

# Journal OF THE Royal Asiatic Society China

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# THE SCRIBE OF RUSSIAN SHANGHAI:

Vladimir Zhiganov and his perennial masterpiece

BY KATYA KNYAZEVA<sup>a</sup>

*“We are not in exile, we are on a mission.”*

—Nina Berberova

## ABSTRACT

Vladimir Zhiganov (1896–1978)—photographer, archivist, author, and philanthropist—lived his professional life amid the Russian diaspora in Shanghai, China, and his energies were singularly devoted to his community. He produced only one work: an illustrated atlas, *Russians in Shanghai*, published in 1936. Few histories are as fundamental to the study of their subject as is this book. It is a photographic index of Russian people, organisations, and businesses in Shanghai, and it remains the most comprehensive and, in many respects, the sole source of information on the diaspora prior to the Second World War. Zhiganov was his community’s only biographer, but his own career remains enigmatic, and the only accounts we have of his life are his own. This essay traces the rise of the Russian community as reflected in Zhiganov’s definitive historical portrait of Shanghai’s ‘Little Russia,’ and examines the early years of Communist Shanghai through the eyes of the last remaining Russians.

## INTRODUCTION

Vladimir Zhiganov<sup>1</sup> (1896, Khabarovsk–1978, Sydney)—photographer, archivist, author, and self-styled philanthropist—lived his professional life amid the Russian diaspora in Shanghai, China, and his energies were singularly devoted to his community. The pace of his activity was relentless, but he produced only one work—an illustrated atlas of the Russians in Shanghai, published in 1936. Few histories are as fundamental to the study of their subject as is Zhiganov’s atlas. The book is a photographic index of people, organisations, and businesses in Russian Shanghai, and it remains the most comprehensive and, in many respects, the sole source of information on the diaspora prior to the Second World War. Zhiganov was his community’s only biographer; he was also perpetually in debt and in conflict with

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everyone around him. He was entirely dedicated to the celebration of his compatriots, who were oddly circumspect regarding him. The only accounts we have of Zhiganov's life are his own; no one else ever acknowledged the man in any memoir, press, or print. His historical portrait of Shanghai's 'Little Russia' is definitive, but his own career remains enigmatic.

The Russian community in Shanghai emerged in the early 1920s with the arrival of a decimated Czarist fleet from Vladivostok. In the following years, more Russians relocated from China's north. By 1940, the community had reached a peak population of about 25,000. About 80% of the refugees were ethnically Russian,<sup>2</sup> but the boundaries of the Russian Empire had included territories populated by the Polish, Czech, Jewish, Greek, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Tartar, Hungarian, and other ethnicities. When they converged in Shanghai, they considered themselves Russian, while simultaneously engaging in associations which varied along the lines of faith, ethnicity, and politics. The scale and characteristics of the diaspora remained vague to its members, who mostly saw their exile as temporary.

In Shanghai, residential and business directories (*Hongs*), published twice a year, were full of Russian names ending with -eff, -off, -sky, and -ich, but there were also large numbers of exiles with uncharacteristic last names. Motivated to end their statelessness, Russian women married foreigners and adopted new citizenship. The society pages in the *North China Daily News* were filled with wedding announcements, like the marriage of Miss Vera Candiba to the British officer George Rouse, of Angela Kriloff to Raymond Besset of Massachusetts, or of the shoemaker's daughter Selina Toochinsky to the French Baron Reginald d'Auxion de Ruffe. Hundreds of other, more modest marriages went unpublicized in press. Many Russians became naturalized Chinese citizens.

Large numbers of Russian children attended French, German, and English schools in the foreign settlements. While some maintained a Russian linguistic identity, many grew up in homes where Russian was intentionally not spoken; frequently, parents reasoned that the future of their children lay the West, not back in Russia. Having settled in Shanghai, the refugee community was integrating and even dissolving in the complex fabric of the cosmopolitan port. It took a certain obsessive investigative chauvinism to identify and record only the

'Russian' characteristics and genealogy among Shanghai's refugees—but obsessive documentation was Zhiganov's métier.

#### MUTUAL MEDICAL ASSISTANCE SOCIETY

The methodical intelligence Zhiganov provided about other people contrasts with the chaotic sequence of annoyances and miracles by which he narrates his own life. He emerged from the horrific battles of the First World War unscathed. He narrowly escaped imprisonment by the Bolsheviks. He found himself trapped in Shanghai for 38 years. He witnessed the formation and dissolution of the Russian community, the Japanese occupation, the war, and the arrival of the Communists. He was one of the very few Russians left behind in Shanghai after Liberation and able to give an account of life as a foreigner in Communist China.

Vladimir Zhiganov was born in 1896 in an officer's family and grew up in Port Arthur, Chefoo, and central Russia. Having joined the Russian army in 1914 as a volunteer, he fought on the western front during the First World War, then joined the anti-Bolshevik White Army and retreated with it all the way across Siberia. After the civil war, he remained an inveterate Czarist and one of the last White officers to openly wear his epaulets in Soviet Vladivostok. In 1922, after working as a poster artist in Harbin and a Bible teacher in Vladivostok, Zhiganov became involved in a commercial fishing enterprise in Kamchatka. In 1925 Soviet authorities arrested him for anti-Bolshevik activities and put him on a ship bound for Vladivostok. During a stopover in Hakodate, Japan, Zhiganov managed to mix with a crowd of fishermen and escape. After four months in Japan, Zhiganov boarded a ship for Shanghai.

He landed in Shanghai on 25 December 1925. He was ready to start a new life, away from Russia—and from Russians. Unexpectedly, in 'the faraway, foreign city' he found thousands of his compatriots, many of whom he already knew. He duly registered as a 'White Russian' in the Emigrants' Committee, the extra-legal body which managed the affairs of the exiles, and found work as a night watchman in an English company (most probably, Jardin, Matheson & Co.). By 1927, Zhiganov's younger brother, Georgy, found his way out of Communist Russia and joined Vladimir at the same company.

Zhiganov's sense of civic mission was inflamed after he fell sick and had to spend several days in a Russian charity hospital.



**Figure 1:** Zhiganov (centre) unloading fish in Kamchatka, 1922.  
(*Review of the Past*, No. 14, p. 151)

*“Having tried their garbage-like soup and frozen in the unheated room, I felt deeply the poor emigrants’ plight.”<sup>3</sup>*

In 1928 the former officer and fisherman started the Mutual Medical Assistance Society, so that “*none of us would have to pawn his or her golden crucifix to pay the doctor anymore.*”<sup>4</sup> He set the minimal membership fee at one dollar a month. The poorest members were entitled to free medical services, while those with a steady income paid reduced doctor’s fees. Russian doctors and hospitals collaborated with the Society, which provided a range of medical services from dentistry to hospice care. Laboratories offered the members tests at discounted rates, while family doctors allocated work hours for house calls.

Zhiganov anticipated that Society membership fees would eventually pay for the construction of a large free hospital, an affordable pharmacy, and a public summer resort in Qingdao. To recruit new sponsors, he frequented charity balls, dinners, and celebrations, where he was identified as a particularly tenacious panhandler. He also stalked addresses where Russians lived, going door to door and enquiring with Chinese owners whether any Russians were living there:

If the Chinese answered ‘yu’ and pointed at the door,  
I would go in, introduce myself and try to persuade the



residents to join the Society.<sup>5</sup>

Soliciting fees from households in the evenings, after seven-hour shifts as a watchman, took all of Zhiganov's free time, so he quit his job and plunged full-time into the Society administration. By spring 1929, over 1200 adults and 600 children were listed as members.

The Society never thrived. A third of the contributing members failed to pay their fees. The majority of Russians were unable to afford any kind of monthly payment. Some made the minimal contribution to get a free visit to the dentist, but "*upon learning that the Society was not yet rich enough to offer golden crowns, they would quit.*"<sup>6</sup> Zhiganov expected the Society to become sustainable if membership reached 3000, but this goal was never attained.

One delays his membership until we open a hospital; the other one will not join until we hire an ophthalmologist; the third one wants his favorite doctor; the fourth never falls ill and does not want to pay the membership fees; the fifth has left because we could not provide free X-ray; [...] the eighth has left because she was not elected a vice-chairperson; the ninth was disappointed when she did not get free tickets to the masked ball; the tenth did not pay his fees for a year in spite of having a steady job. The members would leave, fall ill, come back and ask to join the Society again.<sup>7</sup>

"*Oh the humiliations I suffered on this job!*" Zhiganov recalled forty years later, writing from Australia.

One time I rode my bike all the way to the edge of the city, to visit one Russian lady and get her to pay me one dollar. She only counted as a lady because she married a French police sergeant, when in fact she was barely literate. Her Chinese 'boy' opened the door and told me: 'Missy sleep.' She had danced all night long in the French Club, and he refused to wake her. I turned around and rode my bike to the opposite part of the city to collect more fees. I came back by noon, and her 'boy' told me: 'Missy chow.' That is, she is having lunch, and during the meals she never touches the money because it is filthy. When I came back

again at four the 'boy' informed me: 'Missy go.'<sup>8</sup>

On another occasion, Zhiganov helped place a poor member of the Society in the prestigious Country Hospital free of charge. Three days later he paid him a visit and asked how things were. The patient replied:

I like the hospital alright, but I don't like the English food.  
All these chocolate cakes and coffee, I cannot stand them. I  
prefer borscht and buckwheat cereal.

After three weeks in the hospital, the fastidious Russian recovered, but when Zhiganov reminded him of his membership fees, the former patient claimed poverty and asked to be sent back to the hospital. Eventually, the patient slammed the door in Zhiganov's face.

The Society limped on for two years. In the meantime, the Russian expatriate community was growing larger and richer, and competing charities flourished. Endorsed by the Orthodox Church, military unions, and merchant associations, they offered shelter, meals, medical treatment, and education to disadvantaged compatriots. Generous one-off donations for a particular cause and the patronage of figures of authority proved a better mechanism for charity among the Russians than the equal distribution of cost that Zhiganov had envisioned. He resigned in January 1931 and resolved to never do public work again. Without him, the Society dissolved within a month.

#### THE NEW MISSION

The summer of 1931 was unbearably hot. Most foreigners and their families had abandoned the city and headed to summer resorts. Commercial and social life seemed to stop. Vladimir Zhiganov was in his room on the second floor above a little Russian store on the Avenue du Roi Albert. He was broke and owed several months' rent. As he looked around his room, he noticed a stack of illustrated supplements to Russian dailies, *Shanghai Zaria* and *Slovo*. He had been saving the pages with portraits of prominent Russians, as a souvenir of his time in Shanghai.

And then the idea struck me. I do not need to look for work. These photographs will give me work and money. I will produce an album about Russians in Shanghai.<sup>9</sup>

This new endeavour was meant to be small and commercial: several pages of portraits and brief profiles of the most influential and wealthy Russians and a page-long overview on the state of the community. Although there were no millionaires among Shanghai's Russian entrepreneurs, Zhiganov believed that dozens were close to this mark, and they would be the subjects of the album.<sup>10</sup> He calculated that, at a price of five dollars, he could easily sell several thousand copies in Shanghai, Harbin, Changchun, as well as in Europe and North America.

With a notebook, a pencil, and twenty cents in his pocket, Vladimir Zhiganov stepped out of his house on the Avenue du Roi Albert and walked south, towards Avenue Joffre. Since his arrival in 1925, an enormous change had come to this part of Shanghai, once disparaged as 'the Arabian desert' in local Russian-language periodicals. Articles recalled that around 1925 Avenue Joffre was ...

a dusty country road sparsely dotted with bungalows,"<sup>11</sup>  
"there were fewer than five Russian shops, [...] no neon ads, no shop displays of quality undergarments and no Tkachenko's Café."<sup>12</sup>

By 1931, the neighbourhood had blossomed. Gone were the two-story 'bungalows' set back from the street, once inhabited by Belgian and Spanish missionaries, French exporters, and American traders. In



**Figure 2:** Anna Iskandrian's store in Grosvenor Gardens.  
(University of Wisconsin System © The Board of Regents; National Geographic Society)

their place, commercial façades lined both sides of the thoroughfare. Behind them, new residential lane house compounds (Russians called them 'passages') were filling up with Russian residents, who were arriving from Manchuria at a rate of about a thousand people a year.<sup>13</sup>

The corner of Avenue Joffre and Avenue du Roi Albert became a destination after the construction of the Parc des Sports, also known as the Auditorium ('Promoters of Pelote Basque, Sound and Talking Pictures, Boxing, Skating, Athletic Games, etc.').<sup>14</sup> Buildings fronted with Russian stores lined the street. Behind them was the grid of almost 200 townhouses, called Joffre Terrace. The majority of these houses with miniature walled-in gardens had middle-class Chinese residents, but over 50 Russians lived here as well, among them the well-known painter Victor Podgoursky and the police detective and spy Vladimir Kedrolivansky (also known as Eugene Pick and Hovans). On the north side of Avenue Joffre, past a small cluster of Russian shops and offices, the Chinese-owned Far Eastern Butchery and an American gas station, there was another sports emporium, the Cercle Sportif Français, built in 1926.

In the French Concession, roads had been laid out before any buildings were built or planned. A construction boom marked the beginning of the 1930s and new houses filled the empty lots. The intersection of Avenue Joffre with Route Cardinal Mercier became the cultural centre of the French Concession, anchored by the new Cathay Theatre. Stretching north along Route Cardinal Mercier,<sup>15</sup> the new commercial and residential strip, called Grosvenor Gardens, was filling up with tenants. When Zhiganov started his project in 1931, fashion and cosmetics boutiques with Russian, French, German, and Dutch proprietresses had begun to claim these storefronts. Among them was the atelier of Nina Gingeroff, whose Salon Des Modes had operated at various locations in Shanghai since 1926. Responding to the emergence of a new prestige retail area, she moved her boutique into a double storefront at Grosvenor Gardens. New York's latest fashions displayed in huge glass vitrines received regular coverage in the press.<sup>16</sup>

Gingeroff's level of success was an exception among Russians in the garment trade, who were mostly at-home tailors, but a fair number did rise to prominence. Among them were Anna Iskandrian (the owner of Scarlett Gowns in Grosvenor Gardens and the official representative of the luxury brand Elisabeth Bock), Tamara Linoff

(the owner of Maison Arcus in Hamilton House) and Eleanora Garnett, who climbed out of abysmal poverty to become the darling of Shanghai's fashionable elite. Targeting Western clientele, Russian businesses assumed European-sounding names, like Maison Lucile, Grand Magazins de Paris, and Femina Silks. However, the majority of Russian tailors served their native community, operated from homes (or shared storefronts with other businesses) and never expanded the scope of operations past their alleyway.

When Zhiganov began his investigation, Russian tenancy and commerce concentrated on four blocks along Avenue Joffre, from the Avenue du Roi Albert to the Rue du Lieutenant Pétiot.<sup>17</sup> If one walked past the modernist corner of the Cathay Theatre eastwards on Avenue Joffre, the streetscape became indistinguishable from a Czarist-era town in central Russia, with its interrupted row of stores with striped canopies and Cyrillic signs. Next to the Cathay, the signage in the windows of Piotr Grigorieff's fashion store promised moderate prices and timely arrivals of English woolens and French angora for tailor-made dresses and coats. Further east, the Shanghai branch of the old, established Harbin textile emporium Petroff & Co offered a range of "*woolen, silk and cotton piece-goods*,"<sup>18</sup> and also positioned itself as "*the only place to find ready-for-wear suits and dress, as well as moleskin, mink and leopard fur coats*."<sup>19</sup> Next in line was Avenue Joffre Flower Shop of Mrs A. P. Medem, one of the few confirmed aristocrats among the Russians. The next course of shop windows belonged to the Haberdashery of Leontiy Baranovsky's, an old-timer in Russian Shanghai.

Like other successful Russian entrepreneurs, the store's proprietors came to Shanghai with some capital, having prospered in Vladivostok and Harbin. Arriving in 1923, Leontiy Baranovsky first opened a small shop near Shanghai port, and then moved his business to the French Concession following his clientele's gradual relocation. By 1934, he operated a large storefront at a prime location on Avenue Joffre, with five floor-to-ceiling windows. The haberdashery sold English wool, Chinese silk, Indian cotton, and European lace sourced directly from its manufacturers. Fabric could be turned into coats, suits, dresses, and children's garments directly on the premises; there were also sections for ready-for-wear men's clothing and accessories.

To include Baranovskys' business in his album, Zhiganov paid him several visits. He interviewed the owner and wrote down his history. He



It became evident that it was text, not photographs, that would set the tone for the book – the text that would make the Russian heart rejoice one hundred, two hundred and one thousand years later.<sup>20</sup>

The commercial incentive for the production of the album gave way to a preoccupation with creating an “*historical monument to the Russian diaspora*.” Zhiganov had forgotten his resolution to eschew civic-minded ventures. He now set himself to chronicle the Russians’ exile from Communist Russia and their tortuous path to Shanghai, their struggle for survival, their outstanding self-reliance, and tenaciousness in the face of powerlessness and poverty.

More sections were added to the book. The first one traced the dangerous voyage of the White Russian fleet from Vladivostok to Shanghai, with a separate page on the Far Eastern Cossacks. The next 10 pages were devoted to the Russian Orthodox Church in Shanghai: biographies of the clergy, histories and photographs of every Shanghai building that had ever served as a Russian prayer hall. Zhiganov decided to omit the numerous mosques, synagogues, temples, gurdwaras, Lutheran, Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches where exiles of the Russian Empire prayed, married, and received the last farewell from the community.

The author’s personal preferences and experiences informed the order of the chapters and their level of detail. The work of Russian watchmen and bodyguards received an expansive section, complete with the breakdown of ranks and salaries. An overview of Russian benevolent societies included a lengthy and emotional history of the Mutual Medical Assistance Society (somewhat out of proportion as regards its effect on the community). A detailed survey of Russian schools and four pages of portraits of emigrants’ children and babies (nude, posed, dressed up for masked balls) was followed by sections on Russian literary workers, musicians, artists, sculptors, and theatre actors in Shanghai.

Zhiganov recorded that for the first two years he worked 14 to 16 hours a day, every day, even on Sundays. He set aside his domestic troubles,

with what to fill the stomach, where to find money to buy photographs, how to order printing blocks, how to pay the

typography for printing and where to store the expensive paper (I ended up filling my whole room with three tons of paper).

He had to keep his mind on what he considered essential:

The relic of what saint was laid at the foundation of the Orthodox Cathedral? Who was the first director of the Russian Commercial College? What English spelling of his name does the activist Ivanoff prefer? What year did Petroff's textile company open in Harbin? Who was the first Russian Consul in Shanghai?<sup>21</sup>

Working completely alone, he spent an entire month just on research for a two-page essay on Russian industry and commerce. In addition to doing all the investigation and writing, he added about 1600 photographs to the manuscript. He commissioned portraits of prominent Russians at George Photo Studio, bought ready-made city views from Denniston & Sullivan and Ah Fong Studios, and took photographs of family celebrations, public holidays, charity balls, and weddings. He developed his photographs, printed, and retouched them at home.

Progress on the book was slow and there were countless setbacks. On one occasion, Zhiganov lost the notebook where he had collected English spellings of the names of about 800 Russians; his public appeal, begging the subjects to submit the information again, published in a local newspaper, yielded only one response. On another occasion, he decided to include the full names of Russian elementary school students on the class group portraits taken two years earlier. In an attempt to track down the names, he repeatedly circled the city, relying on vague directions from neighbourhood children:

If you go to so-and-so street, you'll find a friend of that student on the picture, and he might remember her name.<sup>22</sup>

The Russian Shanghai that Zhiganov was documenting was constantly changing. In addition to the old Russian-inhabited lane compound Linda Terrace, at 833 Avenue Joffre, new compounds were becoming majority Russian as well, like Harmony Terrace and



Louis Terrace, built in 1934 next to Joffre Terrace. Spreading in all directions from the central blocks of Avenue Joffre, Russians came to dominate Route de Grouchy, Rue Bourgeat, and Route Vallon (the latter was nicknamed 'Nahalovka,' or 'The Squats'). Newcomers from Harbin were relocating their businesses with them. New stores and production facilities were opening, old ones expanding, changing hands, or closing. The Tchakalian brothers' French Bakery opened several outlets around the city and became the leader among Russian bakeries in turnover and, eventually, in longevity. Tkachenko's Restaurant, the sacred institution for the Russians, moved into a new building and immediately collapsed under its debt, just before the book was released, rendering obsolete the whole page dedicated to it. Zhiganov created a new 'General Section' at the end of the book to include previously uncovered personalities and events, like the page dedicated to Feodor Chaliapin's visit to Shanghai in February 1936.

Several thousand acquaintances Zhiganov had made during his work in the Mutual Medical Assistance Society proved to be useful for research, but he had a gift for alienating his potential collaborators. In the afterword to his book, he complained that he "*had to beg for information because nobody believed in the project*" and that "*the book was produced in the atmosphere of mistrust and hostility.*" Forty years later, however, he acknowledged the help he had received in Shanghai. Several stores purchased advertising space in the future book and offered him goods on credit. The largest Russian publishing house, *Slovo*, rescued him from dire financial straits during the third year of his work and offered to print the book on credit. One hundred people prepaid 10 silver dollars each for their copies of the book. Zhiganov's landlord allowed him to live rent-free for five years.

#### RUSSIANS IN SHANGHAI

In April 1936, under the mounting pressure from creditors, Zhiganov released his much-anticipated book. It was a luxurious leather-bound volume of almost 300 pages, with stamped metal corners and silver-coloured cloth spine. Raised metal letters spelled *Russians in Shanghai* on the front. The cost of the production was 18,000 dollars, and at the time of the release, the author was 7000 silver dollars in debt. He had to increase the planned price from 3 to 25 dollars, at a time when "*a dinner of three courses with a shot of vodka cost 40 cents,*" and a volume by a classical Russian writer cost four dollars.<sup>23</sup> The book sold slowly,



Figure 4: Title page of *Russians in Shanghai*

and most buyers chose to pay in installments. Of the 1100 copies that Zhiganov had printed, he managed to sell about 700, which barely allowed him to pay off his debts. Later, during the war, Russians were not in a position to buy expensive books, and the remaining 400 copies were left unbound.

The atlas was not finished to Zhiganov's satisfaction. He had planned to include a long essay on the Russian theatre, but this plan went unrealised in spite of an enormous amount of preparatory work: he indexed 2500 issues of *Shanghai Zaria* and copied all references to Russian performances, stage direction, and actors.<sup>24</sup> Another comprehensive essay, on Russian press and literary work, also never materialised. Many pages were missing at the end of the Industry and Commerce section, where Zhiganov planned to add more businesses and personal profiles. He ended up adding a framed notice to the last page, promising to print and send the new pages to everyone who had purchased the book.

Omissions notwithstanding, the book was obsessively comprehensive and diverse. There are biographies and portraits of the Greek pastry chef Kyriaco Dimitriades (owner of the Astoria confectionary), of Polish hairdresser Joseph Wziontek (owner of Jan's Beauty Parlour), and of Armenian photographer George Odjagyan (of George Photo Studio). Many influential exiles were ethnic Germans: the former Russian Consul Victor Grosse, the Vice-Consul Karl Metzler, the furrier Summer Fluss, the sausage maker Adolf Lang, the pharmacist Hugo Baruksen, the doctor Georg von Bergmann, and many others. Russian Jews were numerous among furriers (Grigory Klebanoff, Moisey Lipkovsky, Isay Goldwasser, Aron Peisahov, A. Blackman, and others), pharmacists (Osip Goldberg, Benjamin Shmulevsky, Harion Shohor, Mikhail Ioffe), doctors (Semion Furstenberg, Semion Helfenstein, Isabella Goldberg, Samolik Ioffik, Ida Leiboshetz, etc.), jewelers (Anatoly Beerbayer, A. Ginzburg), beauticians and hairdressers (Sam W. Levy, Jacob Rosenbaum), as well as among all other occupations (the photographer Sam Sanzetti, the wholesaler Wladimir Zimmerman, the bookseller Boris Rimmerman, the wine importer Isaak Mechik, the baker Mikhail Halian, and others).

The book is also filled with Zhiganov's idiosyncrasies. The section on the Russian visual arts begins with an essay decrying the waning interest in classical painting. The author blames ...

the propensity of the Shanghai public to furnish their apartments in the 'modern style' that prescribes decorating the walls with framed photographs instead of paintings.

He goes on to observe that, luckily, the fascination with art deco is on the wane. A gallery of portraits and biographies of 35 artists follows the essay, starting with Georgy Sapojnikoff, a.k.a. Sapajou, the famous cartoonist of the *North China Daily News*. Not only was Sapajou the most popular Russian in Shanghai, he was also one of the first to arrive, having landed in 1920. As an organising principle, Zhiganov deemed the order of arrival in Shanghai far more important than accomplishment or celebrity. Biographies in the book tend to highlight the qualities peculiarly relevant to the Russian community: Sapajou is represented as a former White Army officer, then as a founding member of the Cossacks' Union, and then as a philanthropist.

Sapajou, incidentally, owned the publishing house *Slovo* that printed Zhiganov's *opus magnum*.

The line-up of painters and sculptors includes many personalities known outside of the diaspora. Victor Podgoursky, at the top of his fame, is introduced as the designer of the dome mosaic of the HSBC building on the Bund, but his authorship of the glass mosaics and greyhound ornaments in the Cathay House is not mentioned; this information might not have been available to Zhiganov. Another famous painter, Vladimir Tretchikoff, the 'world's first pop artist,' was captured at the beginning of his global career: the 21-year-old had just completed his five-year stint in Shanghai as an apprentice of the classical oil painter Mikhail Kichigin. He had also worked as the cartoonist for the *Shanghai Evening Post* and as designer of advertisements. In Shanghai in the 1930s, art and advertising departments of foreign companies were mostly staffed with Russians.

Tretchikoff proposed his design for the title page for Zhiganov's book, but the author chose the work of the traditional oil painter Nicolay Zadorojny, who had a predilection for religious and historic imagery. The title page features a portrait of a solemn Russian maiden in a folk crown decorated with pearls. She is resting her arms on the Cyrillic letters for *Russians in Shanghai* that rise like skyscrapers behind the Bund skyline. An ethereal Kremlin fortress floats in the sky behind the maiden's shoulders. Two flags, one for the Russian Empire and one for the Shanghai Russian Regiment, surround a laurel wreath emblazoned with the symbols of various cardinal vocations: a caliper, a caduceus, a torch, a sword, and a lyre.

The book also devotes pages to the work of Russian sculptors. The most successful of these was Yakov Lehonos, whose work can be seen on many Shanghai buildings. Zhiganov included many lesser-known sculptors as well. The biography of Mrs Isabella Karsnitsky, printed under her portrait, informs the readers that she designed the flamboyant sculptures of Hermes, Eros, and Aphrodite on the tower of the Central Post Office, completed bronze ornaments for the War Memorial on the Bund, and authored "*hundreds of memorial busts and bronze bas-reliefs.*"

There is a relative lack of distinction given to Russian architects, who are scattered in the Arts, Charity, and Industry sections along with general contractors, civil engineers, and interior decorators. It appears that Zhiganov did not have contacts among professionals,

especially those who worked in foreign companies, and so he failed to attribute many buildings to Russian architects. Alexander Yaron, the most successful and prolific among them, appears in the Charity section of the book as a church benefactor. His largest architectural projects are acknowledged (St. Nicholas Church and the ballroom of the Majestic Hotel), but his authorship of a handful of famous apartment houses and lane compounds is omitted. Zhiganov might not have been aware that Yaron had designed Linda Terrace (1925), Washington Apartments and West Park Mansions (both 1928), Bishop Apartments (1932), and a number of urban villas. Vladimir Livin-Goldenstaedt, Shanghai resident since 1922 and the architect of Astrid Apartments (1933), is absent from the book altogether. Also missing is Alexander Reyer, whose firm completed the general works and plumbing service in Astor House, Majestic Hotel, and Country Club, and built Cavendish Court and a number of factories, wharves, and godowns. Reyer is only mentioned in passing, as an important donor for the Orthodox Cathedral (which was still under construction at the time of the book's printing).

In his research, Zhiganov relied exclusively on oral testimony and the local Russian press; otherwise he would have known that Reyer was the only Russian included in the directory *Men of Shanghai and North China* (1933) by George W. Nellist. That publication listed such celebrities as Du Yuesheng, T. V. Soong, and George 'Tug' Wilson, among other "men of all races and creeds who, in various fields of endeavor, have contributed in some substantial measure to the material and cultural advancement of Shanghai and North China."<sup>25</sup> But unlike the chauvinist *Men of Shanghai*, Zhiganov's book could never be entitled *Russian Men of Shanghai*, for since the establishment of the diaspora, women worked, created jobs, and were often the sole breadwinners of their families. Russian professional women are widely represented in the book as business owners, artists, writers, actors, doctors, and charity activists.

The section on industry and commerce was the most prominent, and it had a lasting impact on the scholarship of the Russian diaspora. The long opening essay covers the history of Russian enterprise in China. Biographies of various businessmen were frequently narratives of intrepid transformation: from their early years as itinerant vendors who took dangerous trips inland, at a risk of being robbed and killed by bandits, to becoming owners of exemplary storefronts on Avenue



**Figure 5:** Interior of G. M. Klebanoff's Siberian Fur Store. (*Russians in Shanghai*, p. 175)

Joffre. The most unique part of the book is, no doubt, the abundant photographic documentation of Russian businesses: to these pages we owe the most detailed views of Shanghai storefronts that ever existed.

In spite of its focus on raw data, the book is also utopian. The author does not dwell on the widespread poverty, the rampant rates of prostitution, high rates of alcoholism, crime, and suicide among the Russians. Nor does he acknowledge the escalation of Soviet propaganda and the violent political currents among the diaspora. The exalted, solemn tone of the writing suited the community, and, according to Zhiganov...

the book delighted everyone. Even those who paid in advance four years ago and called me a crook for not releasing the book were now shaking my hand and expressing their admiration. It was quite unheard of among Russians abroad: thousands of people were saying nice things about someone who was not dead. [...] Is there a higher reward than this?<sup>26</sup>

The timing of the release proved auspicious. The Russian diaspora in Shanghai lasted only about 25 years, and its peak period, when high numbers of Russians were living in relative prosperity and stability, spanned less than a decade. Zhiganov's book became a snapshot of a renaissance of Russia in exile, even though it predated some of the personalities and venues that later became inseparable from the idea of Russian Shanghai: the success of the famous émigré singer Alexandr Vertinsky, the rise of Oleg Lundstrem's jazz band, the career of the dancer Larissa Andersen, and the popularity of the new venues like *Arcadia*, *Renaissance*, and the *Soviet Club*.

## BLACK SATURDAY

On the afternoon of 14 August 1937, Zhiganov and his friend, the painter Nikolay Noskoff, had lunch near the Bund and then went to the river's edge to look at the Japanese armoured cruiser Izumo, anchored in the Huangpu River. All morning, the Chinese warplanes had been trying to hit it with bombs, but the most they achieved was to send giant waves splashing onto the embankment.<sup>27</sup> The two Russians found themselves in the company of a "*half a million Chinese*" who had been driven out of the northern district and were now squatting on the Bund. As more Chinese bombers flew over the river, the Izumo launched a deafening fusillade of anti-aircraft fire, and the refugee crowd ran away from the riverbank in a panic.

My friend Noskoff could not stand this hell any longer and dragged me away from the Bund. I proposed we run toward Nanking Road and wait between the Palace Hotel and the Cathay Hotel: I thought it would be an excellent place to continue watching the Chinese fight the Japanese, with Izumo less than 400 paces away from us. So we joined thousands of refugees and ran toward Nanking Road.

Before they reached the corner the warplanes were already overhead, and Zhiganov heard an invisible voice ordering him to "*get down.*" He obeyed the voice, and crouched among the refugees, ducking his head. After half a minute he got up and dashed towards the hotels again, unaware of the bombs that had been released from the planes. Before he could reach his observation place on Nanking Road, the first bomb had exploded there, killing dozens of people who happened to be between the entrances of the two hotels. The second bomb damaged the roof of the Cathay.

By then the friends had separated, and Zhiganov decided to go home. Hesitant to take the "*corpse-strewn Nanking Road,*" he ran around the Palace Hotel, stopping on the way to carry some injured girl into a shop. This delay saved his life for the second time that afternoon. Following the widest street in Shanghai, Avenue Edward VII, together with a large crowd, he reached the Racecourse and saw that two more bombs had exploded in front of the Great World amusement centre, killing hundreds and injuring thousands. It had

happened just minutes before his arrival.

Zhiganov had long believed he had a special relationship with death. When he was seven years old and living in Port Arthur, two Orthodox nuns paid a visit to his mother. One nun gave him a little icon of St. Vladimir (the Kiev prince credited with converting Russia to the Eastern Orthodox faith). She said, “*If you never lose it, you will live a long life and die an old man.*” The mother kept the icon for her son, and when 18-year-old Vladimir went to fight in the First World War as a volunteer she gave it to him. Later, Zhiganov was able to tell his mother that he was the only survivor among 12 officers of his battalion. During his fight against the Red Army in the Ural Mountains, he was the only one unharmed among his 12-strong artillery squad. Writing from Australia, Zhiganov mused:

It has been over 70 years since that encounter with the old nun in 1903, and I’ve seen a lot during these seven decades. I’ve kept the icon and survived all the altercations. God bless the memory of that pious nun.<sup>28</sup>

Among those killed on the Black Saturday on 14 August 1937, there was someone Zhiganov knew—the Russian musician A. Estrin, who had been performing with the Cathay Hotel orchestra and “*stepped outside to look at the war.*”<sup>29</sup> Overall, the Japanese attack and the subsequent invasion of the Chinese areas in Shanghai seemed a distant event for Shanghai Russians; it was seen as a conflict between Asians that had no practical connection to them. Events of the following year, however, affected them deeply. In March 1938 Austrian and German Jews began to arrive in Shanghai. Within two years, they numbered in the thousands and competed directly with the Russians in crafts, medicine, commerce, and the service economy. They opened stores that attracted everyone—even Russians—with low prices. One Russian observer called this a “*reverse economic miracle:*” people without money baked cakes and tried to sell them to people who could not pay; they, in turn, made dresses and tried to sell them to the bakers who could not pay for them either.<sup>30</sup>

In the years leading up to the total Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Zhiganov enjoyed a steady income as a teacher of Japanese. In the middle of 1939, he spent several months in Hokkaido and Tokyo, “*escaping Shanghai summer heat.*” He had always loved Japan,



its people, and its culture; it was a sentiment many foreigners in China had acquired since the emergence of the treaty ports and the advent of regular tourist voyages across the East China Sea. He praised Japan's "*order in all areas of life, strict discipline, courteousness to each other and visitors of the country, exemplary cleanliness, and patriotism.*"<sup>31</sup>

His travel notes are euphoric:

    Ginza is like a magic kingdom! Over two kilometers of the most beautiful buildings with grandiose vitrines flooded by millions of electric and neon lights. A picturesque, cheerful and – most importantly – courteous crowd. Colorful advertising, animated fiery hieroglyphs with world news, artful neon displays of the kind that our great international Shanghai has never seen. All of it charms you with its beauty.<sup>32</sup>

    Japan's department stores are regal and grandiose, like palaces. Our Shanghai Wing-On and Sincere stores look pale and pathetic in comparison with these marble walls and balustrades, mosaics from floor to ceiling, plaster sculpture, bronze colonnades, ornaments, and crystal chandeliers. The only building in Shanghai that can compete with them is the Shanghai and Hongkong Bank.<sup>33</sup>

In his eyes, a granite shore and asphalt highway along the Pacific Ocean surpassed the Bund. Tokyo's beer halls, resembling cozy living rooms of fine European houses, were a cut above those in Shanghai. Japan's best restaurants were so good they compared only to "*our former Majestic.*"<sup>34</sup> He was especially pleased to discover that, unlike the restaurants in Shanghai, customers in Tokyo were asked to pay after the meal, not immediately after ordering, and that tips were not expected. He was deeply impressed by the Japanese urban rail culture: cashiers always made change for passengers, and passengers, in turn, obeyed instructions:

    I imagine what would happen in Shanghai if the buses and trams stopped using their grill doors to constrain passengers.



**Figure 6:** With students of Tokyo University in 1940. (*Review of the Past*, No. 14, p. 149)

Among the Japanese, Zhiganov found many national traits common to Russia, such as the forfeiting of national architectural style in favour of a European neoclassicism which brought to mind Saint Petersburg, or the habit of removing one's shoes when entering the house. He condemned Chinese and Russian habits of rudeness to strangers and punitive parenting. He praised Japanese patriotism which, he believed, inspired common people towards virtuous unquestioning support of their government. He believed that the absence of this quality weakened Russia's unity and allowed it to fall prey to Bolshevism. Zhiganov did some research regarding Russian residents of Japan, who numbered about two thousand. He found that they lived mostly in Tokyo and were entrepreneurs who owned their own houses and operated clothing, deli, and jewelry shops. Russians living in the north ran fox fur farms and owned raspberry plantations, from which jam was exported to Shanghai. Russians in Japan were well off, many were rich, and almost everyone was satisfied with their new country.

Upon returning to Shanghai, Zhiganov published his impressions in both Russian and Japanese-language newspapers. He founded the 'Society for the Promotion of Study of Nipponese Language' in April 1940,<sup>35</sup> and then left for Japan again, spending most of the year in Tokyo, teaching Russian. There, he befriended a student surnamed Mito, and it was from Mito that he heard the news of Japan's occupation of French Indochina and the capitulation of the French

General-Governor:

This news was a shock to me. I felt pity for this charming country.<sup>36</sup>

In November 1941, the Russian publishing house *Slovo* announced the termination of the eponymous daily newspaper after 12 years of publication and over 4000 issues. All the printing equipment that Zhiganov used to print his book was sold off. The closure of the second largest Russian newspaper had to do with *Slovo's* critical stance on Germany's war on the Soviet Union which broke out in June 1941,<sup>37</sup> an event which instantly charged and antagonised Shanghai Russians. Patriotic youths began escaping to North China, crossing the border, and tried to join the Soviet army (they were accused of espionage and perished in labour camps). Among the monarchists, to whom Zhiganov belonged, it was customary to view the Nazi invasion as the welcome liberation of Russia from Bolshevism. The 'defeatist' expatriates cheered Hitler, but Zhiganov had a different opinion:

The Germans ought to have saved Russia 20 years ago. The Red Army had to be destroyed when it consisted of red Internationalists, but not now when innocent Russian youth make up its ranks.<sup>38</sup>

In August 1941 Zhiganov published a manifesto 'In Defense of the Motherland: the Chronicle and the Call for Reflection.' In the text he claimed, with the confidence of someone "*who knows the Shanghai Russians the best,*" that all young Russians and the majority of those of a more advanced age supported the USSR in the war. He condemned the Axis powers, but his faith in Japan remained unshaken:

I hope with all my heart that my treasured Japan does not turn against Russia in the same way. I want Russia and the Land of the Rising Sun to live in peace.<sup>39</sup>

His wish was realised: as the Japanese gained control of Shanghai and nationals of Allied countries were being arrested, stripped of their properties, and interned in camps, Shanghai Russians—stateless and Soviet citizens—remained free, owing to the fact that the USSR and

Japan maintained neutrality throughout the European war.

Being free in wartime Shanghai meant being poor and hungry. Isolation, food shortages, and inflation were accompanied by massive unemployment, as Western-owned companies closed and their Russian employees were sacked. Many Russians chose to openly ally themselves with the Japanese, especially entrepreneurs operating clubs, bars, and restaurants which coveted the patronage of the occupying army personnel. Responding to the changing times, the long-standing Baranovsky's Haberdashery on Avenue Joffre converted to a nightclub popular with Japanese officers.<sup>40</sup> The café DDs, on the opposite block of Avenue Joffre, became a favourite haunt of black market brokers. The singer Alexandr Vertinsky (reduced to singing for food in the Russian restaurant *Renaissance* next door), described the DDs' clientele as "*ship commissioners, heroin addicts, bartenders from Qingdao, buyers of stolen goods, Portuguese, Chinese, and women.*"<sup>41</sup> The scope of the brokers' interests included soap, Camel cigarettes, whiskey (made in Hongkou), bras, lighters, gold, clocks, and prostitutes. To stay afloat, the owners of DDs revitalised their kitchen by employing the cooks from the Italian ocean liner *Conte Verde* which sunk in the mouth of the Huangpu in September 1943.<sup>42</sup>

At that time, Zhiganov could not afford a restaurant meal and had nothing to sell; he lived by teaching Japanese language. Still, he would frequent the pastry shop *Mignon*, on Route de Soeurs, operated by his friend from Vladivostok, Pavel Petrovsky. One morning, over a cup of tea, Petrovsky told him of the previous night's incident: a gang ripped the mink coat off a Russian woman in front of his shop. This gave Zhiganov an idea to organise a self-defense unit to patrol the streets of the central French Concession, where the majority of Russian stores were. Two hundred fifty stores signed the contract for protection, and Zhiganov hired a team of watchmen:

It was so hard to find work at that time. Among those who joined my guard (just for a piece of bread to eat) there were interesting and intelligent people – the opera tenor George Kudinoff, the general Khrushchey, the archdeacon Egoroff, the engineer Yudin, the voice teacher Yakimoff, the former British police inspector Voschikoff, and many others. They guarded other people's goods from dusk till dawn, in the cold and rain."<sup>43</sup>

On nights with the mandated blackout, the guards walked along a route of about two kilometers long, covering seventeen blocks on Avenue Joffre and the adjacent streets, passing over 700 stores along the route. After the war, Zhiganov asked store representatives to sign a letter confirming that not a single robbery or break-in happened during the two years of the night guard's service, whereas on all other streets crime was rampant.

After the victory of the USSR over Germany, in May 1945, Shanghai Russians rejoiced, but kept their celebrations private until the end of the Pacific War; then they celebrated together with the rest of Shanghai. On 3 September 1945, the city welcomed the Guomindang troops: the streets were decorated with Nationalist flags and festive crowds were everywhere. Zhiganov and a couple of friends walked all the way to the Bund, hoping to catch a glimpse of the American fleet rumoured to be arriving. Passing a store, each of the Russians bought a Nationalist flag, red with a white star in the top corner, and waved it as they marched. The news of the Americans' arrival proved to be false, and the Russians walked back on Nanking Road. A Chinese crowd started to follow them, evidently mistaking them for recently released prisoners of internment camps. At the streetlight Zhiganov addressed the followers with a brief "*Long live Chiang Kai-shek!*" and continued marching. By the time he reached his home in the French Concession over 30,000 people were parading behind him—or so he claimed.<sup>44</sup> Having heard of Zhiganov's walk with a red flag, some hard-line White Russians labeled him a Communist. He, in turn, accused them of hypocrisy, pointing out an elliptically phrased ad published by one of the accusers: "*Congratulations on the great victory over the treacherous enemy. A. A. Shliapnikoff's Sausage Factory, 126–128 Route Dufour.*"

There was no more need for night patrols, and Zhiganov returned to teaching Russian, English, and Japanese to Chinese students. This was his occupation in the next 16 years. He continued living in his little apartment on the Avenue du Roi Albert, renamed South Shaanxi Road, and from his window on the second floor he watched the dramatic changes in the city. Shops around the former Avenue Joffre were closing, the Russian shop signs replaced with Chinese characters. The Russians were leaving Shanghai, heading to the West or to the USSR. Soviet propaganda worked relentlessly, luring people into mass repatriations, and Zhiganov admitted: "*The postwar patriotic hypnosis*

*was about to drag me into the Soviet noose.*” Many Russians leaving for the USSR bought a copy of Zhiganov’s book as a souvenir; the books would be confiscated at the Soviet border.

As the Communist People’s Liberation Army approached Shanghai, Russians frantically applied for any visa that would permit them to leave China, but many applicants failed to meet the medical criteria, since years of poverty and malnutrition made them test positive for tuberculosis. Some time in 1949, Zhiganov’s younger brother Georgy and his sister Tamara emigrated to the U.S. and settled in San Francisco. But Vladimir Zhiganov was well-known as a Japan sympathiser, and his visa was denied. The final mass exodus of Russians from Shanghai took place in spring 1949, when over 5000 refugees sailed to the Tubabao island in the Philippines. When the Communists entered Shanghai, about 400 Russians were still stranded there, and Zhiganov was among them.

#### NO EXIT

Having failed to get an American visa, Zhiganov applied for a visa to Australia, but with the Communists now in charge of the immigration bureaucracy, determined to right colonial wrongs and extract as much capital from the foreigners as possible, leaving China became next to impossible. Zhiganov described people receiving their coveted visas and then the Chinese authorities deliberately impeding their departure. One family he knew received their exit permits together with a two-week mandate to leave China. They sold all of their properties “*down to the last tea kettle*,” and then the authorities revoked their permits and made them wait again; in the meantime, their Australian visas expired. In the 1950s, emaciated Russian ‘leftovers’ were seen as far as the former Chinese City, attempting to peddle soap, matches, and thread.<sup>45</sup> The only safety net left was mutual support and camaraderie among the remaining compatriots.

Russians often lived on 10 dollars a month sent from Hong Kong by relief organisations. Food rations were introduced. They were impossibly meager, and only after a 1960 increase did Zhiganov begin to receive “*5 pounds meat, 3 pounds of fish, 3 pounds of sugar, 12 ounces of vegetable oil, 20–25 pounds of rice, and two pounds of crackers.*” Russians were allowed to exchange their rice quota for bread. (Zhiganov believed that the Chinese population could have access to bread only with a doctor’s prescription.) Foreigners were entitled to



**Figure 7:** Vladimir and Olga Zhiganov in Shanghai in the 1960s.  
(*Review of the Past*, No. 14, p. 149)

a pound of potatoes a week, when the designated ‘foreign’ store had potatoes.<sup>46</sup>

Chinese special police agents haunted the apartments of the remaining Russians and tried to drive them out of the country to the only available destination, the USSR. Those that still lingered in Shanghai, however, would rather gas themselves and their families than

go there. When the rumour spread that all Russians would be hauled to the open sea and drowned there, several people killed themselves. The threat did not materialise, but the oppression intensified:

The police paid daily visits and humiliated us with insulting inquiries. They checked our cooking pots to see what we eat. They did not allow us to take jobs. Writers were forbidden to publish. We had to write a report on every visit we paid to each other and describe in detail everything we talked about.<sup>47</sup>

Zhiganov's impressions are supported by other accounts. Larissa Andersen, who appeared as a promising poet in his book, had to wait five years for her chance to leave China. She was repeatedly denied her exit visa and interrogated with a lamp pointed into her face. One of the most successful dancers in Shanghai, Larissa resigned to spend her life in loneliness and obscurity. She even considered herself lucky for having a job as a dancer in the former *Arcadia*, the last restaurant in the city to have a floorshow. Her chance to leave for Brazil evaporated as soon as she tested positive for tuberculosis. Thankfully, in 1956 she married a French citizen, one of the last foreign trade representatives who still gathered in the French Club. With the new passport, Andersen's exit visa was immediately granted and the couple left China.<sup>48</sup> Her new life unfolded amid paradisiacal islands of the Pacific Ocean, Indian palaces with armies of servants, and an heirloom villa in the Provence. But since she had met her husband late, she could not have the daughter she had always dreamt of. (Andersen lived to be 101 and died in 2012.)

Zhiganov was in his late forties, or possibly fifties, when he married for the first time; his wife Olga had no children. The only available income in Communist China was through teaching Russian: the language was in high demand thanks to the ties with the Soviet Union. Zhiganov gave lessons to professors of the Franco–Chinese College in the storefront of the former Russian shop where he lived upstairs. Passersby often threw rocks at his window, and one night someone smashed the storefront glass. Every time he had to give lessons at the college campus, students hissed abuse: “*European pig, foreign dog, tramp.*” All stateless emigrants were issued Soviet passports, but the policy of anti-foreignness made no distinction between Soviet or



Western. Towards the end of the 1950s, even groups of kindergarten children on their way to the park automatically shouted “*foreign pig*” in unison while their teachers smiled approvingly.<sup>49</sup>

According to Zhiganov’s memoirs, Chinese authorities punished foreign men for amorous connections with Chinese women. By the early 1960s, several of his friends were imprisoned for affairs with local girls. He claimed that a Norwegian diplomat who had lived not far from his house was arrested for an alleged relationship with his housemaid.<sup>50</sup> Russian women who had affairs with visiting foreigners would be rounded up and sent to re-education camps, without a trial or any release date. According to Zhiganov, an American citizen, Margery Fuller, spent 13 years in such a camp and developed a mental illness.<sup>51</sup> He named two Russian journalists, Drozdov and Kaminsky, who were suddenly released after five years of prison detention, grey-haired and with no property left in their names; their wives had, by then, remarried and left the country.<sup>52</sup> The Russian charity home, once created by merchants and still operational under the Communist management, became the last resort for such unfortunates.

Imprisonment in China was often accompanied by torture. Arrests were staged for public dramatic effect and usually involved numerous policemen. The arrested were transported in jeeps left by the American Army. Zhiganov observed interminable motorcades along the former Avenue Joffre from his window, with jeeps blasting their sirens and armed policemen beating gongs. Most Russians did not know what they were arrested for; nor did their families receive any information about those who went missing. Zhiganov was convinced that the local population was far from happy with their government, and he recalled Chinese students being punished for reading a letter from Hong Kong or for having foreign magazines at home. The surveillance regime was equally suffocating for everyone. Zhiganov regularly filled out multi-page questionnaires and provided updated lists of his Chinese students, with their complete addresses and occupations, standing in long queues to submit each report.

Zhiganov witnessed the degradation of the old French cemetery (*Pahsienjao*) on the eastern end of Avenue Joffre. He remembered the place as an oasis of urban calm, with gravestones submerged in flowers and interspersed with marble statues, overhung by a leafy canopy of old trees. After 1949 it was deliberately turned into a depot for sewage

collection carts. Zhiganov saw ...

over two hundred wheelbarrows with large sewage collection boxes attached to them, piled on the graves and stacked along the alleys. At night, cesspool workers carted the refuse to the nearby fields for fertilisation. The stench at the cemetery was overwhelming.

Here he met a weeping Russian woman who unsuccessfully tried to persuade the wheelbarrow worker not to wash his cart on her mother's grave.

Zhiganov was convinced the filthy depot had moved there from the city's edge specifically to spite the memory of the foreigners. He also believed that foreign consuls sent a note of protest to the First Premier of the PRC, Zhou Enlai, who, allegedly, responded that "*today China is interested in living Chinese, not dead foreigners.*" The cemetery was destroyed and all gravestones excavated by 1958; the site became a park. Another malicious act, in Zhiganov's view, was the construction of a public restroom right across from the Orthodox Cathedral (that toilet at the intersection of Xinle Road and Xiangyang Road survived until 2016). The other Russian church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, became a Communist Party meeting hall. Mao's portrait replaced the icons at the altar, but the golden crosses on the domes were left untouched, to allow foreign tourists to take photographs of 'free' Shanghai. The last synagogue to be built before the war, on Route Tenant de la Tour,<sup>53</sup> became a concert hall, and "*the Star of David over the entrance was replaced with a Satanic five-pointed star.*"<sup>54</sup>

By 1964, Zhiganov thought the Communists were in a hurry to evict the last foreigners "*so that nobody would know what is going on in China.*" That year, he and his wife were finally granted their exit visas and left China for Australia. On the day of their departure, out of the tens of thousands of Russians "*only 19 old ladies and 11 men remained, who eventually left or died.*"<sup>55</sup> During the exhaustive customs search before boarding the ship, the custom's officials ("*Mao Zedong's bandits*") went through Zhiganov's papers and confiscated everything: his writing, the collection of magazines, photographs, and the remaining unsold copies of *Russians in Shanghai*.

In Australia, the Zhiganovs settled in small house near the rail tracks, in a suburban neighbourhood in Burwood, near Sydney. A

sizeable community of Russians from China had already settled there. In spite of his advanced age, Zhiganov became a factory worker in the Pressed Metal Corporation. Three years into his new life, he started to print a magazine, *The Review of the Past*, subtitled ‘The almanac of historical facts and ideas.’ He personally authored every article, typed the pages on a typewriter, bound the issues, and distributed them through Russian shops in Burwood. New issues appeared twice a year, and he worked on them “seven days a week from the morning tea until eleven at night,”<sup>56</sup> financing the production out of his own savings.

Although Zhiganov solicited writing contributions from other Russians, there were not many like-minded writers. On the pages of his magazine, he gave full rein to his monarchist reveries, anti-Semitic tirades, and conspiracy theories, all interspersed with reminiscences of his life. Between lengthy, messy narratives, there were ads for Burwood’s Russian stores, where Zhiganov had found old acquaintances from Shanghai. His old ‘enemy’ Shliapnikoff, who continued to accuse him of Communism, advertised his sausage factory on the pages of the *Review of the Past*. Another old friend was George Odjagyan, of George Photo Studio, now advertised as ‘the Shanghai portrait photographer.’ Zhiganov was happy in Australia, a developed capitalist country where his income was sufficient to support a family of two. But he

still managed to antagonise the Russian community, as he had in Shanghai. He began to publish protracted denunciations of individuals in his circles, accusing them of Communism, conspiracy, and embezzlement. Among the targets of his soliloquys were his advertisers, his church committee, and Russian storeowners.

Issue No. 14, dated January 1975, had double the usual number of pages. Zhiganov announced that it was the last issue. It was filled with accounts of his youth as a fisherman in Kamchatka, a Bible teacher in



**Figure 8:** Vladimir Zhiganov in 1936.  
(*Review of the Past*, No. 14, p. 150)

Vladivostok, an army officer, a charity organiser, and a member of the Volunteer Corps in Shanghai. The issue ended with a plea to the readers:

Since the previous issue, I am no longer able to distribute the magazine. Up to now I have not visited any church community gatherings or tea parties where I normally distribute copies. Those who used to help me have either died or are ill. Please try to sell a couple issues – it is not that hard. If you cannot spare a dollar, just give the magazine away. By doing so, you will help me very much, one last time. I wish you a long and happy life! Vladimir Danilovich Zhiganov.<sup>57</sup>



### **Endnotes**

- 1 Alternatively spelt 'Jiganoff.'
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- 3 Zhiganov, V., 1975, *Kartiny proshlogo (Review of the Past)*, Burwood, N. S. W.: V. D. Jiganoff, 1967–1975, No. 14, January 1975, p. 63.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 7 Zhiganov, V., 1936, *Russkie v Shanhae (Russians in Shanghai)*, Shanghai: Slovo, p. 70.
- 8 Zhiganov, V., 1975, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
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