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**GEORGE LEONOF
SHANGHAI, CHINA
APRIL 19, 1989**

**Interviewers: Steve Hochstadt
Debbie Krisher**

**Transcription: Scott Pugh
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Steve Hochstadt: What I'd like to ask you is for your story from the beginning to the end.

George Leonof: Well, (laughs) I don't know if what I have to give you is much of a story, but I'd gladly answer any question you put to us.

SH: Well, I'm, what I'm, the question I would put to you is, starting from as far back as you can remember, to tell me about how your family got to China, and then your, how you got to Shanghai, and then your life, whatever you can remember of your life in Shanghai. And it's, I understand that, in some ways, it's very personal for me to ask this, and I . . .

GL: Oh, I don't mind personal questions.

SH: Tell what you want.

GL: Okay.

SH: I would, we may interrupt with questions. Mainly, I would maybe ask for more details, if you say something that, that interests me.

Sasson Jacoby: Maybe, maybe you have to go, as a sort of a preface, to go back in history a bit, because otherwise it's somewhat meaningless just to give a personal description of what we were and all that. We have to preface it with a bit of history of how Jews in modern times came to China.

SH: Well, that . . .

SJ: The beginnings of the Jewish communities in China.

SH: Those things I know something about, and what I'm hoping to do is collect enough stories . . .

GL: You also mean certain personal accounts, yes, that's what you want?

SH: Because your personal account and your personal account, and those of others have so much overlap that, after that, I hope that I'll be able to systematize it.

SJ: Do you know enough of the beginnings of the Jewish communities in China?

SH: Well, I know some.

SJ: I mean modern, in modern days, we're not talking about the Kaifeng Jews. That's something . . .

SH: Back too far.

SJ: . . . which we needn't touch.

SH: It's back too far. It's really back too far.

GL: It's something that nobody knows anything, no real anything about it.

SJ: How they came there. Whatever.

SH: So, just probably tell us what is . . .

SJ: It comes just after the Opium Wars, that's all. And if you know enough about it, there's no point in going over it again.

Debbie Krisher: I don't know enough about it. Please.

GL: I don't think so. You can learn all that from encyclopedias, relevant encyclopedias, or history books.

SJ: Not quite so easy. There is not a lot of written material about it, very little.

GL: Well . . .

SJ: And a lot of it is just sort of lost, and . . .

GL: It depends how you select your material, actually, but there is material available. And again, a good index . . .

SJ: And even . . .

GL: . . . a good library and you'd be all right.

SJ: No, no, you won't, George, because I know even the . . .

GL: You can't, you can't, I can talk there for hours (laughs).

SJ: Even the Hebrew University hasn't got enough materials, and they, and they relied on what they called "oral history." I know, they've interviewed me a couple times, and I've talked to them for hours about the beginnings of the Jews, and this that and the other, and it's not for publication, actually. It's for their records and their research. But if you know enough about it, then we'll leave it at that.

SH: Well, I'm interested in the things that we can't read about at all, that, your own stories. And what I would hope to do, I should say this, that I will be glad to give you back a transcript, when eventually I get this transcribed, of whatever you say, and I will try to preserve this in some archive eventually.

GL: Well, it's pretty late. I'll tell you what I can remember briefly in Harbin, and my memory is playing tricks, I think, with me, so I'll try to stick to what I think is authentic. First of all, I'll tell you, the Russian community altogether in Manchuria, started with the development of the Manchurian railway. The Russians had, the Russians, Imperial Russia won or forced a concession of three mile, a strip of six miles down the center of

Manchuria from, say, Man-chou-li, the border, Harbin, down to Dairen, through which they, on which they built a railway, and on which they had almost extra-territorial rights to engage in agriculture, if you wished, or engineering, but min-, coal mining was the main. Anyway, for the Jews, it was at that time, Russian Jews I speak about. Sass will tell you more about the Baghdadi, so-called Baghdadi Jews. It was a land of opportunity because they needed people. Jews provided a more educated and sophisticated element, and the Jews did fairly well in commerce and whatever they engaged in in Manchuria. That, to be very succinct, lasted till about the outbreak of the, of the Manchurian incident, when Japan attacked Chinese troops and Soviet troops in Manchuria. That's in . . .

SJ: 19-, sorry, 1931.

GL: Preceding that the activity was curtailed slightly as a result of the Russo-Japanese war. That, of course, you know.

SJ: 1904.

GL: And then, of course, after the Japanese, the Japanese didn't come to Manchuria for fun, they wanted to take over almost everything there was, and gradually they managed to get a stranglehold on most of the business life, whether commerce or industry in the area. They employed services of certain Russians, of course, certain people who collaborated with them. It wasn't also a war situation any more, mind you. It wasn't our war.

DK: Could you tell me what years this was?

GL: Pardon?

DK: Could you tell me about, like, is this right after the Russo-Japanese War, like 1905, 1907?

GL: No, after that, no, no. The incident is in 1931 . . .

DK: The Manchurian Incident.

GL: . . . the Sino-Japanese incident, when Japanese troop attacked.

DK: Right, oh, so this was after 1931.

GL: Oh, yeah.

DK: I just wanted to get . . .

GL: After 1931, people, the Jewish community gradually began flowing southwards into Tientsin and Shanghai mostly.

SH: Trying to escape the Japanese?

GL: Pardon?

SH: Trying to escape the Japanese?

GL: No, no, it wasn't a question of escape, it was just a decrease of opportunities . . .

SH: I see.

GL: . . . diminishing opportunities.

Peter de Krassel: Steve, I've got, tonight there's a group of local professors from the local universities that are going to be here, that are teaching Hebrew, and so I have you sitting with them, so you guys can exchange . . .

SH: That's fine.

PK: . . . and that means I want to have you maybe participate in that panel on Thursday.

SH: Okay.

PK: I just wanted to let you know.

SH: That's fine.

PK: You're sitting with them at a table of a lot of visiting Americans, too.

DK: Oh, great.

PK: And you two gentlemen are naturally sitting at the head table.

GL: Now I remember life in Harbin very vaguely. And my experiences in Tientsin were two nights at a Catholic school, boarding school, in which my mother appeared around 10 o'clock the second night and dragged us home (laughs). That was the end of that experience.

We moved to Shanghai in 1922, our family. Our father was away mostly in Europe on business. I enrolled in the British school here. Actually it's not a British school, it's an international school, though run by the International Settlement, it was dominated by the British, until towards the start of the Second World War, the American influence became more and more dominant. Thus I went to school, studied, finished, spent a couple of years. I wanted to be a journalist. And my father said, no educated man ever turns to be a newspaperman (laughs). What he called it the "*gazetchik*." And so we had an argument, but finally he sent me off to study civil engineering in Liège, Belgium, a polytechnical school there. I escaped, more than I escaped the Japanese (laughs), I escaped that school two years later and returned to Shanghai and . . .

SH: What year is this now?

GL: . . . joined the then Chinese-owned but U.S. registered newspaper, the Chinese In, China Press, as a sports reporter. Now if you want anything about, you'll have to ask me. I don't know where, where to go on from there.

SH: Well, let me ask one question. You were a Russian citizen, or your whole family were Russian citizens, at this, still . . . ?

GL: Our, well, it was only my mother and I and my sister, and my sister died in 1926, and my mother died, my mother died in 1934. We were all Russian emigrés, that is, we did not run away from Soviet Russia. I was born in 1915 in Manchuria. It was just that there was a community that was caught by the Revolution out of, out of Russia.

SH: But with no interest in going back?

GL: Certainly no interest in going back. And we, and I remember as a child, a lot of Russians, Jews and non-Jews, staying over in our house, who had come on foot across the border. They were tired and hungry, and we used to provide them with a couple nights or more of lodging. They didn't want any more, just to get them back into shape, just a reasonable shape. So we continued to be stateless, so-called, as the Russian, there was a Russian emigré status. It was a Nansen passport, I believe,¹ if you ever heard of it, but write it down, you could . . .

SJ: League of Nations.

GL: . . . find it in the encyclopedia. For stateless people they were papers of registration or identity issued to . . .

SJ: Used as a travel document.

GL: Yeah, also a travel document, which was accepted by most nations, for stateless Russians. Now that situation changed, for most of the stateless Russians, at the end of the Second World War, when Moscow announced appreciation of Russian loyalty, emigré loyalty, to the motherland during the war, and awarded citizenship to all former Russian subjects and their children. That as far as status was concerned. (unintelligible)

SH: Did some people take advantage of that and go back to the Soviet Union?

GL: Many people went back to the Soviet Union. Many did not. Many went to Japan. I mean, I'm speaking of the, of the Jews, mind you. Many closed their businesses and went to Japan. And again, this is after, I'm prece-, I'm jumping over this, this is after . . .

SH: That's all right.

¹ The Nansen passport was an identification card for refugees created through the League of Nations by international agreement in 1922. It is named after Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930), a Norwegian Arctic explorer and diplomat.

GL: . . . the Communists took over. But the community lived on. The German Jews who came during the war had certain difficulties.

SJ: They came after 1937.

GL: They came from 1937 on. In 1942, the Japanese announced that all German and Jews, and all Jews in territories occupied by . . .

SJ: Not Jews, they never mentioned the word "Jews."

GL: No?

SJ: Never mentioned the word "Jews."

GL: Well there's a difference!

SJ: No, no, they spoke of "stateless persons."

GL: Well, anyway, the understanding was that all German Jews and Jews from countries occupied by Germany were to be restricted to an area in Shanghai.

SJ: In effect, it affected those people.

GL: Whether they said so or not, they were here because everybody knew what they were referring to, and they had to make a distinction between their strong allies, the Nazis, and the Jews. I understand to this day that this was a result of Nazi pressure on the Japanese, saying that, here are their enemies, they're our enemies, therefore they're your enemies. And it did not apply to Jews who lived in, who had lived here. They continued their life as though nothing had happened. And we helped them, of course, we helped those German Jews. Our community centers and the whole community subscribed.

DK: So you were also restricted to an area?

GL: No, I, I didn't belong to the German . . .

DK: You weren't, I mean the people with the "J" stamped in their passports.

GL: Not mine, no.

SH: But the people who had "J" stamped in their passports.

GL: I don't know whether they had passports marked. I really don't know . . .

SJ: No . . .

GL: They wore a little badge here, to identify them as, you can speak to Curt, what's his name, Curt . . .

SH: Pollack.²

GL: And he was one of them. He was . . .

SJ: Yeah, he'll give you a good run-down on that side, on that side of the problem.

GL: But he was a . . .

SH: Excuse me?

GL: Curt Pollack.

SJ: Yeah.

GL: You spoke to him.

SH: Yes.

GL: For that very reason he'll tell you more.

SJ: He's the expert on that. He was there.

GL: He bore it on his back.

SH: So did you, you went to the, to college in Liège, or university there, but you went, after that you went back to Shanghai. You considered yourself as a, as living in Shanghai, that was your permanent place of . . .

GL: Yeah.

SH: You didn't want to go someplace else.

GL: No, I didn't.

SH: Shanghai was your home.

GL: I was perfectly happy here in, on my, I'd say, unstable status, as it was. Now after the war, the Russians announced, a sort of an amnesty, to all Russian, former Russian subjects and their children, and issued them passports, which were valid for travel to all countries except the Soviet Union. (laughs) That wasn't exactly the sort of, I thought that passport wasn't what I really wanted.

SH: And then that enabled you to go somewhere else?

SJ: You could go anywhere with it . . .

² See interview with Curt Pollack, April 22, 1989 (Shanghai), a German Jewish refugee.

GL: You could go anywhere with that . . .

SJ: . . . except probably for countries which . . .

GL: . . . but not to return to the Soviet Union.

SJ: . . . made a distinction, you see.

GL: Many went to the Soviet Union. Many of my, some of my co-workers went, in the China Press, and the Shanghai . . .

SJ: But they had to apply specially.

GL: Yes, you had to apply to go. You just couldn't just get in the boat and show your passport and go. You had to get special permission from the Soviet Consul to emigrate to Russia.

SJ: To immigrate to Russia!

SH: So tell me about being a sports reporter for the China Daily. Is that what it's called?

GL: Well, I was in athletics in school, and I wrote for the school magazine, I edited the school magazine. And the first thing I thought I wanted, oh, yes, I always wanted to be a newspaperman, and after I left Liège, the Polytechnic there, I returned and started to work at the China Press as a sports reporter. The China Press at that time had a, in fact all papers, had a sports section, not just a column or two. They were very developed in sports coverage here. And I started doing the sports that I knew, like soccer, rugby, basketball, swimming, athletics.

SH: Were you covering sports done by Westerners, rather than by . . .

GL: Yeah, by Westerners, no, also Chinese, Chinese teams played . . .

SJ: It was a very active sporting scene in Shanghai. It was a great thing.

SH: So there were contests between Chinese and between Westerners . . .

SJ: Oh, yes.

SH: . . . and refugees and . . . ?

GL: Definitely. And Chinese had held their Olympics, so-called "Asian Olympics", here in the Kiangwan stadium, it's still there. Sports was very developed in the community because it was a very prosperous community, the foreign community, including the Jews.

SJ: It provided the basis of most of the recreation.

GL: There were many people doing business, making a profit, who knew nothing about a business, but had employed Chinese specialists who were paid a fraction of the sum that a European would be paid for the same work. Just to give you the general idea. Now when the Communists took over, that situation stopped. We had to compete with the Chinese on all fields on even terms, and there was sort of a no-go situation. You just couldn't compete with them. You couldn't live on their level, or at least, I suppose, we could have existed. I'm speaking more of businessmen.

SJ: Took over all businesses, too, and properties owned by foreigners.

SH: When did you leave Shanghai?

GL: I didn't leave Shanghai. I moved from, I took on the Soviet passport, I told you, and I worked for TASS after the War. And I worked both here and in Peking. In 1951, the woman I had wanted to marry, and who had gone to Israel, told me that her husband, having arrived in Israel, to make sure that his child was with him, had agreed to grant her a divorce, which he had refused to give her in Shanghai. To make a long story short, I tried to get her back into Shanghai, but she had also a Soviet passport.³ That's before Israel passed its law of nationalization. What was it?

SJ: Yeah, Law of Return.

GL: Nationality law.

SJ: Law of Return.

GL: Pardon?

SJ: The Law of Return.

GL: Law of Return and Nationality Law. That means, and the British would not let my wife through Hong Kong with a Soviet passport, and that was the only way to get into Shanghai from the West at that time, through Hong Kong, no direct sailings. So I went to Israel.

SH: 1951.

GL: Huh?

SH: 1951.

GL: 1951, end of '51, from Peking. This is a disjointed story, but . . .

SH: That's all right, I can put it back together again, and then, so you've lived in Israel since, or you've been based in Israel?

³ See interview with Rita Leonof, July 27, 1993, Jerusalem.

GL: I've lived in Israel since, and this is my, not first return to the Far East, but my first return to mainland China. I've been in Taipei, I've been in Hong Kong previously, this is it.

SH: Tell me something again just about life in Shanghai, about what there was to do for entertainment, or about what . . .

GL: Well, life in Shanghai, which I don't know whether you know, is called the "paradise of the adventurers." There was a book by a Brazilian diplomat,⁴ which maybe you'll find somewhere in some library, that describes that one aspect of life perfectly, about the corruption, certainly, about the practices of the diplomatic corps importing duty-free liquor (laughs) and other things, and selling it on the market. It was a wide open city in all respects. It was composed of two foreign areas, one was the French Concession, called the French Concession. The other was an International Settlement.

SJ: And the more important one.

GL: Yeah, the more important one, dominated, as I said, by the British. It came about as a result of the First World War, when, and the Russian Revolution. These, and the Austrians, of course, and all the German allies, lost their concessional rights here. And then it was all grouped into an International Settlement with a municipality.

SJ: Well, that came way before World War I.

GL: What?

SJ: Way before, when, the nineteenth century already.

GL: The International Settlement.

SJ: The, yeah, the Austrians and Russians didn't have concessions there.

GL: What? The Germans did!

SJ: No, no, no, no.

GL: They had a whole area here.

SJ: They weren't separate. There was the International Settlement, and the Americans had a, for a brief while, had a concession there. But the Americans, being Americans, they frowned on colonialism. So after a while they became very embarrassed and gave it up. And it was incorporated into the International Settlement.

GL: Well, the Americans frowning on colonialism was a very, very nominal affair. They had a law which they imposed on the Chinese government, that they did not want any

⁴ Leonof refers to the book by G. E. Miller (pseudonym), Shanghai, The Paradise of Adventurers (New York: Orsay Publishers, 1937).

concessions, with any rights won by any foreign power anywhere must be applicable to the Americans. So they gave up their concessions (unintelligible), but none of the profits that came with it.

SJ: Yes, but they took part in the administration, in the administration of the International Settlement, which was run by a municipal council dominated by the British, but included councilors of various nationalities, most of the European nationalities, Danish, American. Germans, no.

GL: Yes, but again, the main armed force here was the British one. The Americans had a, their force were the Marines here, and the French, of course, had their army and navy here. But, again, the dominant forces were British, the police were headed by British officers. I don't think there was an American police force.

SJ: There were a few.

GL: Maybe. Anyway, it was so completely British. There were some Russians, too, in the police force, and Indians and Sikhs.

SJ: The police force was a conglomerate of various nationalities. Basically it was British, run by the British. There were some Americans there. And then amongst the police force, actually, there were members of the local community from various nationalities. Now there was a fairly large force of Japanese in the, in the police force, and also, the largest amount of course were the Chinese, who were mainly constables. And amongst them the British welcomed the Sikhs, Indian Sikhs, who were mainly traffic policemen.

GL: Well, there was an old British policy of pitting one minority against another minority in order to dominate both. The Sikhs were put above the Chinese, and the British were above the Sikhs, of course. And the Shanghai International Settlement also had a volunteer force, in which there was a Jewish company, was it, or battalion?

SJ: It was a Jewish company.

GL: A Jewish company.

SJ: It was a, was a civilian sort of militia, who were called upon to aid in guarding the Settlement in times of war and . . .

GL: Mostly military duties, but we were issued guns and things like that. We even had a light, a light artillery battery.

SJ: They were composed of, there was an American company, a Filipino company, a Chinese company . . .

GL: A cavalry force.

SJ: . . . a Jewish company, a cavalry unit, machine gun company. They were composed of all the various different nationalities.

GL: It dates back to the Boxer Rebellion, when Shanghai was in danger of being overwhelmed. Let's say not very, not very, not very practical. But it was a threat that the Chinese may rise.

SH: When you, in the International Settlement, was your social life or your family social life . . .

GL: Social life was highly developed.

SH: Was it only with other international people? Was it mainly with Jews and not with non-Jews?

GL: The Jews had their own club. The Jews, I won't say the Jews did not mix in the international . . .

SJ: They did.

GL: . . . social life. They certainly did, and particularly the British Jews. The Russian Jews were, kept more to themselves. But also it's not a generality. Social life was very developed, with many communities having their own clubs, quite apart from international clubs. There was horse racing. As I said, sports was highly developed here.

SJ: Horse racing, horse racing, of course, was a big business. It involved also a lot of Chinese who owned horses, rather Mongolian ponies that were used for racing. And the whole community was involved in this, including the Chinese.

GL: And you had a situation where the community could pass laws above any federal agency, to benefit itself. For instance, there was an across the board 5% tax, income, customs . . .

SJ: Municipal rates.

GL: On everything.

SJ: Taxes, that's a separate thing.

GL: There were no taxes. You paid rent.

SJ: Customs, customs duties, there's no income tax.

SH: No income tax.

GL: None at all.

SJ: But paid municipal rates.

SH: What does that, what does municipal rates mean?

SJ: That means you are entitled to vote for a council. When elections . . .

SH: But what did you pay on? How was that figured?

SJ: According to the premises you occupied.

SH: The property that you owned?

SJ: You owned or you occupied.

SH: Or you occupied.

SJ: But most of it was rental.

SH: But you still had to pay a tax on your rental?

SJ: You had to pay a tax.

GL: Also, the International Settlement existed up to a point, because it provided shelter for the rich Chinese against their warlords and various changes . . .

SJ: Exactly.

GL: . . . and subtleties, they're all the same here. Chinese law did not apply to the Settlement or the French Concession. There were Chinese courts for Chinese, as there were British courts for British, American courts for Americans.

SJ: And they were . . .

GL: Any Chinese here was safe, I mean safe as he could be from any authority, any Chinese authority.

SJ: But they had to face a mixed court, what was known as a mixed court. You remember that.

GL: Not the Chinese, that was the Russians. There were mixed courts for communities, so-called mixed courts for communities that did not have their own courts here.

SJ: For stateless persons.

GL: But the Chinese went to Chinese courts. The Chinese judges picked their noses and drank tea (laughs) while the lawyers were arguing.

SJ: And received under the table . . .

GL: Anyway, it was, it was fully, it was completely corrupt. There was opium traffic, all drug traffic, arms trafficking. You could buy a machine gun in an alleyway if you wanted it. I had four revolvers which I never used, including a Mauser machine, machine-pistol. Just as a kid I collected them, as a young man, delivering news.

Nobody checked on me, nobody cared whether I had them or not. Now you can imagine what streets like that would do to gangsters. The gangsters were organized here by a man called, by brothers, but the main brother was Du Yu Sen, wasn't he?⁵

SJ: Du Yu Sen.

GL: And he organized crimes, in all those branches he had a hand in them.

SH: Could you spell his name?

GL: Pardon?

SH: Spell his name.

SJ: Du Yu Sen.

GL: Du . . .

SH: D - U?

GL: . . . Yu, S - E - N, Y - U S - E - N.

SH: Did that mean that at night it, it would be dangerous to wander the streets because you might get mugged?

GL: Only in very, very outlying area. In the Concessions . . .

SJ: In the Concessions, it was pretty safe.

GL: . . . and the Settlement, they were heavily policed. I mean there were . . .

SJ: You had cops everywhere.

GL: You had traffic cops, you had patrolling cops, you had car police patrols, and police, various police stations around the city were always alert to anything. Shanghai was safe. We never thought of not letting our children, you know, walk. Children normally don't walk at night anyway, but you never thought of children not being able to go alone to school, not to have any company, or anything like that.

SJ: Yeah, there was no danger, no danger at all on that point. And besides, very young children usually had their *amahs* to take them out.

GL: Yes, and I suppose, that was what life here was all about, the Chinese domestic servants.

⁵ Du Yuesheng was an important business figure in Shanghai, as well as a leader of the Green Gang, the major underworld syndicate in the city.

SH: Well, tell me about that a little bit.

GL: Well, there was no family, however poor, who could not afford a servant, whether live-in.⁶ All apartments, for instance, were, were rented with servants' quarters. The servant had his own quarters within your apartment or across the corridor, or in the courtyard specially built for him. The usual portion for a medium-class family would be a boy, houseboy, a cook, and a coolie, who did the dirty work like washing floors and lighting stoves, taking out the ashes. That would be about three servants for a, for a middle-class family. Then, of course, when your baby was born, the baby never knew its mother (laughs) until it was four years old, an *amah* took care of him, more or less. They were paid, of course, underpaid. In today's terms, they were given starvation wages. But they managed to exist, and domestic servants . . .

SJ: They were underpaid, but they were better off . . .

GL: I'm coming to that.

SJ: . . . than a lot of Chinese domestic servants employed by Chinese.

GL: Domestic servants was a high, high employee compared to the factory worker, or whatever it was. There was starvation. There were deaths in the streets. People used to lie down on the street, sleep, and never wake up. Rickshaw porters used to freeze in their rickshaws at night. And generally they, when I became a little older, I became a little sickened with this kind, with this sort of life and I was glad to get out of here to Peking. After the Communists came, of course, the situation changed altogether for business people. As I say, they had to compete on their merits, and they couldn't, couldn't do that. The Jews couldn't, had nobody to deal with. Some Jews exported things like sheep guts for sausages, which was a huge export. Pig bristles for the brush industry. All these were mass exports. Fur, there were many Jewish fur merchants who travelled to the interior and bought up furs from the Chinese trappers. And I think Sass can give you a whole lot more on that, on that aspect. He knows what Jewish life here. Yours, unless you want to ask a question.

SH: I want, I would like to get to that story, but I wanted to ask you about the relations with the Chinese you've described so far are employing them as domestics . . .

GL: Yes.

SH: . . . and playing sports against them.

GL: Well, I'll tell you, the professional people, of course, had contact with Chinese. There was a very, very thriving Rotary Club, which all members of professions of all nationalities joined in a big corporation. The, this, I'll turn back. The exploitation was mainly in employ-, in employed class. And then, I suppose it's a sort of snobism. You didn't go to a Chinese doctor, if you could go to a European doctor. Chinese doctors were sometimes consulted by the European doctors as specialists, but I don't remember

⁶ Leonof refers here to Western families.

any family ever having applied to a Chinese doctor if they had an alternative.

SH: So for your services, you went to other Europeans.

GL: Services, yeah. The same was true of various other services that we required. This was the services of lawyers. The Chinese had brilliant lawyers, but you went to your own.

Boris Katz: Did you have any laundry done?

SH: Yes.

BK: Oh, okay. I didn't.

SH: But I haven't tried to find it yet.

BK: Well, this must be yours. Because it doesn't, it's our number, but it doesn't . . .

SH: Oh, I see. Then it probably is mine.

GL: On a purely professional level, we had contact with the Chinese on a very even basis. In my profession, we worked with Chinese as closely as possible.

SH: Would you, I mean, when I asked you about social life, you talked about the clubs. Would, is that where social life happened in clubs, or did people come over to other people's houses and eat dinner?

GL: No, the Chinese were not accepted in European clubs. Which was because of that limited to members of their own community in order to make it look a little better. You didn't say you accept Americans and British, but you don't accept Chinese. So you just accepted (laughs) Americans, or you accepted British. There was of course, much intercourse in going to and fro between the clubs, etcetera. And then . . .

SJ: Yeah, there were also were some clubs in which it was hard to get in, even if you were Jewish.

GL: Yes, of course. More exclusive clubs that wouldn't accept memberships, memberships on a very individual basis.

SH: But would people come over to other people's houses. Would there be private, a lot of private entertaining, or was that not part of . . .

GL: Oh, there was a lot of private entertaining, too, but mostly, simply because entertaining was so easy with Chinese servants (laughs) preparing it. There was a lot of entertaining, and I think that it'd be fair to say that among the people that I knew, of a week, five, five days of a week they were either entertaining or being entertained at other houses by other families. There were parties all over the place, constantly. A party wasn't a party, just a weekly event.

SJ: The movie industry was very active. Movie theaters all over the place.

GL: The artistic world was mostly represented by Russian immigrants, who made up a majority of the municipal orchestra, created a ballet, light opera company. The British had a very good amateur theatrical company. So did the Americans.

SJ: Played at the Lyceum Theater, the so-called Lyceum Theater.

GL: We passed the Lyceum Theater yesterday, which was the headquarters of the, what did they call it?

SJ: Which?

GL: Shanghai Amateur Players . . . ?

SJ: The Shanghai Amateur Dramatic Society.

GL: Yeah, that's right.

SJ: They, it was quite good actually.

GL: The Russians had a ballet, you know, a real Russian ballet, I won't say it was of Bolshoi standards, but it was a regular ballet with all the trappings. They had a light opera company.

SJ: There was also a British woman running a ballet school. And incidently, you're talking about ballet, you've heard of Margot Fonteyn?

SH: Yes.

SJ: Who is today, I don't know, seventy years old, whatever. Well, she started her dancing career in Shanghai, when she was a young girl. She was the daughter of an English businessman. And her original name was Margaret Hookham, which isn't, isn't exactly a glamorous name for a ballet dancer (laughs). She eventually changed it to Margot Fonteyn. But she learned to dance at this dance school, Ann Summers, and later on, as she grew older, she danced with the ballet. And after that, of course, she went over to Europe and England and became famous. But she, I'm not sure about the dates or her age when she left Shanghai, but she left it at a fairly tender age. But she was already an accomplished dancer, and you know she had a future before her. One aspect which people tend to forget, (laughs) because I remember her name Margaret . . .

GL: I don't even remember her school. (laughs)

SJ: Yes, well, I remember her name. She had, she was, she learned to dance at Ann Summers dance school. It was a British woman who ran a ballet school.

GL: No, I was thinking of the Russian community, because there was an unusual situation. The Russians who came here were not average Russians, of course. They were, those fleeing the Communists were the elite among the artists, the professional

people. We didn't get farmers . . .

SJ: Officers, also.

GL: . . . and factory workers here. We got engineers and doctors and lawyers, musicians. And, apart from that, Shanghai was a court of, port of call, practically, for all major artists, including artists like Chaliapin.⁷

SJ: Yes, they used to come here. Chaliapin even sang in Shanghai in the twenties.

BK: I remember Noel Coward, Noel Coward.

SJ: Noel Coward came here. And we had artists coming here, name artists. There was a very active cultural life.

GL: I was just thinking, if I had a reporter writing a story as disjointedly as I've told you, as I spoke to you, I'd fire him on the spot. (laughs)

SH: (laughs) The entertaining that you talked about, people coming to people's houses, in your own, in your own home, was it mainly Russian Jews that, that you would meet there, or was, any international people . . .

GL: Well, the Russian Jews lived . . .

SH: Did the communities mix a lot?

GL: . . . very openly with the Russian community as a whole, with the non-Jews, and they had many common activities. The fact is the Jews didn't exclude, you know, whether there was this latent anti-semitism or not.

SJ: There was latent anti-semitism . . .

GL: Of course.

SJ: . . . amongst the White Russians. But it was different from what it was in Harbin . . .

GL: That's right.

SJ: . . . where it was open. And it led to, I think, at times to violence.

GL: Oh, there was gang fights and things like that.

SJ: But in Shanghai things like that were smoothed over. It was an international city, and there was no room for any kind of Russian anti-semitism over there. There could

⁷ Feodor Chaliapin (1873-1938) was a world-renowned Russian opera and concert singer, who emigrated from the Soviet Union after the Revolution.

have been a latent anti-semitism. Russians were and still are anti-semitic. But it never came out in the open. It couldn't. Under the circumstances . . .

GL: We weren't an oppressed community. We could perfectly well stand on our own rights, you know, and stand up to them. Didn't have to, because it didn't occur.

SJ: And besides, economically, they weren't a dominant force. They had to rely on, for employment on either the *goyim* or even amongst the Russian Jews.

SH: Now, after 1941 or '42, when the Jewish refugees had to go to Hongkew . . .

GL: They started coming as early as 1939 in trickles.

SJ: No, no, no, they started coming in at the end of 1937. I know definitely, because . . .

GL: Maybe, even that.

SJ: . . . because we entertained in our home the winter of '37, I remember it very well. We had some of the young people come over, those who spoke English, entertained them.

GL: But these were in trickles, they came in trickles.

SH: But what I mean is, when they were sent to Hongkew, did that change life for Jews like yourself, who did not have to go there, but did it change the feeling in the city for other Jews, or . . . ?

GL: Well, sorry, ask the question again?

SH: The refugee Jews, in 1941 or 1942 had to go to Hongkew.

GL: Right.

SH: Did that change the life of those Jews who didn't have to go to Hongkew, did that make anything . . .

GL: That fact itself, no, but the situation that created it obviously affected the whole city, including the Jews. The Japanese took over the concessions. There was no more, there was no more British-dominated rule. The French held out for while, claiming that they were loyal to the Vichy regime. That saved them for a while. Not, also, to an extent, the Japanese made inroads as they wished.

SJ: The Japanese had the controlling interest, even in the French Concession.

GL: And the French could do nothing without Japanese approval. Let's put it that way.

SJ: Exactly. They ran, they ran the Concession, but the Japanese were on top politically.

GL: They were allowed nominally to be at the head.

SJ: Exactly.

GL: But all Japanese decrees or whatever said, applied as fully to the French Concession as in the International Settlement.

SH: So how did that change your life, say, as a reporter? Or did it change your life very much?

GL: Well, certainly there's a loss of freedom. The British and the Americans were, and the other allied nationals were taken off to . . .

SJ: Were taken off to the camps, to internment camps.

GL: . . . to prisoner of war camps.

SJ: Not prisoner of war! Internment camps.

GL: Well, sorry. Prisoner internment camps, yeah.

SJ: (unintelligible) concentration camps.

GL: I meant enemy national camps.

SJ: Yeah, I mean, that applied to any country.

GL: Of course.

SJ: The British interned enemy, enemy . . .

GL: Except that the treatment wasn't as it would have been, say, in other countries.

SH: But you aren't an enemy national? I mean, you still had, were in some sense a Soviet . . .

GL: We had all the advantages of being stateless. (laughs)

SJ: We were stateless. We were stateless.

GL: We continued, those who wished to work with the Japanese, worked with the Japanese, and they did. Many wanted to.

SJ: Many had the nasty habit of having to eat, you see.

GL: That's right. The Japanese took over what the others had, so you just had to work with the Japanese or you were through, you didn't work.

SH: Did your paper, for example, get taken over, in any sense, by the Japanese?

GL: Yes.

SJ: All the papers were closed. The Eng-, we're talking about the English-language press, except one.

GL: Yeah. And that was where we had to work.

SJ: And even then there was the Japanese censor sitting over there going through all the stuff.

GL: Well, the Japanese editor, in fact.

SJ: There was the Japanese editor, but even he a censor over there. The editorship was taken over by American Japanese.

BK: Except one . . .

GL: At the beginning of the war, sorry, at the beginning of the war, when the Japanese were sweeping all before them, they were very large-hearted and dealt with enemy aliens, enemy nationals in a very, very lenient way. But things got tougher, of course. Things got much tougher for the, for the internees.

SH: Did you two know each other, because you were both journalists then?

GL: We went to the same school.

SJ: We went to the same school. He graduated ahead of me, being older. (laughs) And . . .

GL: Now I'm smarter. (laughs)

SJ: Well, I knew him in school. I don't know if he remembers me.

BK: Which school did you go to?

SJ: The Public School, the Public and Thomas Hanbury.

DK: What was it called?

GL: It's called the Shanghai Public School.

SJ: Well, it was, later on it was amalgamated . . .

GL: There was also, there were several schools.

SJ: . . . with another school, called the Thomas Hanbury School.

GL: There was a boys' school. There was the Shanghai Public School for girls.

SJ: And there was another public school, in the, in the western area of, close by here.

GL: Right. There was also the Cathedral School, which this little boy from "The Empire of the Sun" went to.

SJ: It was a British school.

GL: It was an entirely British school. But there were some Americans there, I think one or two. There was an American school.

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GL: But the girls' school and the boys' school were run by the municipal council, or perhaps by the . . .

SJ: The curriculum was entirely British. The first history you learned was British. And the first geography you learned was British.

GL: Then, of course, there was the Jewish School, which was, it didn't go up as high, did it? You had a . . .

BK: Ten and two years short of high . . .

SJ: But its standard was a bit lower than others.

BK: . . . two years short of gradu-, of high school.

GL: Pardon?

BK: It was, went up two years short of the high school.

GL: The high, our high school, our school was all inclusive, so-called, from kindergarten . . .

SJ: No, you start . . .

GL: . . . up to . . .

SJ: . . . after kindergarten, from, after kindergarten to the top.

GL: I started school in kindergarten. And I finished with matriculation, which entitled me to enter university, and was accepted.

BK: Yeah, right. Yeah, after Jewish School.

GL: Our matriculation was Oxford Standard.

BK: I know.

GL: We had two exams yearly. One was the Junior Oxford, one was the Senior Oxford.⁸

BK: Ju-, what about Cambridge? Junior Cambridge?

SJ: Also Cambridge.

GL: Also Cambridge, also Cambridge.

SJ: Right. Cambridge and London University.

GL: London LCC, London Chamber of Commerce.

SJ: Some of those who . . .

BK: Yeah, Intermediate, it was called Intermediate Bachelor's Degree.

GL: That's right.

SJ: Yeah, they, there was a commercial section in our school. Those who went to economics used to take the LCC exam.

BK: That's right.

GL: There's a commercial section and an arts section.

SJ: I know, my brother took that.

BK: Then there were the French Jesuit schools, the St. John's . . .

GL: Ah, yes. Oh, no, there was a French college here, too.

BK: . . . and the St. Xavier's.

GL: St. Xavier's school . . .

SJ: Those were the . . .

GL: . . . by the monks.

BK: French Jesuits.

⁸ Leonof corrected this in a conversation of July 27, 1993: there were three exams, the Junior and Senior Oxfords, and the Oxford matriculation.

SJ: French Jesuits. They had what was known as the St. Francis . . .

GL: They were the Franciscan monks.⁹

SJ: They also, it was French and English.

GL: And then there was, of course, the Aurora University run by the French. And that was the university standard.

BK: And St. John's University.

GL: There were several universities here. Chinese universities . . .

SJ: St. John's, St. John's was an American Baptist college.¹⁰

GL: . . . Great Western.

SH: It was a college, it was for after you'd graduated from the schools?

SJ: Yeah. It was a university. But it was run by the American Baptists. And it had a pretty high standard. They had a medical school, too.

SH: My aunt went to St. John's.

SJ: She did?

SH: And then went to Ber-, went off to Berkeley.

SJ: Yeah, the standard was pretty high.

BK: And the Henry Lester Institute.

SJ: Then there was the Henry Lester Institute, which was a technical school. I don't know what standard it was.

BK: It had an affiliation with . . .

SJ: I don't remember.

BK: . . . affiliated with London University.

SJ: Oh, you attended it.

BK: I attended, I went there.

⁹ St. Xavier's was a high school operated by French Franciscan monks.

¹⁰ St. John's was run by American Episcopalians.

SH: Now let me ask, when refugee Jews from central Europe began to flow in in 1937 and '38 and '39, how did that change life in Shanghai, or did that change life in Shanghai?

GL: It brought in a lot of professional people, artisans, which suddenly had leather industry, for instance, which you never had before, a leather clothing industry. They were specialists in it. They were doctors, musicians . . .

SJ: Dentists, musicians.

GL: . . . dentists. And a, also . . .

SJ: Lawyers, but I don't think they, I don't think they . . .

GL: I think they changed their professions, actually.

SJ: Yes.

SH: Did that create competition, for instance if there were too many doctors? All these doctors pouring in . . .

SJ: It was a city of six million at that time.

GL: Don't forget, the Chinese themselves went to foreign doctors.

SJ: Yes, a lot of Chinese.

GL: A lot of Chinese. The Chinese were, of course, many of them very well-to-do . . .

SJ: Even the, you know . . .

GL: . . . well-to-do, they were, in fact stinkingly rich some of them.

SJ: An educated Chinese clerk for instance, graduated from, we had Chinese in our school, too. And they were, it was virtually their mother tongue.

GL: In many ways they, they set the commercial tone of the city, although they were never in the high administrative positions. The Chinese commercial activity was such that it couldn't be ignored.

SJ: But there, there were masses of all these Chinese bank clerks, office clerks, who were proficient in English, and conducted all their work in English. And they had the advantage also of knowing Chinese. Some of them were pretty well paid.

GL: You going somewhere?

Curt Pollack: I don't know, I think I'm going to go out and do some nightclubbing tonight. (laughs)

BK: My goodness.

SH: We don't start till seven?

CP: Yeah.

SJ: Well, I'll tell you, my, my side of the story, you'll have it later, it's going to be, because it's going to be pretty long.

SH: Well, that's good, that's good, because I'd like to start at the beginning.

SJ: It will have to be combined together when you get . . .

GL: Well, you'll have to coordinate.

SH: That's my job.

GL: That's your job.

SH: That's my job. Did either of you learn Chinese when you were here? Or did people you know learn Chinese?

GL: The Chinese learned foreign languages.

SH: That's the way it worked?

SJ: No, no, I studied Chinese in school.

(unknown speaker): You did?

GL: Yeah, we had a Chinese course in school, but I don't know at what level that was.

SJ: Well, I had, depends if you paid attention to the thing, you were . . .

GL: Yeah, it depends (unintelligible).

SJ: We had the choice of studying either Mandarin or Shanghai dialect. And the majority went for Shanghai dialect. Because they, a lot of them already . . .

GL: Of those who chose, who chose to learn Chinese.

SJ: Yeah.

GL: We learned Latin instead.

SJ: No, I studied Latin, started studying Latin for a while, and I studied Chinese.

GL: As well?

SJ: Yeah. And also French.

GL: Well, French was compulsory.

SJ: And in addition to that . . .

GL: French was a compulsory language.

SJ: . . . I had a very active sporting life. I don't know how I, when I think back on those days, I don't know how I managed to combine all these things together at the tender age of fifteen to eighteen or fourteen to eighteen.

GL: That's the age at which you absorb.

SJ: Well, and then homework. I used to go out training for track after school hours and then go home and do my homework, then eat and read and go to sleep. And we started school at eight o'clock, and we finished at four.

GL: We had a four-hour break, of course.

SJ: We had a break, no, let's . . .

GL: No. Two hours, twelve to two.

SJ: In my time it was, we started, knocked off at twelve and started at one-thirty. Maybe that was after you'd left. It was a solid eight hours or so.

GL: In any case, you have to remember that the International Settlement and the French Concession also provided a cover for Chinese activities. The country was in turmoil, for most of the, all of that time.

SJ: It was always in turmoil after the Chinese revolution.

GL: There were warlords until, until there were . . .

SJ: Until 1930's.

GL: . . . organized 1937, I think.

SJ: No, no, no.

GL: No, earlier, earlier, earlier.

SJ: Once, once they wiped out the Communists, and Mao Zedong started his Long March in '34, the warlords were finished. By that time they were out. You had all these so-called . . .

GL: No, no, the warlords were not yet finished, but . . .

SJ: Yes, but . . .

GL: . . . they were united under the so-called . . .

SJ: But they were more or less . . .

GL: . . . to an extent. They had their own freedom of action. And the Guomindang allowed them certain freedom of action. Otherwise Chiang Kai-shek would never have been kidnapped by . . .

SJ: Yeah.

GL: . . . Chang Hsueh-liang in the so-called Sian incident.¹¹ But they were all united against the communists. That united them. And there were a lot of various warlord activities . . .

SJ: And then the business started with the Japanese, also intended to wipe out the warlords. Because they took over some territories where the warlords had control. And gradually it's, there was a kind of an alliance, and the Guomindang was the dominant factor. In the meantime, in their hideaway in Yen-an up north the Communists were quietly building themselves up. And the results were as you've seen.

GL: That part of the story is well told by Snow and Jack Belden.¹² Anyway, life in Shanghai was something that you couldn't have experienced anywhere else in the world. It was unique.

SJ: And for the Jews it was perfect.

GL: The privileges and the intermingling of various nations in, at all levels, which of course absorbed the worst and the best, and the best of all communities.

SJ: You had the worst and the best of everything.

SH: So what do you think now about coming back here?

GL: Pardon?

SH: What do you think now about coming back here?

GL: No, no. There's nothing to do.

¹¹ The Sian (or Xi'an) incident occurred in December 1936, when Chang Hsueh-liang (or Zhang Xueliang) and other military leaders arrested Chiang Kai-shek in an attempt to force him to unite with the Chinese Communists to fight the Japanese.

¹² Leonof refers to Edgar Snow, whose many books on Chinese communism include Red Star Over China, and Jack Belden, China Shakes the World.

SH: No, I mean just visiting. How does this affect you?

GL: It's just a journey into the past, (laughs) I'd say, more or less.

SJ: Yeah, it's exciting.

GL: It brings back so many memories that I didn't know I even had with me.

SJ: It's exciting, yet . . .

GL: You saw the excitement on the bus tour today.

SH: That was remarkable.

SJ: That's obvious. I mean, it sounds childish but still it's, I think after forty years, what can you expect? Of course Shanghai has changed its face entirely, it's, in the old days, when you stepped into Shanghai . . .

GL: Now what I say about what you see here . . .

SJ: . . . it was completely internationalized. You could feel the, it was a different aura. Now it's completely Chinese.

GL: There were units in the municipalities going around picking up dead bodies, then. Today I see they're all in, I don't see them very fancily dressed, they're all dressed decently.

SJ: They're all dressed decently.

GL: They all seem well fed. You see no beggars. You see no starving children on the streets.

SJ: Yeah, no, they all look well fed. They may not, they may not eat so well, but they, they have enough to eat.

GL: I don't know about that. Even if they don't have enough to eat . . .

SJ: No, no, no. If you noticed today at the Buddhist temple, where the dining room down below, where the moderns, and you saw the upstairs dining room. It was a different quality of people that came over, they're Chinese, too. You didn't notice what the people, the people downstairs ate?

GL: Yeah.

SH: They had a bowl, that's what I saw. People were eating out of a single bowl.

SJ: There was a big cooking pot over there. And these people used to come over there to the coupons, and they used to dish it out in a big bowl. It was a mixture of, it's kind of a soup with noodles, and I think, whatever the so-called meat, you know, the bean curd

meat. Over there. And if you ate a bowlful of that, it'd be good and (laughs) . . .

GL: You can safely say that wherever communism failed, and it may have failed as communism in China, it certainly created a situation for the population that for many was the difference between life and death.

END SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW