

4-24-1989

Jacoby, Sasson oral history interview

Steve Hochstadt
Bates College

Follow this and additional works at: http://scarab.bates.edu/shanghai_oh

Recommended Citation

Hochstadt, Steve, "Jacoby, Sasson oral history interview" (1989). *Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection*. 6.
http://scarab.bates.edu/shanghai_oh/6

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Shanghai Jewish Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

Interview with Sasson Jacoby by Steve Hochstadt
Shanghai Jewish Community Oral History Project
Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Jacoby, Sasson

Interviewer

Hochstadt, Steve

Transcribers

Pugh, Scott

Hochstadt, Steve

Date

4/24/1989

Extent

2 audiocassettes

Place

Beijing, China

Use Restrictions

© Steve Hochstadt. This transcript is provided for individual **Research Purposes Only**; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Steve Hochstadt, c/o The Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, 70 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, Maine 04240-6018.

Biographical Note

Sasson Jacoby was born on May 14, 1918 into a prominent Baghdadi family in Shanghai. His maternal grandfather was the first rabbi of the Ohel Rachel synagogue. His father was born in Baghdad and left the Turkish Empire just before World War I began. He was also a rabbi in Shanghai. Jacoby was educated at the Public and Thomas Hanbury School, where he won many medals as a runner. He was reporter for many English-language newspapers in Shanghai, beginning as a sports reporter for the China Press, then later for the Evening Post, the Sunday Mercury, and the Shanghai Times. After the Japanese occupied Shanghai, he joined the English language department of the Japanese Domei News Agency from 1942 to 1945. In 1948 he left for Israel.

In Israel, Jacoby worked for the Jerusalem Post, and was part of the editorial team from 1952 to 1982. Then he wrote regularly for the Bulletin of Igud Yotzei Sin. He died on June 11, 2006.

Transcript

Sasson Jacoby: Opium Wars began 1840, 1842. You understand how the Jews gained a foothold in Shanghai. The British, as you know, of course, a lot of, lot of people don't know, had a big opium growing industry in India in those days, and to find a market they came to China. Now, the Imperial Chinese authorities didn't view this with very much favor. And, and the Opium War started when they threatened to burn stocks of English, British opium, in Canton where they had trading rights. Now, well, that started the war. The British came in with their gunboats, at that time they bottled up the fleet. And that's it, the war started. Now, when they signed a peace treaty, they made the Chinese pay a heavy indemnity. In addition to that, they opened several, what they called, treaty ports, where the British had full concession rights in trading and so forth. Now, the British had their eye, and of course that's the time they made Hong Kong into a colony, they had their eye on, on a port where, which would control, in effect, control goods coming in and out of Shanghai, in other words, import and export. And they lit upon Shanghai, which was situated, as you know, you've been there now, on the Whangpoo River, which is, which flows into the estuary, into the mouth of the Yangtze River. Now, it was difficult to build a port in the estuary for natural reasons. There's no protection from the elements over there, and there's no safe place for a port. So they came down river and they picked on Shanghai, where there was just a couple of fishing villages over there and mud flats, and nothing much. It was not a really good place over there. And naturally it became a treaty port. And they knew that that port would con-, would control all, all the flow of trade into China, because a lot of, most of the trade would come down the Yangtze, even from the north to the Yangtze, and from certain areas to the south to the Yangtze River. Hong Kong was a story in itself. Anyway, gradually it was built.

Now, in Hong Kong were stationed members of the Sassoon family from India, who originally came from Baghdad, who estab-, who established themselves in, in India in the late 18th century, around, around 1790. Now, these events, these, this family, various branches of them, eventually became known as the Rothschilds of the Far East. That, they first established businesses in, in Hong Kong, in opium, which was then more or less legal, and in other businesses. Now, one branch of the family, after, after Shanghai was established, decided to venture into trade in Shanghai. And he came over there and set up his office, in import and export, same thing, you know, opium, textiles, cotton. And now, now naturally, with him, he brought his whole crew of clerks. Now, these people were all observant Jews, religious Jews, and they conducted their business in Arabic.

Steve Hochstadt: So not only him, but his clerks were also . . .

SJ: His clerks, yes. Most of them were either Indian born, Baghdadi Jews, or those that were, that came from Baghdad. All the correspondence and business was conducted in Arabic. But

they, that's an interesting thing, they did not write in Arabic script. But they wrote in, wrote in a form of Rashi script, which was a cursive script. It was a cursive script. And it was, the Rashi script was an Ashkenazi version of an easy writing of Hebrew, which is only in capital letters, more or less, and difficult to write rapidly. It was developed by an Ashkenazi rabbi, whose acronym, name, was Rashi in France in the Middle Ages.¹ Now, the Baghdad Jews adopted this with some variations, and had their own (unintelligible), and they wrote Arabic in that script. Now, that in itself, so with the first group that arrived in Shanghai, in effect, they started the community there.

SH: OK.

SJ: Now, the rest of the story follows pretty rapidly now. Gradually more and more of these Baghdadi Jews came from Hong Kong, from India, and established all kinds of businesses, until the community, in the later 19th century, was well established. Now, once there were enough of these Jews, they, naturally, they had to form a synagogue. They brought in Sifrei Torah.² Then they started communal services, they established what eventually became known as the Shanghai Communal Association.³ And that dealt with religious affairs, with marriages, burials, circumcisions, of course, all that, you know, leading a Jewish, a solid Jewish life. And they were all Orthodox Jews, all of them. So, so by, by the early 19th century, they were very well established and organized, and at that time they, there weren't many Ashkenazi Jews in, in Shanghai. They were odds and ends of people who drifted in and out, and who, who were mostly in business. They were actually a few, very few, Russian Jewish families. And so it took the Baghdadi Jewish community about 75 years to really get organized and established, and it was a thriving community, by, by 1920, by the end of the First World War.

Now, it was after 1920 that the Jewish community began to swell, with an influx of Russian refugees after the Bolshevik Revolution. Amongst them were the Russian Jews. Now, at that time, Chinese saw the rare sight of Europeans begging on the streets. But I must say, to my personal satisfaction, that the Sephardi, Baghdadi Jews never allowed one Russian Jew to do that. You never saw a Russian Jew begging on the streets. They looked after them. They found them housing, helped them with money, clothing, had, had their children attend the Jewish school,

¹ Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105), known as Rashi, was one of the foremost commentators on the Bible and Talmud.

² *Sifrei Torah* (also *Sefer* or *Sefer Torah*) is the scroll containing the Five Books of Moses, used for religious services.

³ Officially known as the Shanghai Jewish Communal Association, founded in the early 20th century by the Sephardic community.

because there was a Jewish school, even at that time and instruction was in English. And it took the Russians to establish, to establish themselves and to stand on their feet very rapidly. In twenty years time, there were, there were rich people amongst them, doing a thriving business in import and export, mostly. And then, after 1937 came the third massive influx, this time of Jews from Europe, German Jews mostly, Austrians, and some, some Polish, some Polish Jews. And that, briefly, a history of the establish-, of the establishment of the Jewish community in Shanghai.

Now, I'll come back to my personal history. My father was born in Baghdad. And he attended a traditional Jewish education in Baghdad and, and was studying to be a rabbi. He got married in 1910, at the age of about twenty, he was twenty-one then. Now, he did not finish his rabbinical studies. He was not ordained as a rabbi. He never got his *semikhuta*, as you say in Hebrew.⁴ Now, the reason for his departure from Baghdad. At that time, the Turkish authorities, and you must remember that Baghdad was in a province, which was part of the Ottoman Turkish empire. Now that period, the Turks were mobilizing a lot of young, young men from all parts of the Empire, for a war that was brewing in Europe, the Balkans, think it was with the Bulgarians, broke out in 1912. Anyway, my father's family had a Turkish officer friend in the police force. And he came in one day and said, "Look, this is what's going to happen. They're starting to mobilize. I want to give you adequate warning. After that, you know what, what to do." Anyway, my father then took his wife, and his sister-in-law and her husband, and his younger brother, and a few, few other young people in the family, and made their way down to Basra, which was the seaport. And there they boarded an English ship, you know, in those days there were no papers, no passports, and landed in Karachi. Today it's in Pakistan, but then it was part of British India. And they sort of made their way from Jewish community to Jewish community in India, Bombay, Calcutta. Then they went on to Rangoon, in Burma, where there was a Jewish community, and made their way down to Singapore, to the Dutch East Indies, which was today's Indonesia, and eventually landed in Hong Kong, where their first child was born, their first son was born. Apparently, they knew there was more opportunity for work in Shanghai, which was then a much more thriving community than Hong Kong, was a larger community. By that time they had (unintelligible), and leading members of the community at that time were rich, and were able to direct the affairs of the community pretty well, you know, controlled all the purse strings. So eventually, must have been sometime before World War I, that he came to Shanghai.

He established, established himself doing, they always needed, he was a sort of an all purpose rabbi. He was a rabbi, he was pretty well versed in the Halakhah, Torah. He was a *mohel*. He was a, he was a fantastic scribe. He could write beautiful Hebrew script. He was a *schohet*.⁵ And a man like that was always in demand, especially with a community which was, in

⁴ *Semikhuta* in Aramaic (usually *semikhah*) refers to the ordination of rabbis.

⁵ *Halakhah* is Jewish law. A *mohel* performs ritual circumcisions, and a *schohet* slaughters animals in the prescribed way.

effect, strictly Orthodox. And there we were born, the rest of us, all five of us, in addition to my eldest brother, who, who was a British subject. We all at that time were stateless. My father, eventually, with the establishment of Iraq after World War I, received an Iraqi passport. But we were not classified as Iraqi; we were stateless, naturally. And that was the beginning of our life in Shanghai, my family's life in Shanghai. Eventually more members of the family came from Baghdad, and we were, became a close-knit family.

Now, as far as numbers were concerned, the Baghdadi community was small, never more than about a thousand. As compared to the Russians, who eventually had something like seven or eight thousand, or the Central European Jews, who numbered afterwards twenty-seven thousand. I suppose you know all about that from the other people. And that's the way it went. Now, as far as our personal life was concerned, all of us children attended the British school. We, my father had the option of sending us to the Jewish school, for which he didn't have to pay tuition, but he preferred an English education. And he told us, a Jewish education you will get at home, and I wish you to have a proper Jewish education. Well, he said, the Jewish school had a much lower standard than the, than the British schools. And he preferred to spend money, and it took pretty good money in those days for, for the British schools, and private tuition, you know, in those days, was fairly expensive.

Now, at home we always had Chinese servants, even though we were just, not a well-off family, let's say, but fairly comfortable circumstances. We had a cook. We had a Chinese male servant. And, of course, we had a, always had a Chinese *amah*, woman servant. When we were young, of course, her main task was to look after us, to take us out for walks, to the garden, and to generally look after us. And that's where we learned Chinese. Now, my father couldn't afford three servants, who were English-speaking, and there were English-speaking servants, who spoke pidgin English. So, he had the option of taking Chinese servants, who spoke only Chinese, because he was, he was fluent, even at that time, in the Shanghai dialect. He spoke it pretty well. He just picked it up; he learned it in the street. And I remember, he spoke a very good street Shanghai dialect. And we picked it up from the servants. In fact, by the time, that's what they tell us, by the time we were four, we could chatter in Arabic, Chinese, and English. And now, there's a thing I remember very well: we had a Cantonese cook, cook from, came from Canton. And he must have been with us for over twenty years. And he became an excellent cook in Middle Eastern cuisine. He knew all our Baghdadi dishes. And I remember him having arguments with my mother and my father, who incidentally was a good cook himself. They had these arguments in the kitchen. And do you know in what language, in what language he spoke? Baghdadi Arabic! He learned Baghdadi Arabic! And there were couple of other cases of other families, who had cooks who, who also, at the same time, who could speak, they could speak Baghdadi Arabic. Eventually he left us because he was a, he was an opium addict. And he was getting old and sick, so my father gave him a lump sum or something, and paid for his fare to his native village down in Kwangtung Province. And after that we didn't have a cook, but we always had two servants.

Now, now I remember, we lived in the Hongkew district, which was north of the Soochow Creek. You were in Shanghai now, so you know, could orient, orientate yourself pretty well. We always lived until 1932 in Hongkew. Now, in 1932, you know, the Japanese started what they not so humorously called the "China Incident", beginning in Manchuria, Peking. Now, war broke out around Shanghai. Of course, we weren't in the International Settlement, and the others in the French Concession. And the international powers then brought in troops, mobilized the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, kind of an amateur militia type of force. And they guarded the borders of the International Settlement, because there was a stream of refugees coming in all the time. It was a sort of a buffer against any breakthrough by Chinese or Japanese, well, the Japanese kept away from there. There was a lot of fighting over there. And eventually the, my father gave, gave his keys to, to one of our Japanese neighbors, because we were living in a section which was known as Little Tokyo, a lot of Japanese there. And they looked after our place when we left and crossed the Creek into the west.

Now, come to an interesting part of the story. I'll have to sort of digress for a moment. My father, at that time, in the twenties and thirties, was the religious instructor for the adopted children of the man named Haroon, who was a multi-millionaire at that time. And Haroon had an estate in, on what was then known as Bubbling Well Road. It was bounded on three sides, it was almost a block, a block-sized estate. Not quite, the northern section was not bounded by a road. But the other three sections were bounded by the Bubbling Well Road, then Haroon Road, and on the other, on, on another side, it was bounded by three streets. And it was a very large area. You saw it as the exhibition halls.

SH: Where we went shopping.

SJ: Where we went shopping, at that time.

SH: So that was a house, that enormous . . .

SJ: That was not just a house. It was a large estate, a park. He had an artificial pond in there. And, and a whole retinue of servants and relatives of his wife, who was Chinese. And he turned over one of the houses there to us and to my, to my aunt, who came with us. And we lived over there, it was a couple of months, until the war died down, and we went back. And after that we lived in the western side of town. And then my father was close to the Ohel Rachel synagogue. And he eventually was the rabbi. Then eventually, we moved into several places. Housing over there was, for foreigners, for practically everybody was, well, was rentals. You could only rent houses. It was only the very rich who actually owned property. And so in the course of, you know, just a few years we lived in three separate houses. And eventually we left, eventually, how shall I put it, we wound up near Ohel Rachel synagogue.

Now, all this went on through 19-, through the 1937 war. There was another outbreak.

Until, until the outbreak of World War II started another phase in history of the Shanghai Jews. When World War II broke out, quite a few of the Baghdadi Jews had British citizen-, British citizenship, were British subjects. And the year after the war broke out, you know, the Allied, Allied citizens were interned. There's nothing new in that, it happened in every country. Enemy nationals were put, put behind, were placed in camps. Well, they were not concentration camps, but they were interned various different places. And their homes were taken over by the Japanese and Chinese.

Now, we stayed at our place. My father was an Iraqi citizen. And (laughs) the Japanese, to us it was humorous, he was known as a friendly national, a friendly enemy, so he was not interned. Although he was, he was obliged to wear a red armband, which identified him as an enemy national, but he was not interned. So it was a kind of a ridiculous situation. We were stateless, so we were free to walk around and do what we want. And I was still working as a newspaperman, at that time, with a Japanese-controlled press. And I had to work. Had the nasty habit of wanting to eat. And besides, what my father's income was drastically reduced, because the funds that, the Communal Association funds, began to dry up. The overwhelming part of the rich Jews, which were the backbone of the Communal Association, were behind, behind bars, so to speak. And those few who remained outside, the rich ones, had no way of access to their funds. Their businesses dried up; the stock exchange was closed. A lot of them were stock exchange brokers, members of the stock exchange. Businesses slowed down. And it was a kind of a living from hand to mouth. My father was paid very little. And sort of left to myself, and my brother, my two brothers, we were working and we had to support the family, too. Well, we were left alone. We, we were lucky not to be classified as refugees like the German Jews. We were free, quite free to move around and practically do what we want. We had no, no real problems with the, with the Japanese.

And, well, then after the war, you know, we saw what was coming. Well, Chiang Kai-shek took Shanghai. It was very peaceful and there were no problems with the Nationalist Chinese, except that they were corrupt. Everybody knew it. And most of us old timers over there had the feeling that Chiang Kai-shek wouldn't last. We all knew that he'd, if he lasted, there was still a future for the Chi-, Shanghai Jews. But, as time went on, it was obvious to us, we saw the writing on the wall, that the Communist forces were taking huge areas in the north, and they were coming closer and closer. In the meantime, a lot of the British, British and Americans and other nationa-, other nationalities, who were in the camps, started, started leaving Shanghai and going back home. Businesses were running slow. But certain, certain people kept on doing businesses until, say, 1947. Things really slowed down.

Now, in the meantime, my father, about 19-, early 1947, got permission to leave for the States. He and my mother, and eventually two of my sisters, because my eldest brother by now was an American. He had emigrated to America fairly early, and they left. And us three brothers remained in, remained in Shanghai. Now, we never were Zionists, in any sense of the word. But, after the war, after learning of what happened in, after, after the Holocaust, things began to look

different to us. And we joined the Betar movement, which was dominant Zionist movement in China at that time. And eventually we, well, we didn't actually join Betar, because part of the Betar movement started, established the underground movement of the Irgun Zeva'i Le'ummi.⁶ And we joined that. Must have been a group of about a hundred or so. And amongst them were quite a few of the young Baghdadi Jewish element, who were never, never with the Russian Jewish Betar, who had never had very many (unintelligible). But I joined it, and a friend of mine, and my brothers, and gradually a few others drifted in. And, of course, our aim was to come to mandated Palestine, the mandate was about to be over. We began training in secret, weapons, weaponry, physical training. And eventually, we left for Israel. We became established. Myself and my brothers were on the first transport ship that left, end of December '48. And after a couple of months we arrived in Israel. And there we remain to this day.

Now I abandoned newspaper work around 19-, late '47. And with my conversion to Zionism, I, I had contact with my former superior in the, in the Shanghai Times, it was a newspaper. And he had become manager of an export-import firm, whose headquarters were in New York. Now they were, they were Jews from China, who had left for United States, the late twenties, and had a pretty thriving business there, import-export business in New York. And they were dealing goods from China. Now this man became a manager of it. And he asked me to help him in the office. So I joined the office with him, anyway, he says, "You're with us now," and he was an active Zionist in the movement. "You're with us now. There's no sense in your continuing to work, and I need somebody to help me here in the meantime, for the next year or two."

SH: This is still in Shanghai.

SJ: That was still in Shanghai, before we left. And just to give you an idea of what things were like over there with us. And there I was, you know, in this commercial firm, never done any of this kind of work. Previous eight years I was a newspaperman. And so we kept on with this business, and I helped edit a magazine that they put out, the Betar movement put out over there, in Russian and English. And they needed, really needed somebody who was sort of, half of my work was, was to deal with this magazine also.

Anyway, as I told you, eventually we all left. And the Shanghai community, of course, started breaking up. People began leaving in all, all directions, all four corners of the world. Lot of them, fair amount, came to Israel, others went to Canada, and the U.S., Australia, and England. And that virtually spelled the end of the modern, modern Jewish community in China. Eventually there was nothing left. I think the last Jews left around 1959. Certain amount of, of the

⁶ Irgun Zeva'i Le'ummi, often called just Irgun, was an armed underground organization founded in Jerusalem in 1931; the name means "National Military Organization". It was allied with Betar by its acceptance of the leadership of Vladimir Jabotinsky, a conservative Zionist.

community leaders remained there to wind things, to wrap up things. You know, they had to deal with the Communist authorities, who were, who were pretty understanding about these things. You know, they had to, the Chinese had different plans; they had to get rid of all the cemeteries in town. And not only Jewish or Christian cemeteries, too. And it was all done in, well, I suppose you've got a documentary of things about this. They removed all the cemeteries and took 'em, transferred them about 15 kilometers to the south of Shanghai. I mean, they did it with all the cemeteries. In fact, right on Bubbling Well Road, there was a Protestant cemetery over there, and today it's sort of a public park. Most of them changed into parks. Unfortunately, during the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards went wild and destroyed all the tombs which were set up. You know, they were transferred in a very orderly manner. Because, although being Communists, the Chinese shared one thing with the Jews about respect for the dead. But the Guards went wild, and they wiped out all traces of the, of the cemeteries, not only of Jewish ones. And today most of them are just public parks, nothing left of them, just bones underneath there, and nobody knows anything about them. And that's it. That, in a nutshell, is what happened to all of us.

SH: Can you tell me about being . . .

SJ: You have any questions?

SH: Yeah, I want to ask you about being a newspaperman. What was, what was this Shanghai newspaper scene like?

SJ: It was a very thriving English-language press. There were, in fact, let me see, one, two, three, four, there were four English-language newspapers. Three morning ones, consisted of the North China Daily News, it was a sort of a, you know, like the Times of London, sort of thing. It was the oldest one there, and was set up by the British, a typical British newspaper. There was the China Press, which was, in fact, Chinese-owned, but an Amer-, sort of an Americanized newspaper. The editor was, was a Chinese who was educated in, in the States. You could call him an American, because he had an American wife. There was the Shanghai Times. It was owned by an Englishman, who had a Jewish wife, she was a Baghdadi Jew. And he was partially subsidized by the Japanese, he was, who wanted to have an English-language paper which is sort of, not pro-Japanese, well, at least neutral. And then there was the American-owned Evening Post, came out in the afternoon, the late afternoon. It was called The Evening Post and Mercury. The Evening Post and Mercury consisted of, on Sunday, it had published a tabloid.

Now, I started working. Now, in school I was always active, as one of the editors of the school magazine, which published three times a year. And I was always interested in sports and, in fact, light athletics. I was a pretty good, pretty good in track, I was a runner. I used to run the 440 yards. And now when I left school, you know, I sort of wanted, didn't quite know what I wanted to do. But I always had a leaning, a leaning towards writing. So, eventually I got myself a

job with the China Press as a sports reporter. Now, interesting enough, George Leonof,⁷ whom you have met here, also started his life as a sports reporter, also in the same paper. Except he was several years ahead of me. By the time I reached the, reached the Press, the China Press, he was already established as a reporter.

SH: Is that when you met him?

SJ: Well, I remembered him from school, except he was a bit ahead of me, about three years ahead of me. You know, at that age it's quite a, (laughs) it's quite a, made quite a difference. He doesn't remember me, but I remember him very well. And we met again at the China Press. By that time, he was one of the crack reporters of the day. I mean, you see him nowadays, he's a bit, got old, and is a bit hard of hearing, so sometimes it makes problems. But he was a very sharp character and a good reporter.

Well, eventually I graduated from sports writing. I joined the Evening Post. I worked at the Mercury, which was a Sunday tabloid. And I was fortunate enough to work with the editor. It was a very small staff. Three people working for it, because all the news we had was on Sundays, and the rest was all feature stuff and things like that. And, as I said, I was very fortunate enough to work with, with a man who was a German Eurasian. He was part German and part, part Chinese. But he was American educated, and a very fine newspaperman. And I was glad, I spent a year with him over there, and I learned all the basics. And when I left him, I joined the Shanghai Times for a while, and eventually became police reporter there. And I worked for several years over there and was doing quite well.

It was a pretty wild period at that time, politically, crime-wise. It was an exciting period. Things were in a state of, I should say, in those days it was the late 1930s and the early '40s, before World War, even in the last of World War I, that was World War II period, sorry. And there was a lot to cover at that time. Used to be out with the police a lot and, and the whole, all the Settlement and the French Concession was in a state of turmoil at that time. Politically, too, things were, things were in a upheaval with the Chinese. They had, they had to deal with the Communists. There were rivalries amongst them in Shanghai. Those, both sides were involved with the Shanghai mafia, who were very strong. And there was corruption all through, all along the line, Nationalist government. It was an exciting period, and I'm glad that I grew up in that, in that.

Now, another turning point came now with the outbreak of the Pacific War, 1941. Now, automatically, the entire English-language press was closed down. The Japanese concentrated on producing one newspaper, and they picked on the Shanghai Times. And the British staff, of course, a lot of the British staff were interned, and the paper was left, they brought in an

⁷ See interview with George Leonof, Shanghai, April 19, 1989.

American-Japanese as editor, with Japanese censors sitting over there. Paper was reduced. But some of the local people, stateless persons like myself and George Leonof, there were a few others, remained over there. Everybody had to make a living. And that was it. I personally had left the Shanghai, the Shanghai Times some time, some time before the war broke out. I was always looking for opportunities. I didn't get stuck in one newspaper all the time.

Now, I got an offer from, by chance, from the Japanese news agency at the time, the Domei News Agency, in the English Department. They wanted a rewrite man, somebody who could edit translations written by, you know, from the Japanese over there, rewrite stuff and I joined them. I got nothing to lose. I joined them. If I don't like it, I'll walk away and join another paper. And then the war broke out and I got caught in there. Not that it was bad for me. It was a job and I was doing very well over there. And I liked the people I was working with, the Japanese I was working with. The first head of the bureau was an American-Japanese, who was transferred later. There was another Japanese who was American-educated. And it was an interesting period. There I was in this Japanese news agency and all stuff was funnelled through us. Even the German news agencies couldn't publish on their own, couldn't issue their own bulletins. And their stuff came through us. And . . .

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SJ: . . . were not allowed to issue their own news bulletins except through Domei. They could release their, their news. They had a, they had a small German newspaper in English. They could use only German news under their own names in that paper. Now, the Germans had two news agencies there. One was known at that time as TransOcean News Agency. That belonged to the Foreign, Foreign Office, the Foreign Ministry under Ribbentrop. Now, they had another news agency, which was handled by Goebbels's outfit, the Propaganda Ministry, and that was known as the Deutsches Nachrichtenbureau, the German News Agency, DNB. And both were quite rivals.

Now, interesting thing, thing came through this. I was one of the main editors over there. And both sides were eager to have more news printed through Domei, because we used to give a credit "Domei-DNB" or "Domei-TransOcean." And they were all, each one, they were rivals actually, and each one wanted more, wanted more news published then. Now I was approached by the DNB, and they offered me a sort of a salary on the side. Well, they didn't say, "Put more DNB there," but, "Have a little consideration for us." And there was another one over there who, who TransOcean went to, and did the same thing. So it sort of evened out. And we both knew what the situation was, and made extra money that way. And there were all kinds of, you know,

stupid stories, really didn't mean anything. And I used to put in a little more DNB, he used to put in a little more TransOcean, and (laughs), it's all worked out even.

Now there's another interesting thing about, interesting thing about this. We were often invited out by both agencies to dinners and lunches and out to the German club over there to play bowls, things like that. They all knew I was Jewish. And we used to attend different receptions, was friendly with the Germans. They, there's nothing they could do about my being Jewish. I was (laughs) in the Japanese news agency. And I was a stateless person, and I was on excellent terms with the Japanese. And, as I said, they could do nothing about it. Now, I was very friendly with the DNB man, with whom I had contact. He was an, he was a German who was half English, his mother was English. And, strangely enough, his wife was also half English. And I used to visit him. He was a bit older than I; well, I was about 25 years of age, 26 years of age. He was a man of close to 40. But I liked him very much, and we liked each other. And I used to drop in now and again for a cup of coffee with him and his wife. And one day there was a knock on the door. And, well, I noticed a fellow come in there with a bag in his hand. Well, this friend, the other friend of mine looked a little embarrassed, because I could spot this man as a German Jew, a German refugee. I don't know how he got a pass to get out of there, but apparently. And he was selling Jewish sausage to this friend of mine. Now I remember his name, Lavrence.

SH: Say it again.

SJ: I remember now the German's name. Strangely enough I've forgotten it all the time, suddenly came back to me. His name was Carl Lavrence. And, so he sort of turned red a bit, you know, and looked at me and smiled and shrugged his shoulders (laughs). And this German Jew was sneaking in all the time, selling him stuff, selling him all odds and ends of stuff. Now, I'll tell you another curious thing about this Nazi period. All the occupation, Ger-, Japanese occupation period, in the Nazi, there was a man in, who worked for TransOcean, (coughs) a German, who was in a very awkward position. I also knew him and I liked him very much. But his wife was Jewish, and she looked Jewish. You had a, you know, a real, what we used to call as an eagle beak. (laughs) There's no question about it. And he was in a strange position. He, they stopped him from working, but his salary was paid on the quiet. And he wasn't so well received, wasn't so well received amongst the Germans. And he kept to himself. And his wife very seldom went out. Well, I visited them a few times, too. And, but actually the Shanghai Nazis were Germans who weren't involved with Nazism. They, I mean, they were Germans and they had to follow the line. But (laughs) they were pretty lukewarm, lukewarm Nazis. And the very young amongst them also, a lot of them were born in Shanghai. It was only later on in the war that some of the real Nazis came from Tokyo, tried to stiffen their backs, sort of, and make them more Nazi. And well, it never really worked. Of course, there was another side to the story about the Nazis, and the Japanese and the Jews, the refugees, you might say. But, I presume you got most of it from, well, what's his name there in the . . .

SH: Curt.⁸

SJ: Curt. But in any case there was a real movement amongst them to set up gas chambers, in Pootung, on the other side of the river. But it never worked out. Firstly because the Japs never liked taking orders from the Germans. And they, they were never exactly lovers of Nazism, because they always had the feeling that, well, "The Germans look upon us as little yellow monkeys." And they certainly didn't want to take any orders from the Germans. But they eventually settled for this segregation.

Now, a poc-, proclamation was issued in 1942, but it never mentioned the word Jew, in spite of what, I don't know what you've been hearing from the various sources, but the word Jew was never mentioned. Only that stateless persons who arrived after a certain date were requested to congregate at various areas of. Now, they talked about, you heard Curt mention about this, a man named Ghoya, who was in charge of the whole ghetto. He called himself the King of the Jews.⁹ But actually the story is, they couldn't find a suitable person for that, because nobody wanted the job. So they nipped onto this character. Apparently he was a low official of some kind somewhere. And they just stuck him over there and didn't bother very much with what he did. And I know personally that Japanese never liked him. The Japanese I had contact with, whom I was working, always spoke against him. They called him a crazy man. I don't know why the army put him in. That sort.

But, let's face it, I think the German Jews were lucky to be in that situation over there. It was hard for a few years, a couple of years. They were lucky to get through. We, on the other hand, we were free. Economically life wasn't easy for a lot of the local foreign people, you know, they had, they had lost a job. They were dealing in all kinds of black market deals, selling, selling all kinds of things, scrap metal and things like that, to the Japanese. But, as I say, everybody had to eat. And you could hardly look upon them as collaborators. Or even me as a collaborator, because I worked in a German news, a Japanese news agency. (laughs)

I remember after the war, I was asked by the American G-2, the army intelligence, they wanted to interview me. They asked me; they didn't order me. So I went over there and, and they knew I was a stateless person naturally. And they started questioning me about all kinds of things. You know, I just told them flatly, "Look, I'm stateless and I had to eat. Period. What do you want me to do?" (laughs) So they laughed. (laughs) What else you want to ask me? That's, I was telling you about the press side of all those papers.

⁸ See interview with Curt Pollack, Shanghai, April 22, 1989.

⁹ Ghoya was an official in the Japanese Bureau for Stateless Refugees Affairs, in charge of issuing daily passes to leave the Hongkew ghetto. He is remembered for his capriciously brutal behavior toward the Jewish refugees.

SH: Yeah, that's stuff I haven't heard at all before.

SJ: Yeah, you wouldn't. (laughs)

SH: Just one more thing about social life, maybe even as you were growing up. Did, was your family's social life, you know, people coming over to dinner, or going over to people's houses, was that Baghdadi Jews or . . .

SJ: Now, the Baghdadi community was very clannish. They kept to themselves. And the main, the social life of the, the average person, and I'm not talking about the extremely wealthy, who were, were actually part of the British community, were accepted by the British, because they were millionaires. The average person worked in an office, spent time on their families, they were very cl-, they were very clannish and closed, it was a kind of a closed community. They mixed very little with the Russian Jews. Except, of course, one good thing about it was the fact that the Baghdadi Jewish children and the Russian Jewish children were mostly together in the Jewish schools, which was a very good thing. They, lots of them grew up together. Now they were so clannish, that if a Baghdadi Jewish boy married a Russian Jewish girl, or vice versa, my goodness, there was virtually, it was a case with the Baghdadis of virtual excommunication. (laughs) Then later on it worked out. But especially in the twenties and early thirties, oh my goodness! Marrying a Russian Jewish girl! You want to marry a Russian Jewish boy! It was case of, you know, like marrying a goy! They always considered themselves, you know, more Jewish than the Russian Jews, from the religious sense. Well, the Russian Jews were more, they weren't, they weren't that observant and we never liked them calling us, in Russian, *arabskii yevrei*.¹⁰ It infuriated us.

SH: But they did that?

SJ: (laughs) They used to, they used to refer to us as *arabskii yevrei*. And I know my father used to get really furious on hearing that. We never, never called ourselves Sephardim. To us Sephardim were those Ladino-speaking people who, and there were very few of them in, in Shanghai, three or four families. And I know of only about two Yemenite families. And the rest were all Baghdadis, all those who came straight from Baghdad, or later on from Iraq, or those from India, who were, who were hundred-percent Baghdadi origin, even if they were there for a couple of generations.

A curious thing about the Baghdadi Arabic that they spoke. A lot of the Indian, Indian

¹⁰ "Arabic Jews" in Russian.

Jews, the Baghdadi Indian Jews, used to mix, mixed Hindu, Hindi words with the Arabic. These were words like shoe or rice, all odds and ends of words. And some of the Baghdadi Jews began using it, too. For instance my father and mother at one period used to like smoking a *narghile*, you know, the water pipe.

SH: Hookah. Is that a hookah? Or is that different?

SJ: It's a *narghile* in Arabic. But eventually they called it a hookah! Because a hookah is an Indian *narghile*, virtually the same thing. They called it a, a hookah. Originally they called it a *narghile*, and they began using hookah. And there were all kinds of words we used, which were Indian, in Indian, of Indian origin.

What else can I say about the Baghdadi, about the Baghdadis? Yes, about Hardoon. For many years, especially when we were in Hongkew, my father used to go off to the Hardoon estate a couple of times a week. And I believe he was rather well paid. Now, to get from Hongkew to Bubbling Well Road was quite a distance. We lived in the heart of Hongkew, not where the ghetto was, which was close to the, close to the riverside, and it was further in. It was quite a distance. Now, twice a week, Hardoon used to send his Rolls Royce to pick up my father at home. And, sometimes, if it was a Sunday, I used to accompany him. I think I was the only one that did, he used to take me along with him. Now, this was an old 1916 Rolls Royce. And ten, twelve years later he was still running it. You know, the other Jewish millionaires, Baghdadi millionaires, they all had these fancy new cars, the Buicks of those days, it was various models that they had. But he stuck to this old Rolls Royce, which had acetylene lamps in front. (laughs) And a Chinese chauffeur who came, and the other Chinese next to him, his driving mate, who used to open the door. And he used take me along with him sometimes. We used to ride in style, all the way across Garden Bridge, down Nanking Road, Bubbling Well Road, and into the estate.

I remember one time he, I think, Mrs. Hardoon, the old lady, saw me there with him one time and sent a servant and asked my father to come in there with his son. So my father brought me in and spoke to her, he used to speak to her in English, he told her, "This is my third son." You know, it's the Chinese fashion, you don't say just "my son", you give his, give his number. (laughs) "This is my third son. His name is Sasson." "Ah," she said. "Well, it's okay." How old was I, I must have been about ten years old then, something like that, about ten years old. "His name is Sasson." She says, "Ah, Sasson. It's a well-known name." So I came in over there, and he told me in Arabic, "You must kiss her hand." You know, I had to kiss her hand, and she patted me on the back, and she fished in her purse and took out a shiny new silver dollar, Chinese silver dollar. And I have this silver dollar 'til, 'til this day. I kept it; I never spent it. I liked it so much, I used to take it out and admire it. And it, I grew up with this thing. I used to keep it away in my drawer. And, my gosh, I still have it, came with me to Israel. I've got it. It was a silver dollar, on one side with the head of Yuan Shi-kai.

There's a story about this character Yuan Shi-kai. In my childhood I used to hear my

father talking about Yuan Shi-kai, and later on I found out who Yuan Shi-kai, Yuan Shi-kai was. Now, after the 1911 revolution, things were, it became a republic. Now there was a clash amongst the Imperial generals. Yuan Shi-kai was, I think, the Imperial War Minister. And, at one time he staged a coup, must have been around 19-, about 1914. And for a period of a few months he made himself Emperor. But, but after a few months he died. I don't know whether he was poisoned or (laughs) whatever, but he died. And this short-lived kingdom of his, which never extended beyond Peking, died with him, and then the rest followed, with Sun Yat-sen and, and then followed the period of, what we call the "Warlords Period." You know, every general who had a few thousand troops used to grab, (coughs) grab a portion of the country. And he was the boss, although nominally there was a republic. Sun Yat-sen was trying to get the country together, but he eventually died in 1925, and then Chiang Kai-shek took over from there. That was I remember, how I remembered Yuan Shi-kai.¹¹ Later on I looked him up, you see, to find out all about that, you know, that thing. And that Yuan Shi-kai dollar was even used during Chiang Kai-shek's time.

SH: So it was produced when he, in the, in the time that he was the Emperor?

SJ: Yes, it was produced, it was minted then. But it was in use in the, even until the thirties.

SH: Couldn't be many of them, could there?

SJ: There were quite a lot of them. They were superseded by the head of Sun Yat-sen. But there were a fair amount of these Yuan Shi-kai dollars floating around. And it eventually found its way in my pocket. Because a dollar in those days was something. It was worth, I think, I don't know what it was, must have been about three of these Chinese dollars to one U.S. dollar, something like that. What else can I remember?

SH: Well, let me ask you one more question. But if you remember other things that, that you think are interesting, that would be fine. But the question I wanted to ask is, I mean your, your background is, is so mixed as far as languages and . . .

¹¹ Yuan Shi-kai (1859-1916) was the most powerful military commander in North China and Minister of Foreign Affairs until 1909, when he was forcibly retired. As the Manchu dynasty collapsed in 1911, he was called back as Imperial High Commissioner of all military forces fighting the revolutionaries. When Sun Yat-sen became president of the provisional revolutionary government, Yuan's control of the military gave him a powerful negotiating position. Sun agreed to give up the presidency if the Manchu dynasty abdicated, and Yuan became the first president of the new Republic of China. In 1915 he attempted to revive the monarchy, but his death in 1916 ushered in a lengthy period of political anarchy.

SJ: Education.

SH: . . . education. And then, even though you were born in China, now and then traveled. You're, compared to the average person who is born and dies in one country, you are kind of a citizen of the world.

SJ: Yeah, cosmopolitan, I should say. That's the way it was with us over there. There were so many different people of different races, that eventually you just learned to live with each other. Now at my school, for instance, it was an English school. And it was an excellent school. We had an excellent English education there. And it was, you know, a sort of a semi-Victorian education. Because, after all, I was born in 1918. I attended an English kindergarten, when I was five years old or so. After a year or two I went to school separate from the kindergarten. Now, the kindergarten, strangely enough, was part of the girls' school. There was no coeducation then. (coughs) And I was in a kindergarten class, I remember it so well. Could I have something to drink? I'm so dry from talking.

SH: Shall we go get . . .

BREAK IN RECORDING

SH: Want to taste this before I try it? Looks like Guinness. It's got that same blackish color.

SJ: That's a kind of Guinness. Not quite Guinness, but . . .

SH: I'll sleep well tonight.

SJ: Good, good imitation. Not bad. Good imitation of it. Where was I?

SH: You were talking about school. You said you'd, you were in kindergarten.

SJ: Oh yeah, we were talking about the cosmopolitanism of the . . .

SH: Yes, that's right.

SJ: Well, in effect, that's what, that's what Shanghai, in effect, that's what Shanghai was, a cosmopolitan city, where people of all kinds learned to live with each other. And I really consider myself fortunate that I grew up in such a, in such an atmosphere. And another thing I was glad, is

that my father never lived in, in an exclusively foreign neighborhood. We always lived amongst Chinese. And not working-class Chinese, but amongst Chinese, and we always had good relations with them. They were people in, you know, shopkeepers who owned big shops, they were people who worked in banks, and people who ran their own businesses. And we were on very good terms with them. Most of them spoke English, but my father used to converse with them in Chinese. And we also lived amongst the Japanese, there were areas that were Japanese (unintelligible). And again we had good relations with them. You know, the Japanese image was bad after World War II and all that, but from the personal point of view, the Japanese were extremely nice people. We took to them very well. I loved going to their shops and eating their sweetmeats. You know, used to hop in there, and rush off round the corner, they had all these little Japanese rice cakes, sweets and things.

At the same time, we were friends with the Chinese, too. And I remember very well, my father didn't like us going out and eating Chinese food. He was, we had a kosher home, strict Orthodox. If we came in at home, we always wore a *kipah*. Sitting down at the table, it was a bit of a ceremony, always together, and had to wash our hands, and say the *netilat yadayim*. You know, when you wash your hands, you say a prayer, when you dry your hands.¹² That sort of thing. And so he, he hit, he hit upon this thing. He had the Chinese cook cook Chinese food every Sunday. When we were all at home, we had time. And we had kosher Chinese food every Sunday for years and years. That's why I never remember when I learned to use chopsticks. (laughs) I learned it at home. My father was pretty smart that way. And he enjoyed Chinese food, too, his own Chinese food. He used to use chopsticks, too. My mother no, never. She always used a fork. And my mother, the Chinese vegetables we used to cook at home, too, with some bamboo shoots. I remember some big dish we used to make, bamboo shoots and green peas, especially in spring, and fresh green peas. Things like that.

Now, for instance at school. Now, I remember, I remember so clearly attending this kindergarten at the girls' school. We had a special class over there, boys and girls. We were the only boys in the school from kindergarten. After we graduated from kindergarten, naturally, we had to go to the boys' school. I remember my, my kindergarten teacher. She was a big, blond, handsome Englishwoman, and her name was Miss Allison. I remember her name. And I remember that I was a great favorite with her. I don't know why, she liked me very much. And she always used to cuddle me. And I was a teacher's pet. And there we learned how to use a fork, how to hold a teacup. And to this day when I pick up a teacup, I always have a tendency to curl my little finger. (laughs)

SH: From kindergarten.

¹² *Netilat yadayim* actually refers to the ritual washing of the hands, after which a benediction is recited.

SJ: From kindergarten. This all becomes ingrained in you, all this stuff. Yes, we were taught how to dress properly, and how to keep our fingernails clean, the whole, the whole works. Not just learning nursery rhymes and learning, learning a Scotch dance, all that sort of thing, English folk dances. May came along, we'd learn, we used to set up a maypole, and we used to dance around this thing. Well, it was the whole, I think we were more British than the British. Eventually we went off to school. And our school, I think, had, I think, at one time they counted thirty different nationalities of all kinds. There were Chinese. There were Eurasians, those of mixed marriages, you know, English-Japanese, English and Chinese, Swedish and Japanese, all kinds of mixtures. And there you are, the whole thing is set up over there, you had to live with each other. There was no, what else could you do? You had Indians sitting with, an Indian sitting next to you, on the other side there's a Philippino, and behind you is an Englishman, English boy, in front of you there's an American. Over there was a Dane. There were Russians. There, there were Jews of various kinds, a couple of Sephardi Jews, a couple of Baghdadi Jews or whatever, and a Russian Jew. And there we are! We learned to live with each other.

There was no anti-semitism. We didn't know what anti-semitism was in such an atmosphere. Not talking about the Chinese. The Chinese, of course, never knew. But the others did, but yet we lived together with them. And well, the Russians, for instance. The White Russians that were bad, they were always anti-semitic. And I know the difference between them in Shanghai, and those who were in Harbin. Those in Harbin were anti-semitic, and there were clashes between them. But, in Shanghai, they could have been anti-, they could have been anti-semitics, but it sort of all rubbed off. And, generally speaking, the Russian Jews had a pretty good relationship with the White Russians, with the non, non-Jew.

SH: And you think it's because of the, just the fact of living in that city, as opposed to Harbin?

SJ: Exactly, exactly. I mean, the whole atmosphere there was different. I was for, for a while, even a member of the Portuguese club. There was what they called a Club Lusitano. Now that was another strange thing about Shanghai and Hong Kong. There were those Portuguese over there, who were not Portuguese from Portugal, but who originally came from Macao. And they were a mixed breed. They weren't, they weren't really Portuguese. They all sported Portuguese names. They were strong Roman Catholics. But, and they spoke Portuguese, but a sort of a bastard Portuguese, not pure Portuguese. And they hated being called Macanese, from Macao, it was, into Macanese. I was a member of that club. I mixed with them a lot, and worked with a couple. In the war years I had a couple of good friends who worked with me in Domei. And a strange thing about that, a lot of them, lot of them had Jewish names. You know, in the old days about a third of Portugal were Jewish. And there were certain names which only, only Jews had, used. There were names like Cavalio. There were names like Peres, Figuerdo. Different kinds of names that were Jewish. And I read once something about the Portuguese Jews. I used to tell my

Portuguese friends, "You know, you've got a Jewish name." They said, "What do you mean? I'm a Catholic. I'm a good Catholic. How can I be Jewish?" (laughs)

I used to tell them their origin. You know, the Portuguese settled in Macao and took it over as a colony as long as four hundred years ago. And they're still there today. Although for the last thirty or forty years, they've been trying to get rid of it. The Chinese wouldn't let them, because for them it was a good outlet for all kinds of deals. Now in gold, and foreign currency, and different businesses, just like in Hong Kong, though on a different scale. Although in effect they, they run Macao, but there's a Governor who's Portuguese in Macao. Everything is in Portuguese over there, the roads are in Portuguese names. And, what I say, the poor Portuguese, especially after the revolution, fifteen years ago, have been dying to get rid of the damn, they don't want it. (laughs) What are they going to do with it? But I suppose, eventually, with Hong Kong being taken over in another, 1997, the same thing will happen in Macao. There were a lot of them employed by the British as clerks in banks, and there were many of them, several thousand of them, in Shanghai. But they weren't a bad element, and I liked them, had them in school also. The fact that they were Roman Catholics was no big deal. They had a lot of Jewish friends. And in school, as I told you, things worked very well. I'm glad I was brought up in that atmosphere, it was British completely, the education. And yet, at the same time, we were all together.

SH: Aside from the White Russians, did you ever feel any, was there any anti-semitism from other groups, or was that . . .

SJ: No, I never felt any. I mean, I could feel a sort of a latent anti-semitism amongst them, but it never came out, and I had a lot of them, lot of them were my friends. And eventually, of course, virtually all my girlfriends were Russians. I never went out with Jewish girls. I always kept away from that. I don't know, you know, going out with Jewish girls meant, obliged you to certain things. I kept away from marriage for a long time.

SH: That must have given your father sleepless nights.

SJ: (laughs) I think he got used to it eventually. And, well, sex in Shanghai wasn't a big thing. Sex was very open and, commercially or otherwise.

SH: Different than other, different than other places at that time?

SJ: It was, it was different, much more open. You know, in those days, sex was a thing which was, well, look, let's face it. Fifty years ago sex wasn't what it, what it was today. And, but in Shanghai, sex was a very open thing. There was a lot of prostitution. And sex was cheap over there. Commercial sex was not a thing to be worried about.

SH: And that affected non-commercial sex, that affected relationships between young men and women?

SJ: No. Late, later on, we graduated from commercial sex to non, non-commercial sex. But you could start sex at a fairly young age. I don't mean in your early teens, but in your late teens you could, it wasn't a big thing. And there it was. It, it was a wonderful atmosphere in which to grow. I never regretted it. Both from the Jewish side, and both from the, your general upbringing. That's why we could, most people from Shanghai could adapt themselves to any situation anywhere very easily. And I know, when I came to Israel, it was the same thing. You know, we never, I never lifted a finger in even washing a handkerchief. And for most of us who came over there, during hard times in Israel, it, we adapted quickly. Much more so than the so-called "Anglo-Saxons", many of whom didn't last long in Israel. I think out of, the percentage of those who left, if a hundred came, I think about seventy would, would leave after a while.

SH: These are Americans coming, coming over?

SJ: Nowadays. Nowadays most of the Americans are the religious ones. And, let's face it, they're a good element, too. But why should the average American leave his, leave his country for Israel? Especially now with all the troubles we're having. I know, I, I married a *sabra*. And after being ten years in the country, my child was about three years old then, I told her, I said, "Look, we're not getting anywhere now. Let's leave and go to California where all my family is. I've got a profession. I know I could, I could make it." It's, wasn't a, wasn't a hard deal to, wasn't a big deal to get a job there. One of the papers in San Francisco. You could always do it. But no, she was a big patriot and we remained. There, there am I today. Although I've nothing to complain of. I'm retired now and I still work full time. In effect I'm getting double salary. I'm better off as I've never been before. I'm in good health, thanks, especially thanks to my early sporting life in Shanghai. Sports was a big thing in Shanghai.

SH: Well, tell me about that. That's one thing we haven't talked about.

SJ: One of the biggest recreations over there. Now, of course, most of the foreigners over there always had leisure time to indulge in sports. You remember that people's park, right planked in the center of town. It used to be what was known as a racecourse. In American you'd say a racetrack. Well, it was more than a racetrack. It had a circumference of one mile exactly around. There was the Shanghai Racing Club, which considered, which consisted of, of lots of members, and, distinctly enough, it included Chinese, because horse racing was a commercial thing. And there were rich Chinese owners of horses. Actually, they were not horses, they were Mongolian ponies. And the same, same animals that Genghis Khan invaded Europe. They were Mongolian ponies, a very sturdy animal. And it was a big thing, racing. And the Chinese are inveterate

gamblers, the greatest gamblers in the world. Even with communism, they couldn't, they could never wipe it out. And there were Chinese members, too, and Chinese jockeys. There were amateur jockeys. But it was a big thing.

Now, it wasn't just a, just a racetrack. It's a huge area in the middle of town. And I'll eventually get to why, why it's in the middle, why it was in the middle of town. Inside, inside were various recreation clubs. There were football fields, soccer fields. A couple of rugby fields. There were polo grounds there. There was, there were cri-, there was a cricket club there. There was a lawn bowls club over there, too. In summer were tennis courts. What else? That's about it. Hockey fields, field hockey. And all these sports were held over there. Soccer was a big thing. Now, these recreation fields were closed to Chinese. The whole place wasn't owned by Chinese. But Chinese were not allowed to be members of these recreation grounds. Of course, they had Chinese servants and all that. Apart from the Shanghai Racing Club, that was a separate entity. And, of course, Chinese were admitted over there to the stands, because they were the main gambling element. But the other places didn't have Chinese enter, they were not allowed. I mean, the gates were open, but none of them came in. There were no, there were no stands over there, all these fields you had to just stand around and watch these games. They had, you know, they had a very active soccer league over there with different divisions, one, two, three, four divisions. Of course, there were excellent Chinese teams that were playing, but they played in different stadiums. And that was the meeting place of a lot of young people. They used to go there to watch soccer. Those interested in cricket would play or watch it. And I, as a young reporter there of sports, you know, it was my home ground over there. I used to cover soccer, I used to cover cricket, there was even a corner over there for a baseball pitch. Baseball was played over there. There was hardly a sport which wasn't played, except American, American football.

END SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

