember you saying that, after the war, when the Americans came, you were able to dr-, use their, your knowledge of driving to work for the Americans?

YT: My brother, my brother did, yes. My brother was a bit younger and, while continuing with his studies, he felt, you know, that this was a great event, the Americans coming over, liberating Shanghai. And everybody felt like family. There, many Jewish G.I.'s, that group, as I said, we welcomed a large group with a special service in the synagogue. Many of the G.I.'s became personal family friends. It was true probably of, of all the Jewish families at the time, both in Hongkew and in French town, because I remember that they began to come over to our home for dinners, for Shabbat meals, for outings with the younger generation and so on. Boris Katz, for instance, showed me a picture in which he appears and I appear with a number of American G.I.'s, a army man, and a sailor and so on. Those are all Jewish boys who were in the army in those days or in the navy.

SH: Some people have mentioned the presence in Shanghai of members of the Gestapo, or at least of Germans during the war.

YT: Yes.

SH: Did you ever see them, or how many of them were there? No one has been able to say anything very specific about that.

YT: Yes, because I don't remember seeing them parading in the streets, in uniforms. I at least don't recollect that. But there was awareness, of course. There was a German community in Shanghai at the time. So that, first of all, from within the community you must have had members of German organizations. From within the community you must have had, at least representatives of the Gestapo. And, in addition too, because of the fact that you had a relatively large Jewish population, you did, I presume, have a special German interest in being represented here, with the Japanese authorities.

SH: The, the family, or the man from Taiwan, Andrei Chouraqui, had a story about Jewish gangsters. He had met a man named Nathaniel Rabin, who said he had ran, who had told Andrei that he ran a casino, underground casino in Shanghai. Do you know anything about that?

YT: No. I do remember, only one tragic event, and like so many tragic things that it remains in your memory. There was among the German-Jewish refugees a man, who was very tough and bulky. And they were saying that he was a guard in one of the casinos. And one evening, one night he tried to bounce somebody. And that somebody, I don't remember whether it was Japanese, it may have been a Japanese man, just took out a pistol and shot him. And Jewish people running underground casinos, first of all, I don't think casinos were underground, necessarily. He may have, for all I know, had something going on in Hongkew. God knows. But . . .

SH: It's the kind of story that needs some confirmation, and I (laughs) . . .

YT: At least.

SH: . . . looking, looking for some.

YT: Yeah. No, no.

SH: You, obviously, knew Boris at the time.

YT: Yes, yes.

SH: Did, did you also know Yehuda, the Halevy family?⁵

YT: I may have known his older brothers. Yehuda is younger. Yehuda left as, as a very, very young person. But I may have run into him because, you know, the Jewish people at that time were all together, basically. In other words, the Sephardic, or Baghdadi Jews, as they liked to call themselves, because most of them originated from Baghdad, though in those days we used to call them Sephardic, rather than Baghdadi, comingled with the Ashkenazi, with the Russian Jews, socially, in school, in Jewish organizations, be it in Betar, be it in the Boy Scouts, be it in the junior B'nai B'rith. We had young people from different parts of the community. So that if I don't remember Yehuda Halevy, it's simply because he was very young in those days. He was a baby as compared to the teenagers that we were (coughs) already.

SH: Could you say something about contacts with Chinese people? I presume your family had some servants. That's one form of contact.

YT: Yes, yes.

⁵ See interview with Yehuda Halevy, born in Shanghai into a Jewish family of Bagdadi origin.

SH: What kinds of contacts did your family, or did you have with . . .

YT: The servants, there was always a Chinese cook in the home. There were a few servants to take care of the house, and so on. I would say it was an easy-going family kind of relationship, similar probably to what one finds in the United States today, if you have a maid, or especially if you happen to be, let's say, a, a white family, and you have a black servant. A white family on the east coast of the United States, you have some Puerto Ricans or Jamaicans, or the west coast some Mexicans working. I don't think there was any difference in that. Perhaps there was more intimacy, because the servants here, in many families, in our family, had their own accommodations within the house, within the home. That was one, one type of contact, as you say. And the recollection of it is something very simple, intimate, warm. The *amah*, the Chinese *amah*, who looked after the children, let's say, became a kind of governess, almost. The Chinese can be very warm and very sensitive. Then there was contact in school. Especially in the British School which, as I said, was (coughs), became international. There was contact in business. I remember being taken, I don't think it was my father, but one of the managers of the firm, there was a wedding of one of the employees, Chinese employees, and I was taken to the big feast. Beyond that there was not much contact of the, of most of the Jewish community because we were in business, so the contacts in business (unintelligible) social. In those days the separation between the foreign community, in the broader sense, irrespective of nationality, and Chinese was very marked, so that the contacts were basically what I say. In universities, we went to university. And that's, that's about it. That's about it. It wasn't a, a life in which, let's say, our parents had a Chinese friend, or friends that you would invite for a game of mah-jongg. You had your game of mah-jongg with other Jewish women usually. And the Chinese didn't mix, didn't mingle socially.

SH: You've mentioned the, the unity of the Jewish community, despite being divided into Ashkenazi, or Russian, and German, and, and Iraqi. Were there divisions also among these groups? Some, I rem-, have read some things that talked about some, about the German refugee community in Hongkew feeling some resentment about the, the much more privileged situation, because of circumstance, of the older residents, who were not . . .

YT: Well, that was natural. That was natural. Once the German, it wasn't only the Germans, there, there were large groups of Polish refugees. There was a whole yeshiva which was mentioned by Curt,⁶ as we visited Hongkew, consisting, as far as I remember, of more than four hundred members, that was saved by coming, leaving Poland and coming to Shanghai. I think it's probably the only yeshiva out of Poland, which in those days was a center of Jewish learning, that succeeded in saving its members, because they all got up, young men, students and their teachers, and left, came to Shanghai. The geographic separation meant some distinction, obviously. It didn't affect the younger generation, those that, as I said, used to spend their weekends together, used to visit each other for parties. And at a time when it was more difficult to get a permit, let's say, for young people, who didn't work, to go out of Hongkew, we used to go *en masse* to Hongkew. Now, the material situation, obviously, was much, much more difficult for the new arrivals, for the refugees who came without material

⁶ See interview with Curt Pollack, a German-Jewish refugee, Shanghai, April 22, 1989.

wealth, much more difficult than for the older residents, who had their homes, who had their businesses, who continued, as I said, in answer to your question, what the Japanese occupation did to us, we continued more or less a normal life: study and work and business, socially, club, and so on. A situation like this only naturally generates some resentment, as you said. I would say also envy, which would be natural under these circumstances. Here we are, living in congested quarters. Here we are, having to get special permits to go outside of Hongkew. Here we are, looking for sources of income, new arrivals. And here is a community much larger, well established, basically. But what I do remember, as I say, is one, that there was continuous contact, that there was care. For instance, the four hundred or so members of the Yeshiva, the Yeshiva of Mir, Mirrer Yeshiva⁷ as they used to call it in Yiddish, were young men who didn't have the slightest idea of business. These were students. Some of them, though, I do remember, managed to get themselves involved in all kinds of commercial activities, and made out pretty well. Some that I know, for instance, in the United States today, that are very well off. They started out in Shanghai. But the mass of these young men, students at the Yeshiva, had to have continued support. And as I say, as far as I know, as far as I remember, the moneys that were being sent by the Joint were minimal. And they had to be supplemented by the local Jewish community. (coughs)

SH: I think you've answered all the, the questions that I'd written down. Are there some other strong memories, incidents, events in your life that, that stand out?

YT: As I said, you know, (laughs) as a kind of introduction before you started, bear in mind, you know, I left Shanghai, I went to study in the United States. While studying I became involved in the political efforts to reach independence for Israel. I went to Israel. I became involved, very, very actively, in Israel's foreign policy. In other words, it was destiny that, in every period of my career, I was really in central positions. At the time of the armistice agreements, when they constituted a framework of our relations with our Arab neighbors, I was in charge of that framework. Later on I had very interesting, fascinating posts, like Moscow, twice at the United Nations. So that the distant past, which we returned to now during this visit, was somewhere pushed aside as far as your subconscious, even, memory is concerned. You make an effort, I wouldn't say, to block it out, but put it aside because there are so many other things that you have to remember, and be aware of, and be conscious of, because there are so many things that you are participating in, that as, as life goes on. Like, for instance, if you take even some of the members of our group, who left Shanghai, who went to a particular place, be it the United States, be it Israel, started their career, and continued 'till retirement, or are still continuing with it. It's very simple.

SH: Well, even compared to them your memory is, is good, of th- . . .

YT: Really?

SH: . . . of these, from my point of view as an interviewer, you remember quite a lot. I'd like

⁷ The yeshiva in Mir in Lithuania was founded in 1815, and came to play a central role in the city's religious life.

to ask you two more questions.

YT: Go ahead.

SH: This one may seem obvious, but, but maybe it isn't. Why leave Shanghai in 1946? Your life there was, was not bad. What impelled you to leave?

YT: I already used the phrase that Shanghai was very America-oriented.

Peter de Krassel: Good morning!

SH: Hello, Peter.

YT: Welcome. You have to interview this guy. He's the most interesting of anybody (laughs) around here.

De Krassel: No, no.

YT: Peter . . .

De Krassel: I'm sorry to . . .

BREAK IN TAPE

YT: . . . started saying that, as I pointed out, Shanghai life, business, cultural, connections, was very much U.S.-oriented. One of my uncles had gone from Shanghai to the United States to establish a branch of the company, before the breakout of World War II. He was already there. As far as our studies are concerned, it was natural to feel, that once you finish high school here, or perhaps college here, you go to university in the United States. Here and there, some Jewish people (coughs) went to, to Great Britain; very few. I know one person that we may meet tomorrow evening, because I heard now from Hong Kong that they're arranging some little reception for us at the Jewish Center, and for many years he was honorary Consul General of Israel, though he never settled in Israel, he never came to Israel. But he was, his mother, rather, was a partner in one of the businesses of my father, and he went to university in Hong Kong. But the great majority of young people, if they wanted to continue their edu-, higher education, thought of the United States. In our case, in addition to that natural focusing on the United States, there was already the established family, the established business. So much so, I suddenly remembered a very curious point, that would be of interest. When Macarthur occupied Japan (coughs) and decided to save the Emperor, and decided to start rebuilding Japan, the economy of Japan, he gave out ten licenses to ten American firms to start business anew in Japan. One of the licenses was given to my family's firm, which by then was already an American firm. Okay? With a big office in New York, with branches, as I explained, in China, with connections in Japan. So that for us, it was almost a natural development. Shanghai was liberated. The American forces liberated

Shanghai. We continue the next stage of our life, of our career, of our studies, in the United States.

SH: When you went to the United States, did you assume, did you assume you would stay there? Did you hope to go to Israel? Did you think you'd go back to Shanghai?

YT: I, at, at that time, at that time, Israel was more of a dream to us. As I explained, we were brought up in a spirit of Jewishness, of Zionism, of love for Zion. But Israel was very distant and very much of a dream. I imagine that subconsciously we saw ourselves as remaining in the United States, as my brother did, as my parents later on did. My feeling for the Jewish struggle for the restoration of Israeli, or Jewish statehood, my sentiments for that proved to be much stronger than those of other members of the family. And that's why I became, almost immediately, after the arrival of, after my arrival in the United States, involved in the actual efforts on behalf of the Yishuv, that's the name that is given to the Jewish community of Palestine. That's before, before independence. But when we left China, yes, it was natural for everybody who went here, who came (I say here!) to the United States, to, to study, to think in terms of remaining, remaining, perhaps, for a number of years, perhaps coming back to China. I must add that we at least left so early that we were not conscious of the possibility of the revolution in China, and the, the change, the very drastic, radical change that occurred in the situation here. The communist armies, and Mao Tse Tung were in the interior, but here we had a large chunk of China under Chiang Kai-shek's rule, with tremendous American investments, international investments in general. The British had very great investments in Shanghai. And therefore there was no thought at that time, after the end of the war, '45, '46, that by 1949 everything would change. So there may have been some thought of the family continuing its business, at least, in Shanghai; the young people studying in the United States, remaining for their studies, were then coming back and continuing in business. (coughs)

SH: Did the family's business continue at all past 1949 in Shanghai?

YT: No, no.

SH: The fact that everybody left meant the end of the business in China.

YT: Yes, yes. But that was true of the entire foreign population. In other words, when the People's Republic was established, it was completely free of any foreign interests, investments, financial, business. That was the end of it. There must have been a period, you know, when they had very strong connections with the Soviets, and therefore there must be, must have been, a Soviet trading group, representatives in Shanghai, and offices of various Soviet organizations, trading, commercial, industrial, whatever. But Western businesses were out.

SH: I have one more retrospective question.

YT: Yes.

SH: What do you think the influence on your life, or on your ideas or opinions was, that you were in Shanghai, rather than, if we can imagine, that you had gone to the United States for all

of that time? How did that Shanghai experience affect you?

YT: I would say that the, the greatest impact was that Shanghai, being what it was in those days, made of youth, our young generation who lived in Shanghai, very cosmopolitan, very universal, if you wish, very open, very tolerant people. In other words, my interest in international life, in the world at large, in the universe, in international relations, were almost a natural outgrowth of the kind of international, cosmopolitan atmosphere in which we grew up. My interest in the United Nations, and I was interested. When I came to Harvard, I established what was at the time the first of United Nations' students associations, you know, supporting the idea of United Nations, inviting to Harvard representatives of foreign states. I remember being a proud possessor, owner of a nice car, and I was the one to meet these delegates, some of them very famous at the time, coming over to Harvard to speak, at our invitation. We brought over the Prime Minister of Poland, I remember, before the communist takeover of Poland. He was of, the head of the Peasant Party. There was a party like that in Poland. We brought over the British Ambassador. We brought over others to, to address students. We were the ones who organized it. In other words, Shanghai instilled in you this feeling for internationalism, this understanding, almost, of the world being a mosaic of nations, of cultures, of peoples. I'm speaking subjectively, but I, I think I'm putting some logic into my own life career by answering the question in the way I did.

SH: I think that's the end of what I wanted to ask you about your life in Shanghai. Do you think, but I want to ask you one question about this trip.

YT: Okay.

SH: And then I'll (laughs) let you relax. Do you foresee this trip having an impact on the relations between Israel and China?

YT: All, all I would say, Steven, is what I said yesterday to the AP, the head of the AP bureau here and in Beijing, who spoke to me briefly. As Mao said, the thousand-mile march began with one step. Let's hope, let's hope. There's no doubt that this was a significant step, that our visit was meaningful, that it was a first, after the separation, let's say, of the Jewish people from China. It was almost, as I said at the Seder, a symbolic return of the Jewish presence to China. So that that, in itself, is significant. It is significant that we found people very much interested in Jewish life, in Jewish history, in the Jewish culture. This was only the beginning of their work, of their studies, of their research, of their publications. I think I mentioned to you that I received as a present from one of those that we met at the Judaic Studies Association, a book in Chinese that he authored on the Sassoon family. There are not many books in many languages on that family, prominent as it was. And, other languages. We have one in Chinese. All this is very significant, undoubtedly. But looking to the future, rather than speculate, I say let's adopt Mao's adage to this particular development.

SH: I can't thank you enough.

END OF INTERVIEW