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# High and Low: The Material Culture of the Russian Diaspora in Shanghai, 1920s–1950s

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This paper examines the material culture and consumer practices of the Russian diaspora in Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century. The article argues that the dynamic of political estrangement and mercantile licence in the international treaty port engendered consumer behavior and an economy of services uncharacteristic of Russians living in the Soviet Union. It will also suggest that the diverse enterprises and commercial street life of stateless Russian emigrants have led to permanent transformations in the urban fabric of the treaty port. By drawing on previously unexamined source material, this study addresses a problem in related scholarship that has neglected the material component of the diaspora's experience. Through the testimony of the emigrants themselves, this paper looks at how a lengthy exile in the free-trade environment facilitated the commercial deployment of service skills, and how Russian refugee enterprises produced lasting effects on the cultural life of the city. The study provides a framework for further research demonstrating how the diaspora became the conduit of European material sensibility and global modernity for local and foreign populations.

## *Introduction*

The Russian community in Shanghai emerged in the 1920s, peaked in the late 1930s and dissolved in the 1950s. The thirty-year sojourn of thousands of predominantly middle-class and stateless refugees from the former Russian Empire created a distinctive and vibrant consumer economy in the international city. This paper examines the material culture of the diaspora through the testimony of the emigrants themselves. The focal point of the study is the Russian marketplace in the international port that serves as a backdrop for the matrix of consumer practices among the exiles and provides a framework for analyzing their impact on the city.

The Russian diaspora in Shanghai has been the subject of a number of studies. Wang Zhicheng's *Shanghai e qiao shi*<sup>1</sup> is a phenomenological portrait of the enclave's foreign society based on historical newspaper reports and municipal records. Wang's ethnographic approach makes no attempt to place the work within the *longue durée* and its gaze remains that of an outsider. Conversely, multiple works by Amir Khisamutdinov,<sup>2</sup> the leading Russian authority on Slavic migration in the Pacific region, are grounded in the Russian national perspective and draw mostly on Russian-language source materials. Marcia Ristaino's *Port of Last Resort*<sup>3</sup> is a parallel examination of two stateless communities—the European Jews and the ex-Russian Slavs—through a rich array of archival data, predominantly the records of the Shanghai Municipal Police. Ristaino's work is the most comprehensive survey of the subject to date. It was the first to unsettle conventional perspectives emphasizing more powerful foreign communities in Shanghai and to challenge the coherence of national identities in the complexity of Shanghai's semi-colonial history. With regards to the quotidian, however, the author provides far more character and detail on the Jewish day-to-day experience (lasting less than a decade but more extensively documented by its participants) than on that of the Russians.

Overall, non-Chinese studies addressing the diaspora are inevitably dominated by the diaspora's self-representation that foregrounded Russian culture and spirituality; they also tend to overlook material ambitions and class aspirations. Attempting to relieve the scarcity of detailed analyses of the material life of the Russian community in Shanghai, this study looks at how a lengthy exile in the free-trade environment enabled and molded the community's production, commerce and consumption practices in this city. I argue that the environment of the treaty port instilled extensive entrepreneurialism and a cosmopolitan service economy that was uncharacteristic of Russians in the Soviet Union. While Russians in the USSR were compelled to denounce merchant activity and repudiate material attachments and attainment, the Shanghai Russians were building a locally derived manufacturing base and service economy that targeted both their own community, as well as all the other nationalities in the city. The Russian business and consumer initiatives that were ubiquitous in Shanghai from the 1930s to the 1940s had disappeared from Soviet Russia in the late 1920s with the termination of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The most thorough representation of the material culture of Shanghai Russians are their own oral and written accounts, filled with the itemization of prices,

<sup>1</sup> Wang Zhicheng, *Shanghai e qiao shi* (Shanghai: Sanlian chubanshe, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Amir Khisamutdinov, *Russkie v Kitae: Istoricheskii obzor* (Shanghai: Koordinatsionnyi sovet sootchestvennikov v Kitae, 2010); *Russkoe slovo v strane ieroglifov* (Vladivostok: Far Eastern University, 2006); *Rossiyskaya emigratsiya v Aziatsko-Tihookeanskom regione I Yuzhnoy Amerike* (Vladivostok: Far Eastern University, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Marcia Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort: The Diaspora Communities of Shanghai*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2001).

salaries, rents, descriptions of clothing, food and interiors. This was the prevailing vocabulary through which the community described their experience of exile in Shanghai. These material portraits reveal a web of interconnections between domestic environment, commercial enterprise, consumer behavior and national identity. As a forum for transformation and negotiation, the commercial and consumer practices of the diaspora presented a counter-dynamic to the Russians' political life in China, in which the refugees had no access or agency due to their stateless condition.

### *The Emergence of the Russian Community in Shanghai*

Christina Malygina was a volunteer nurse in the Russo-Japanese War. She arrived in Shanghai in 1904 on the damaged cruiser Askold which docked in Shanghai to undergo repairs, after escaping from pursuing Japanese warships. Malygina, who suffered from tuberculosis, was hospitalized as soon as she disembarked. On June 15, 1905, she died. Her belongings were sent to a judge in Saint Petersburg who was charged with forwarding them to Malygina's hometown in Siberia (Biyssk), where she had left her young son and mother before going to the war. At the time of her death, her possessions consisted only of a cotton handkerchief, a coat, an officer's uniform, a muff, a hat, five Christian crosses, an ostrich egg, a turtle-shell vial, a Singer sewing machine and one hundred rubles in bonds of the Russo-Chinese Bank in Port Arthur—roughly the equivalent of five months' rent for an apartment in her hometown.<sup>4</sup>

Malygina had been supplementing her nurse's salary by working as a tailor, and planned to do the same in Shanghai. She was one of several thousand demobilized Russians from the Russo-Japanese War that passed through the port. The wounded were treated in local hospitals, while the dead were buried at the Bubbling Well Road Cemetery. Most eventually moved on, but some stayed, creating a resident community of 354 persons.<sup>5</sup> This was the first wave of Russian immigration to Shanghai, and the size of this community remained stable for more than a decade.

After the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war, Russians fled to Shanghai in greater numbers. At the end of 1922, several hundred White Army officers and their families sailed from Vladivostok. The refugees initially settled in the vicinity of the port and depended on the charity of the authorities. The strike of 1925 and subsequent suppression of Chinese labor unions created employment opportunities for the exiles: the availability of industrial work attracted an additional 5,000 Russians from the north of China. By the end of the 1920s there were about 8,000 Russians in Shanghai.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Victoria Sharonova, *Nekropol russkogo Shangaia* (Moscow: Staraya Basmannaya, 2013), 285.

<sup>5</sup> Zhicheng Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae* (Moscow: Russkii put, 2008), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 81.

The destruction of the Shanghai port neighborhood in a military conflict in 1927 sent Russians fleeing to the foreign-governed areas of Shanghai. The majority settled in the French Concession, the expansive and largely undeveloped residential area under the governance of the French Consul-General. By 1939, Shanghai was home to about 25,000 Russians who lived mostly in the areas protected by the extraterritorial status from Sino-Japanese hostilities, namely the French Concession and the International Settlement.<sup>7</sup> Almost all of the Russian residents were stateless since the fall of the Tsarist government, although not everyone was a deliberate exile from the Communist regime. Many had been affiliated with the East China Railway and had been living and working in Harbin at the time of the 1917 revolution.

Unlike Europeans and North Americans, Russians did not come to Shanghai to represent international enterprises or national interests, but to protect their lives and possessions. Compelled by poverty, low status and homelessness, but enabled by the booming economy and the legal ambiguity of the treaty port, Russian emigrants turned the French Concession into a European market district and created a westernized service economy. Russian entrepreneurship drove up the value of the land and made the French Concession a city-famous destination. The Russian storefront became the face of Europe for the Chinese residents, whose daily contact with other Westerners was rare or formulaic.

### *The Material Life of the Russian Diaspora*

In the absence of any significant taxation or official procedure, starting a business in Shanghai was simple and inexpensive.<sup>8</sup> By the 1940s, Russians owned and operated almost all the boutiques and tailor shops in the French Concession, as well as most barbershops, bakeries, pharmacies and photo studios. A significant part of the Shanghai jewelry trade was in their hands as well. Russian-owned factories produced wood veneer, nails, paints, leather goods, shoes, cosmetics and medicines; their food processing businesses produced sausages, sweets, wines and dairy products.<sup>9</sup>

While many of the Russian services targeted Western and Chinese consumers, the foundation for most Russian businesses was to supply the demand of their compatriots. Russian-language periodicals of the three decades between 1920 and 1950 are filled with advertisements for pharmacies selling medicines at affordable prices, experienced beauticians and hairdressers, boutiques with men's and women's clothing, lending libraries and bookshops, retail stores offering housewares,

<sup>7</sup> Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort*, 164.

<sup>8</sup> Valentin Fedoulenko, *Russian Emigré Life in Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Bancroft Library, 1967), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Zhiganov, *Russkie v Shankhaie* (Shanghai: Slovo, 1936), 154.

silverware and crockery, furniture rentals, and opticians' workshops trading in watches, reading glasses, engraved gifts and jewelry.<sup>10</sup>

The most successful emigrants had come to Shanghai early and customized their professions—as pharmacists, wine makers, restaurateurs, architects and engineers—to Shanghai circumstances. However, large fortunes were rare. Russians were outsiders in the treaty port with no representation in the city government and few resources outside China to draw upon. The majority remained poor, and there was always a sizable portion of the community living on the verge of starvation.

For older emigrants, reminiscences of the bygone prosperity and status were their only solace in the face of displacement. Stories of lost property and nobility were told and retold with embellishments of missing luxuries: horse-driven carriages, extravagant dresses and well-furnished houses. “They can take everything from you, but they cannot take away your memories,” one emigrant told her daughters who had no memories of living well in the Russian Empire.<sup>11</sup> Aging aristocrats and former generals often lived in denial and squalor, refusing to work for a living and wearing their uniforms and medals at home. Poverty reduced many to begging. A Cossack officer in full regalia lying drunk in a ditch was an iconic sight in Shanghai. One notorious “general with a plate” collected leftovers from the customers' tables in restaurants.<sup>12</sup> Suicides among emigrants were frequent, and many death notes found in the pockets of those who poisoned or hanged themselves cited poverty and the lack of prospects.<sup>13</sup>

The diet of the poor expatriates consisted mostly of Chinese street food, the cheapest available. Larissa Andersen, a cabaret dancer in the 1930s and 1940s, lived for weeks on cacao bought on credit from a Russian store and fried wheat flat-cakes from Chinese street stalls.<sup>14</sup> Georgy Yeliseev, a student of engineering, lived on baked sweet potatoes and self-made peanut paste.<sup>15</sup> The widow Ekaterina Voyerikova and her college-age daughter Olga usually ate one meal a day at lunch, which they often shared; for dinner they had tea and toast with butter<sup>16</sup>—some households even had to replace butter with margarine.<sup>17</sup> Although Voyerikova's family economized on food and moved to increasingly cheaper and more remote boarding houses, the mother maintained her membership in the prestigious social club, Cercle Sportif Français, to give her daughter the opportunity to swim, play tennis and socialize with Western “good girls.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Parus* (1931–1939); *Shanhaiskaia Zaria* (1925–1945); *Slovo* (1925–1941).

<sup>11</sup> Olga Ilyina-Lail, *Vostochnaia nit* (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo zhurnala Zvezda, 2003), 174.

<sup>12</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 102.

<sup>13</sup> Sharonova, *Nekropol russkogo Shanhai*, 189, 217, 253, 272, 329.

<sup>14</sup> Larissa Andersen, *Odna na mostu* (Moscow: Russkoe zarubezhie, 2006), 264.

<sup>15</sup> Georgy Yeliseev, “Uzory sudby,” April 2001, [http://samlib.ru/g/georgij\\_n\\_e/uzory\\_sudby.shtml](http://samlib.ru/g/georgij_n_e/uzory_sudby.shtml).

<sup>16</sup> Ilyina-Lail, *Vostochnaia nit*, 175.

<sup>17</sup> Olga Bahtina, “O semeistve Narbutov,” *Sbornik Uralskogo genealogicheskogo obschestva*, no. 21 (2011), 63.

<sup>18</sup> Ilyina-Lail, *Vostochnaia nit*, 172.

Such adherence to signs of status and class position was not uncommon. Tokens of bygone privileges were hoarded as symbolic protection from the uncertainty of the future. One Westerner who grew up in Shanghai remembered an impoverished Russian countess, who taught her mother French: the lady wore a frilled lace collar every day, in all seasons, convinced that a woman with a lace jabot would never starve.<sup>19</sup> Disenfranchised nobles who managed to find employment were envied. French language skills allowed Prince Ukhtomsky to get a job as a doorman in the Shanghai branch of Banque de l'Indochine<sup>20</sup> and later a secretarial position in the French Consulate; meanwhile his wife operated a boarding house, which was highly profitable.<sup>21</sup>

For the majority of Russians, boarding houses served as residences, which were located in two- and three-story terraced row houses, the predominant type of housing in Shanghai. To the front of the row house, rooms would be arranged vertically, with a tiny attic room at the top. There would be a similar vertical course of three rooms in the back of the house. All the rooms were accessible by a narrow wooden staircase. The back room on the ground floor would be used as a kitchen with a coal stove for heating and cooking. A portable bucket under the staircase served as a toilet; every morning the bucket was handed to the itinerant waste collectors who transported the refuse to the fields. The bathing area in a corner would be separated by a curtain. Many houses lacked even these, so the tenants had to use public bathhouses, on average once a week.<sup>22</sup>

It was commonly accepted that the proprietresses of boarding houses were former nightclub hostesses and concubines. This exclusively female entertainment economy blossomed in the 1920s and was credited with the initial growth of Russian commerce in Shanghai, fueling business in clothing, fashion, jewelry, housing and restaurants.<sup>23</sup> Once they turned to “respectable business,” landladies were not above profiteering. They would ration tap water, overcharge for meals and subdivide rooms into narrow cubicles. Tiny lightless spaces under the stairwells were also rented out as rooms.<sup>24</sup> Tenants economized by squeezing an entire family into one room and making temporary beds out of chairs and trunks pushed together. However basic the furnishing, no Russian room was ever without an icon in the corner and an oil lamp underneath it.<sup>25</sup>

According to the testimony of Valentin Fedoulenko, a former officer and an apothecary store owner in the 1920s and 1930s, one could lead a reasonably com-

<sup>19</sup> Harriet Sergeant, *Shanghai* (London: John Murray, 1990), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Viktor Smolnikov, *Zapiski shanhaiskogo vracha* (Moscow: Strategia, 2001), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Natalia Ilyina, *Dorogi: avtobiograficheskaja proza* (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel, 1983), 130; Ilyina-Lail, *Vostochnaja nit*, 174.

<sup>22</sup> Aleksandr Titov, “Zdravstvui, Shanghai,” <http://www.rusconshanghai.org.cn/useful/shanghai/titov-memory> (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Nikolay Lidin, “Russkaia emigratsia v Shanhae,” *Annales russes*, no. 2 (1937), 317.

<sup>24</sup> Smolnikov, *Zapiski shanhaiskogo vracha*, 270.

<sup>25</sup> John B. Powell, *My Twenty-five Years in China* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945), 60.

fortable existence on about 120 Chinese dollars a month; Fedoulenko paid his employees 175–200 dollars. A room or a small apartment cost between 35 and 75 Chinese dollars a month; a loaf of bread cost 10–15 cents; a meal in a medium-range Russian restaurant cost 40–50 cents; a discounted ticket to a concert or an opera cost 50 cents. Fedoulenko's storefront and the living quarters above his pharmacy all together cost 55 dollars a month. In spite of their middle-class standing, the pharmacist and his wife lived frugally, working all the time and spending only 24 dollars a month on food.<sup>26</sup>



FIGURE 1: FEDOULENKO'S PHARMACY ON AVENUE JOFFRE, 1930s.  
ZHIGANOV (1936).

Russian tenancy and commerce was concentrated in the center of the French Concession, along four blocks of Avenue Joffre from Avenue du Roi Albert to Rue du Lieutenant Pétiot. The streetscape became indistinguishable from a Tsarist-era town in central Russia with rows of stores overhung by striped canopies and Cyrillic signs.<sup>27</sup> The signage in the windows of Piotr Grigorieff's fabric store promised moderate prices and timely arrivals of English woolens and French angora

<sup>26</sup> Fedoulenko, *Russian Emigré Life in Shanghai*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 93.

for tailor-made dresses and coats. Next to it, the Shanghai branch of an old established Harbin textile emporium, Petroff & Co, offered a range of “woolen, silk and cotton piece-goods,” and positioned itself as “the only place to find ready-for-wear suits and dress, as well as moleskin, mink and leopard fur coats.”<sup>28</sup> Next in line was the Avenue Joffre Flower Shop of Mrs. A. P. Medem, one of the few genealogically authentic aristocrats among the Russians. The next row of shop windows belonged to Leontiy Baranovsky’s haberdashery, an old-timer in Russian Shanghai.

The Baranovskys belonged to the elite set of moneyed expatriates who purchased the same services as their European counterparts. They owned their Shanghai homes as well as summer retreats on the north coast of China. In 1935, rich Russians owned about 1,000 out of 3,942 personal vehicles registered in the French Concession.<sup>29</sup> Like most other successful Russian entrepreneurs, the Baranovskys were wealthy before they came in Shanghai. Upon arrival in Shanghai in 1923, Leontiy Baranovsky opened a small haberdashery near the port. By 1934, he operated a large storefront in a prime location in the French Concession with five floor-to-ceiling shop windows.<sup>30</sup> The haberdashery sold English wool, Chinese silk, Indian cotton and European lace sourced directly from manufacturers. Fabric was turned into coats, suits, dresses and children’s garments directly on the premises. Also, sections of ready-for-wear men’s clothing and accessories were available.



FIGURE 2: BARANOVSKY’S STOREFRONT ON AVENUE JOFFRE.  
ZHIGANOV (1936).

<sup>28</sup> Advertisement, *Ponedelnik*, no. 1 (1930).

<sup>29</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Zhiganov, *Russkie v Shankhae*, 163.

The de-facto manager of Baranovsky's store was Madame Baranovsky, who, according to her family, always used her husband's alleged ill-health as a bargaining point in negotiations with suppliers. Born to a Roma family in Kashmir, India, she met her future husband when she was a singer and a dancer at the Roma Theater in Moscow. Having completed her transformation from a gypsy entertainer to the matriarch of a wealthy Russian Jewish family, Madam Baranovsky kept her heritage a secret and always assumed an aristocratic European identity. Not to wear perfume in public was for her "akin to appearing nude, according to the testimony of her granddaughter."<sup>31</sup> Madame Baranovsky ordered her outfits from Milan and Paris even after the Japanese invasion of Shanghai drove up the price of delivery from abroad.

In spite of her pathological fear of horses, Baranovsky took riding lessons, unable to "resist the class connotation of the chivalrous sport." Riding allowed her the opportunity to dress herself in the French luxury brand Hermès from head to toe, including kid gloves and leather boots. She took dressage lessons at a riding school run by the former White Russian cavalry lieutenant Godfrid Arnhold, who landed in Shanghai in 1920. Riding lessons were *de rigueur* among Shanghai gentry, and the riding instructors tended to be former White Army officers and Cossacks.<sup>32</sup> Russians were tutors in all the aristocratic leisure arts—ballroom dancing, instrumental music, painting, singing, French language, fencing—as well as boxing, swimming and tennis. The availability of Russian teachers' services and their low fees created a market for upper class proficiencies and pastimes that would be hard to afford for Europeans and Americans back home.

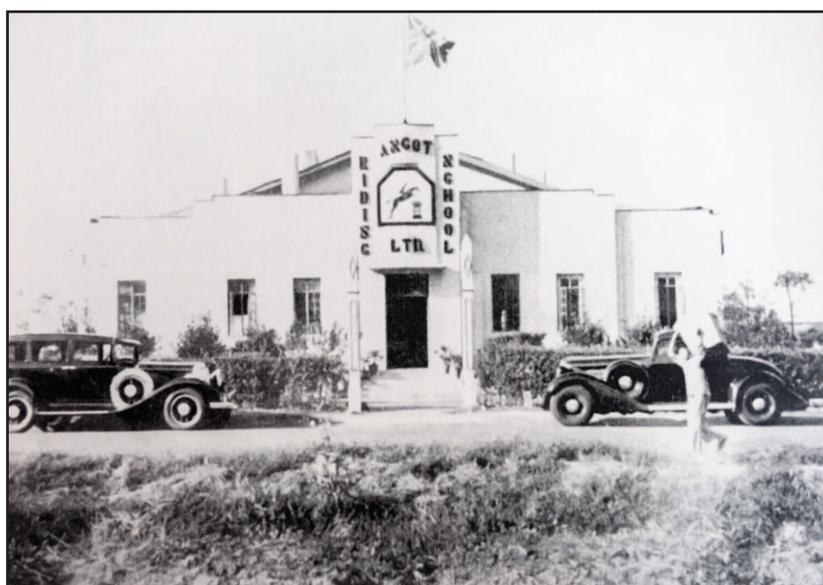


FIGURE 3: ASCOT RIDING SCHOOL ON TUNSIN ROAD.  
ZHIGANOV (1936).

<sup>31</sup> Antonia Marechek, "My First Five Years," 2010, <https://myfirst5years.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Chapman, *Tea on the Great Wall: An American Girl in War-torn China: a Memoir* (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books, 2015), 153.

The Baranovskys left Shanghai for California in 1938, leaving the store in the care of their oldest daughter Sarette (Serafima). She was a capable businesswoman who owned a successful bookshop on the same block as her father's haberdashery. The Globe Bookstore carved itself an upscale niche, offering luxurious leather-bound books for purchase and lending. After the Japanese takeover of the foreign settlements in 1941, Sarette converted her father's haberdashery into a nightclub called Coconut Grove, where some Russian hostesses made themselves available after hours. These same girls sketched out the latest Japanese troop movements culled from the clients in a secret backstage room and passed that information to Soviet agents. Sarette's friendship with Japanese officers helped her business in difficult times, but after the war, her association with occupiers and her espionage for the Soviets made her ineligible for an American visa, and she could not join her family in California.<sup>33</sup>

Most Russians' aspirations for commercial success and a Western lifestyle remained in the realm of the imaginary. Larissa Andersen, working as a classical ballerina by day and a tap dancer by night, had to make her own stage costumes from the skirts of her old dresses; the frilled bras and panties for her stage act demanded so little material that a pair of costumes could be tailored out of one skirt. Andersen recalled that nightclub administrators often demanded a weekly rotation of routines with different outfits, which made her improvise and wrap herself in a tablecloth as a substitute gypsy shawl.<sup>34</sup> Though Andersen was not a professional, she was forced to support herself by dancing, because most Russian women had to work for living and were frequently sole breadwinners in their families, unlike middle-class Chinese and other foreign women in Shanghai. In the absence of any substantial blue- or white-collar job opportunities for women, they had to create their own markets, such as tutoring, tailoring, translation, editing, debt-collecting, dancing and prostitution.

Careers in the textile and fashion industry—hat making, tailoring, knitting, cleaning, mending and modeling—became the preserve of entrepreneurial and skilled women. The most successful of them operated boutiques in the central blocks of the French Concession, like Nina Gingeroff, whose Salon Des Modes was located in the high-end strip mall Grosvenor Gardens. New York's latest fashions displayed in the salon's huge vitrines received regular coverage in the English-language press.<sup>35</sup> Though Gingeroff's level of success was an exception among Russians in the garment trade, a fair number of women 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, and Eleanora Garnett who climbed out of abysmal poverty to become the darling of fashionable elites in Shanghai and

<sup>33</sup> Marechek, "My First Five Years."

<sup>34</sup> Larissa Andersen, *Odna na mostu* (Moscow: Russkoe zarubezhie, 2006), 265.

<sup>35</sup> *The North-China Daily News* (November 14, 1938), 3.

later New York. In order to target Western clientele, Russian businesses adopted European-sounding names, like Maison Lucile, Femina Silks, Modes Parisiennes, La Femme de Demain, La Donna, Elite Fashion, Knitkraft, Jenny, or Monique.<sup>36</sup> The majority of Russian tailors, however, served their compatriots, working from home and advertising their services on the gates of their residences.

The highest aspiration for a well-educated Russian woman with English-language skills was a secretarial job in a foreign firm, guaranteeing her western-level pay, company housing and medical coverage. A mastery of stenography and speed typing were essential, and the competition for such vacancies was brutal. There are accounts of fifty candidates competing in an open speed-typing race with only the winner getting the job.<sup>37</sup> Lidia Tsirgvava was one of the fortunate secretaries, employed by the Norwegian shipping company Mollers Limited, where she enjoyed a free two-bedroom apartment near the port, access to sports facilities, a vacation on a company ship once a year, and, most importantly, free daily meals at the prestigious Chocolate Café in downtown Shanghai.<sup>38</sup>

Professional entertainers among the Russian community—musicians, dancers and actors—inhabited all income strata. Classical musicians employed by the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra enjoyed housing subsidies and occasionally the services of a chauffeured car.<sup>39</sup> Those that played in theaters, ballrooms and hotels often found that their salaries were not enough to support their families, and moonlighted in nightclubs, restaurants and cabarets. Alexandr Vertinsky, the world-famous star of Russian chanson, literally sang for food by performing in the Russian-owned restaurant, Renaissance. After each show, he went from table to table, toasting and eating with the guests. In the mornings, he could count on a free breakfast from the restaurant.<sup>40</sup>

Some corners of the entertainment business offered extravagant material rewards, if only for a very few. Thirty girls competed in the 1931 beauty pageant Miss Shanghai, and the winner, Elena Slutskaya (24), took home a silver goblet 2.5 feet high and a six-seat Buick of the latest model worth 7,000 silver taels. Nina Barsamova (21), elected Miss Shanghai in 1933 out of 160 contestants, received her crown personally from Shanghai's most illustrious tycoon, Sir Victor Sassoon.<sup>41</sup> Barsamova was awarded a round-the-world trip and an audition at Paramount Pictures in Hollywood.<sup>42</sup> The beauty pageant attracted more candidates each year until the austerity of the war years confined the competition to the format of a floorshow in Arcadia, the largest Russian-run restaurant and cabaret.

<sup>36</sup> *The North China Desk Hong List* (1925–1941).

<sup>37</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Lidiya Vertinskaya, *Siniaia ptitsa liubvi* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2004), 42–43.

<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Serebryakov, "Svoia pesnia," *Kazan*, nos. 1–4 (1997).

<sup>40</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 152.

<sup>41</sup> Zhiganov, *Russkie v Shankhae*, 239.

<sup>42</sup> "Rotary Around the World," *The Rotarian* 43, no. 2 (1933), 41.

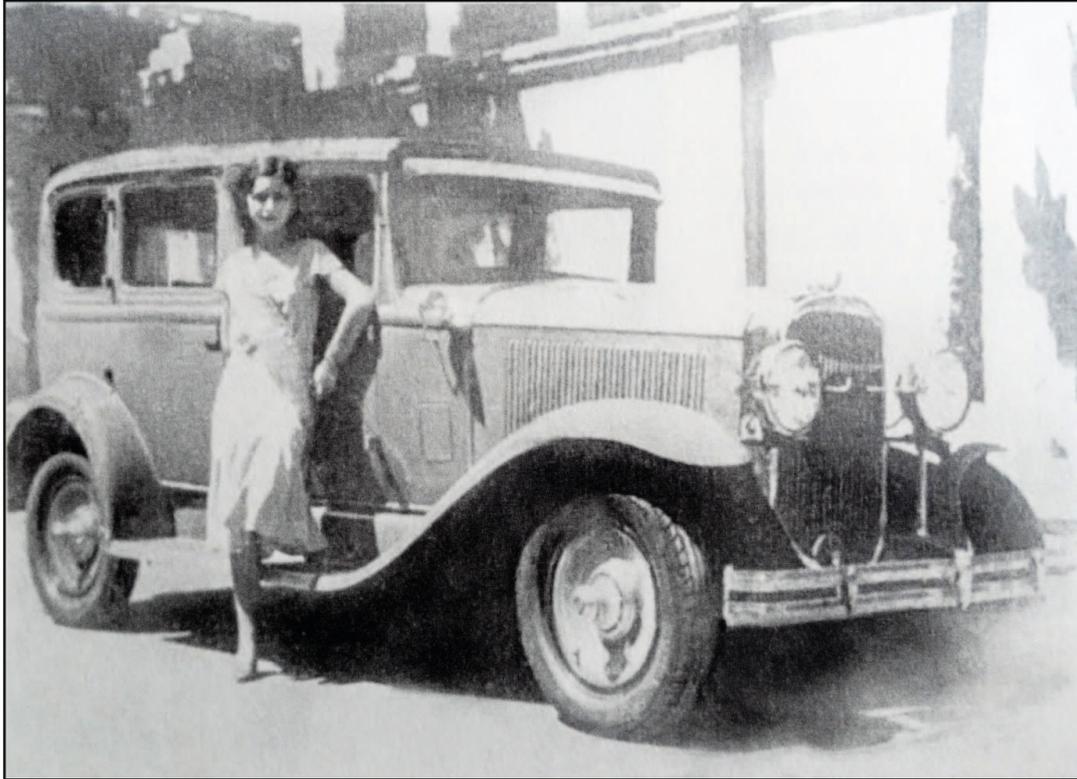


FIGURE 4: “MISS SHANGHAI” ELENA SLUTSKAYA NEXT TO HER PRIZE BUICK, 1931.  
ZHIGANOV (1936).

The restaurant scene was one of the most visible Russian influences in Shanghai. Always attached to their own cuisine, émigrés opened cafés and food stores that traded in familiar foods: dairy, bread, sweets, pastry, honey, fruit jams, smoked fish, sausages, hams and liquor. Emphasizing ethnic and regional Russian dishes, many restaurants, canteens and tearooms served classic Slavic and Caucasian staples, such as skewered meat, soups, cutlets, stews, vodka and fermented bread lemonade. People from all economic strata frequented these eateries. The poor and the middle class did this partially out of necessity since cooking facilities in rented rooms were almost universally lacking. For the well-off, the theatric and festive atmosphere of a proper restaurant with harmonica and balalaika players, gypsy dancers, real silverware, crystal glass and a familiar menu was a trusted way to satisfy their nostalgia.

Numerous Russian coffee houses modeled themselves after Parisian cafés complete with outdoor seating, which was meant to instill a European variant of cosmopolitanism into the street life of an Asian city. Since the 1920s, Chinese intellectuals were caught up in Shanghai’s “coffee house craze.” A literary scene played out in the multiple Russian venues in the French Concession, as testified by Zhang Ruogu: “I spent practically all my leisure time in the cafes on Avenue Joffre [...] Come late afternoon, all of us would gather, at a few of our usual cafés, and as we drank the strong and fragrant coffee to enhance our fun, we would talk

our hearts out.”<sup>43</sup> Participation in the shared cosmopolitan public spaces and the exposure to various aspects of European culture through the consumption of food, services and material goods eventually translated into the characteristic Shanghai modernism in the Chinese literature and visual arts.<sup>44</sup>

Although restaurateurs and entertainers were some of the more visible entrepreneurs among the diaspora, they were certainly not the most affluent due to the volatility of demand and fierce competition. The largest incomes were earned by bankers, import and export dealers, and real estate developers. Among the few Russian professionals who became as wealthy as the above groups were engineers, jewelers, architects, and doctors. In 1935, there were about fifty Russian physicians.<sup>45</sup> Doctors working for the Russian community earned little: competition was high, patients were poor, the currency was volatile and bills were often paid on credit. By the 1930s, when Shanghai already had several foreign-run hospitals with state-of-the-art equipment, the only Russian-run hospital consisted of ten beds in an unheated room, where the patients shivered from cold under thin blankets and complained about the hospital soup resembling liquid garbage.<sup>46</sup> Even this mediocre level of medical care was denied to the poorest Russians. One of Natalya Ilyina’s semi-autobiographic short stories tells of a life-saving operation being delayed until the patient’s wife brought cash raised from pawning her wedding ring.<sup>47</sup>

The most successful Russian doctors spoke European languages and had specialized skills, which allowed them to treat European patients and charge higher fees as compared to when they treated their Russian counterparts. Dr Victor Smolnikov, educated in a French Catholic university, tried running a practice for the Russian community but found himself conducting price wars with other Russian doctors. He later found prosperity as a staff physician in the British-run medical firm, Marshall & Partners. By the early 1950s, in spite of the Japanese occupation and the civil war of the preceding decade, he was living in a sprawling villa and making comfortable sea voyages. His excess furniture had to be stored in his garage, sharing space with his car and motorcycle.<sup>48</sup>

A doctor’s reputation for exclusivity could further attract wealthy patients, who could use medical appointments as opportunities for conspicuous consumption and boasted to their friends about the high cost of their medical bills. Such patients came from a set of “merchants’ wives” who distinguished themselves by status perfume—Chanel No. 5 or Shalimar—and elaborate hairstyles that proscribed wearing hats. Responding to his patients’ fondness for status symbols,

<sup>43</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Lynn Pan, *Shanghai Style*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> Zhiganov, *Russkie v Shankhae*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Zhiganov, “Otryvki iz glavy deviatoy,” *Kartiny proshlogo*, no. 14 (Jan 1975), 63.

<sup>47</sup> Nataliya Ilyina, “Iz posledney papki. Records from Various Years. 1957–1993,” *Oktiabr*, no. 6 (2000), 33.

<sup>48</sup> Smolnikov, *Zapiski shankhaiskogo vracha*, 239.

Smolnikov's one time superior, Dr Arcady Lempert, designed his office to convey affluence and competence; solid wooden wall paneling, portraits of American scientists over the fireplace, piles of leather-bound medical books on a desk, large Chinese vases with white and yellow chrysanthemums, and a "colossal and outmoded broken electrocardiograph."<sup>49</sup> During the checkups, Lempert would casually inform his patients of his sore back, allegedly after playing golf, because "playing golf until you are sore put you on a high pedestal in the eyes of the Russian diaspora."<sup>50</sup>

The Japanese occupation from 1937 to 1945 disrupted production and consumption of goods and services in Shanghai. In 1943, the dissolution of the foreign settlements and the internment of thousands of Allied nationals by the Japanese military resulted in the collapse of the city's economy. Russian cafés and restaurants in the former French Concession turned into makeshift marketplaces. In popular cafés, self-proclaimed brokers walked from table to table, randomly offering goods for sale, such as soap, Camel cigarettes, women's bras, whisky, shaving razors, clocks, etc.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, some Russians profiteered on wartime inflation and speculated on gold bars.<sup>52</sup> Both stateless Russians and those who had received Soviet citizenship were free to move around the city, but in the face of unemployment and inflation the market for their services contracted painfully. Furthermore, there was new competition from thousands of European Jews who had sought refuge in Shanghai and also made their living from craft professions and services.

### *The Move to the West and the USSR*

The end of the Japanese occupation in August 1945, signaled the beginning of mass departures of Russians from Shanghai to the USSR, the USA, Australia, the UK, Canada, Brazil and other countries. The Soviet Consulate reported receiving about 8,000 applications to repatriate—triple the anticipated number. The USSR government announced that it would cover the shipping costs of any personal belongings of up to 600 kilos and the waiver of custom duties.<sup>53</sup> However, the Chinese authorities limited the export of currency, so the emigrants were not allowed to take money with them.<sup>54</sup> To circumvent this rule, emigrants were known to fit golden crowns on their healthy teeth.<sup>55</sup> Dr Smolnikov was still in Shanghai,

<sup>49</sup> Smolnikov, *Zapiski shankhaiskogo vracha*, 44.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Aleksandr Vertinsky, *Dorogoi dlinnoiu* (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), 378.

<sup>52</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 95.

<sup>53</sup> Piotr Balakshin, *Final v Kitae: Voznikovenie, razvitie i ischeznoenie Beloj emigracii na Dalnem Vostoke* (San Francisco: Sirius, 1958), 285.

<sup>54</sup> Larisa Chernikova, "'Nasha zhena' Irina Kotiakova," June 2002, [http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press\\_28.php](http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press_28.php).

<sup>55</sup> Artur Heidok, *Stranitsy moei zhizni. Vospominania, rasskazy, skazki, esse* (Moscow: Biblioteka zhurnala Delphis, 1989), 1929.

waiting for permission to repatriate to the USSR, when he witnessed some ingenious methods used by Russians who tried to smuggle their American dollars to the western countries they emigrated to. One patient in his clinic showed off his custom-made coat with double lining, in which he would hide wads of dollars, and asked Smolnikov to make him a realistic cast corset to hide more valuables. Smolnikov refused, but another doctor complied, and the patient was carried to the departing ship on a stretcher.<sup>56</sup> Sarette Baranovsky, whose US visa was denied, embarked on a circuitous voyage via Singapore, Japan, Indonesia and South America. In preparation for the trip, she filled the hollow body of her daughter's doll with diamonds; the doll underwent "surgery" whenever the need for funds arose.<sup>57</sup>

Readying themselves for the cold climate and the harsh Soviet discipline, the repatriates tried to acquire all the life necessities while still in Shanghai. An advertisement for L. Reznikov's tailor shop in the *Epoch* magazine said:

Everything for the departure! Now taking orders for coats and suits made of the best materials. Men's and ladies' boots per order. Fur-lined leather jackets and men's and ladies' woolen stockings.<sup>58</sup>

Another store on Avenue Joffre announced "special discounts for those departing for the USSR" and a "large selection of autumn and winter essentials at affordable prices."<sup>59</sup> Following the arrival of American troops, Shanghai was flooded with American goods (sent to China as humanitarian aid); US Army equipment went on sale, illegally, in summer of 1947, and emigrants bought army coats and boots, khaki pants and rainproof fur-lined windbreakers.<sup>60</sup> The Soviet Consulate advised returnees to dress inconspicuously and avoid standing out in the drab and conservative USSR, but many men boarded the repatriating ships wearing American army uniforms with the "U. S. Navy" insignia stenciled on the backs,<sup>61</sup> while women wore pants and army boots that had no equivalent in the Soviet Union for decades to come.<sup>62</sup>

Oleg Shtifelman, who was a teenager at the time of his departure, recalled that his mother had purchased enough clothes to last him five years and even a pair of skis. Together with his grandmother's belongings—which included tableware and silverware—they loaded six large trunks onto the cruise ship *Gogol* in November

<sup>56</sup> Smolnikov, *Zapiski shankhaiskogo vracha*, 278.

<sup>57</sup> Marechek, "My First Five Years."

<sup>58</sup> Viacheslav Vozchikov, "Chelovek v misterii XX veka. Pamiati Gleba, syna Spasovskogo," *Noviy vzgliad. Mezhdunrodnyi nauchnyi vestnik* (2016), 42.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Balakshin, *Final v Kitae*, 289.

<sup>62</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 112.

1947.<sup>63</sup> The cruise ship *Ilyich*, which sailed in August that year, carried 1,100 passengers to Nahodka. The luggage took three days to load, and included ten pianos.<sup>64</sup> Some returnees brought trunks of equipment and tools they had used in their workshops and factories in Shanghai.<sup>65</sup>

To equip the teenage Tankred Golenpolsky for his trip, his parents gave him several formal suits, a black leather coat lined with striped skunk fur, a pair of custom-made fur-lined leather boots and six pairs of dress shoes in three sizes. The boy packed a hunting rifle and seven sets of volleyball uniforms—he was expected to continue his practice and wanted to dress his team. To stay under the luggage quota, Golenpolsky had to make an uneasy choice between his thousand-strong collection of tin soldiers, baseball equipment and twenty albums of rare postmarks. He did not sacrifice his set of *Shanghai Millionaire*, the monopoly board game popular in Shanghai.<sup>66</sup> Preparing to depart for the USSR, the wealthy Dr Smolnikov had to get rid of possessions deemed incompatible with the Soviet way of life, such as his custom-made golden ring with a large uncut diamond and his Royal Enfield motorcycle. He also decided not to bring his English Austin 10 automobile, not because he knew there were no spare parts for it in the USSR, but because he reasoned that its motor was not suited for Russian winters.<sup>67</sup>

Having pledged to cover the transportation expenses, the Soviet Consulate immediately set about recouping these funds from rich repatriates. The Soviet Club organized a banquet for the 300 wealthiest holders of Soviet passports and then hectorated them with speeches concerning the hardship their homeland experienced during the war. When asked to cover the cost of repatriation, many guests committed to donating large sums. For instance, the former White Guard, N. Yakovlev, pledged 300 million Shanghai dollars for the cause. Some people, though, ended up paying more than intended. A guest who pledged 50 million at the banquet was later invited to the Soviet Consulate and made to sign off 500 million.<sup>68</sup>

The pressure to part with money and properties continued on board the Soviet ships, since the wealth of the “Shanghainese,” as they were nicknamed, appeared enormous. A group of children sent to the USSR ahead of their parents, in autumn 1947, were approached by the political propaganda commissars on the ship and defrauded of their dollars. In the Soviet port of Nahodka, customs officers declared the children’s valuable belongings, such as foreign postmarks and hunting rifles, illegal for import and expropriated them.<sup>69</sup> When special trains carried the

<sup>63</sup> Oleg Shtifelman, “Kroshka iz Shankhaia,” <http://www.russianshanghai.com/author/shtifelman> (2012).

<sup>64</sup> Wang, *Istoriia russkoi emigratsii v Shankhae*, 114.

<sup>65</sup> Shtifelman, “Kroshka iz Shankhaia.”

<sup>66</sup> Tankred Golenpolsky, “Otiezd iz Kitaia,” <http://booknik.ru/library/all/otezd-iz-kitaya-na-rodinu> (2007).

<sup>67</sup> Smolnikov, *Zapiski shankhaiskogo vracha*, 258.

<sup>68</sup> Balakshin, *Final v Kitae*, 289.

<sup>69</sup> Golenpolsky, “Otiezd iz Kitaia.”

returnees across Siberia, state security officers canvassed the carriages and compelled the passengers to sell their possessions for next to nothing.<sup>70</sup> Locals, too, haunted the stations and solicited foreign goods from the arrivals.<sup>71</sup>

Having acquired most of their knowledge of the USSR from propaganda films screened in the Soviet Club, many returnees humbly acknowledged that they were bourgeois elements in need of moral reform. One repatriated journalist had so much faith in the higher ethical standing of Soviet citizens that he blamed the disappearance of his suitcase from the station on a “backwards element.”<sup>72</sup> In fact, alerted to the arrival of the “Shanghaiense” trains, locals went as far as to unhinge train cars and push them off a slope, causing multiple injuries to passengers and taking advantage of the ensuing commotion to steal their luggage.<sup>73</sup> Those who retained some properties during the first years of their life in the USSR lived off their gradual sale through state-run second hand shops. Many of these people, however, were eventually arrested under the pretext of espionage and counter-revolutionary activity, and their remaining belongings were confiscated.<sup>74</sup>

For those who held out for a better resettlement opportunity than the USSR, liquidating the assets in post-war Shanghai became increasingly difficult. Many Russian entrepreneurs hoped that the American presence would continue to safeguard the free market, but the victory of Mao Zedong in the civil war and the establishment of the Communist regime, in 1949, precipitated the recall of the US troops from Shanghai. For example, the pharmacist Fedoulenko had to sell his business cheaply; after paying agents’ commission and severance fees he arrived in the United States with around 4,000 US dollars to his name.

The exodus of Russians from China was accompanied by the inventory, valuation and liquidation of assets of an entire community. As businesses, estates and private possessions were traded for passage and security, the transactions reveal the relation between the individuals’ economic status and the trajectory of their resettlement. In the absence of thorough documentation regarding age and wealth distribution of the refugees from China, a tentative appraisal based on the personal testimony suggests that the older and wealthier segment of the community relocated to the West, while the younger and less moneyed comprised the majority of those who traveled to the Soviet Union. Entrepreneurs would expect to find a better fit in the capitalist West than in the Soviet command economy, whereas monarchists and White sympathizers would fear repercussions in the USSR. China-born Russian youth, however, were spared the political stigma and political biases of older generations and were more amenable to Soviet propaganda. Professionals were a rarity among the repatriates to the USSR, while artisans, school- and col-

<sup>70</sup> Shtifelman, “Kroshka iz Shankhaia.”

<sup>71</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 113.

<sup>72</sup> Ilyina, *Dorogi*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> Shtifelman, “Kroshka iz Shankhaia.”

<sup>74</sup> Heidok, *Stranitsy moei zhizni*, 1930; Yeliseev, “Uzory sudby.”

lege-age youth and retirees were strongly represented. At the same time, among those who left China for the Western countries, the majority were members of families of above-average means, good education and professional backgrounds, such as doctors, engineers, architects, artists, couturiers, lawyers, businessmen.<sup>75</sup>

The evidence of rich Russians spending large sums to improve their political standing in the eyes of the Soviet authorities suggests some complex strategic reasoning in the repatriation venture. It demonstrates the formation of a hybrid Soviet identity among some of the wealthiest representatives of the diaspora, which is remarkable insofar as it arose in the capitalist milieu of Russian-speaking Shanghai: effectively outside of the Soviet political space. The cases of wealthy emigrants—including former White officers—pledging large portions of their fortunes to reimburse the Soviet Consulate the expense of the repatriation of Shanghai Russians to the USSR is one example of this identity at work.<sup>76</sup>

Prior to 1949, departures from China, for whatever destination, were largely optional; however, the 1950s and 1960s saw sporadic exodus for any country that was available. At the close of 1949, the youngest, the oldest and the most vulnerable of the remaining Russians in the care of the Orthodox Church were assisted by the San Francisco Eastern Orthodox diocese to relocate to the US. For those not in the fold of the church, it became more difficult to leave as the months passed. Western countries tightened immigration quotas for stateless persons, meanwhile Chinese authorities narrowed legal channels for emigration. Applicants for exit visas remained in uncertainty for months, and sometimes years, eating through their savings and forfeiting their properties. Frequently one family member would be held hostage in China while the rest were permitted to leave, but the families were not allowed to take anything with them beyond personal items.<sup>77</sup> The dancer Larissa Andersen was denied her exit visa without any explanation. She was forced to sign off her villa in the western suburb of Shanghai to the authorities and move to a one-room apartment in an overcrowded building in the city. Resigned to ending her days in Shanghai, she continued to dance in the former Arcadia cabaret, which had been converted to a Chinese restaurant, one of the few remaining places of leisure in the city. Only in 1956, after hastily marrying a French trade representative, was she able to leave Shanghai.<sup>78</sup>

During the years in limbo, most Russians lived on 10 dollars a month sent from Hong Kong by relief organizations.<sup>79</sup> Having eaten through their possessions “down to the last teakettle,” emaciated émigrés were seen at street markets

<sup>75</sup> Yeliseev, “Uzory sudby;” Balakshin, *Final v Kitae*; Fedoulenko, *Russian Emigré Life in Shanghai*.

<sup>76</sup> Balakshin, *Final v Kitae*, 289.

<sup>77</sup> Vladimir Zhiganov, “Why I Call Australia Paradise,” *Kartiny proshlogo*, no. 9 (Sep 1971), 32–35.

<sup>78</sup> Andersen, *Odna na mostu*, 318.

<sup>79</sup> Zhiganov, “Why I Call Australia Paradise,” 92.

attempting to peddle soap, matches and thread.<sup>80</sup> Food rations introduced by the Communist government were meager and only after an increase in 1960 did some remaining foreigners begin to receive “5 pounds of 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. They were entitled to a pound of potatoes a week, when the designated “foreign” store had potatoes.<sup>81</sup>

While most stranded Russians struggled to survive in an increasingly barren and hostile city, there was also a coterie whose privileged lifestyle was insulated from the transformation of the country. The Mandrigin family had attained Soviet citizenship, but remained professionally associated with the British Consulate in Shanghai. Into the 1960s, the Mandrigins lived in a prestigious downtown apartment block, hired private tutors for their teenage children and supported expensive hobbies, such as tennis, ballet, sculpture, photography and fashion. The eighteen-year-old daughter, Marianna, recorded that her “social life is made up of dinners and cocktails, which are interesting when you are new to it, but prove to be quite boring after three years’ attendance.”<sup>82</sup> Isolated by her class, Marianna did not know any Russians—or Westerners—in her age group and called herself “the last foreign teenager in Shanghai.”<sup>83</sup> In 1964, the whole family relocated to London, following the invitation to the younger son Mikhail to study at the Royal Academy Schools of Art. In the same year, another and much larger group of Russians of various ages and modest economic means, succeeded in moving to Australia. One of those who departed estimated that out of the tens of thousands of compatriots that once lived in Shanghai “only 19 old ladies and 11 men remained, all of whom eventually left or died.”<sup>84</sup>

Although higher social standing vastly improved one’s chances of escape from China, there were no guarantees. A handful of the commercial elite never managed to leave China, such as Anna Bouianovskaya, a widow of an Italian diplomat and formerly the owner of a hairstyling and cosmetology school and spa. After the Chinese authorities denied her an exit visa, she remained in Shanghai until her death in 1981. Managing to stay under the radar of the Communist surveillance, she became an informal custodian of the closed Italian consulate and indulged in Cuban cigars and champagne from the consulate cellars in the middle of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Guanlong Cao, *The Attic: Memoir of a Chinese Landlord’s Son* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>81</sup> Zhiganov, “Why I Call Australia Paradise,” 92.

<sup>82</sup> “A teenager writes from Red Shanghai,” *The Australian Woman’s Weekly* (March 1961).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Zhiganov, “Why I Call Australia Paradise,” 109.

<sup>85</sup> Mario Filippo Pini, *Italia e Cina, 60 anni tra passato e futuro* (Roma: L’Asino d’oro edizioni, 2011), 141–142; and: “Alcune note su due diplomatici che hanno studiato il cinese e sulle loro esperienze in Cina (prima parte),” *Mondo cinese*, no. 131 (April 2007).

Another inadvertent hostage of the Communist regime, Ksenia Pavlova, was denied her exit visa after the rest of her family left China. Her relatives' attempts to return were also thwarted; thus, Pavlova spent the rest of her life in Shanghai, teaching Russian and doing secretarial work. The family mansion that had belonged to her father, a railways engineer from Harbin, was nationalized and populated with Chinese tenants, leaving Pavlova to live in a one small room. When she died of old age in 1988, the Soviet Consulate found among her scant belongings a crumpled paper with pencil notes indicating various secret areas beneath the floor and behind the walls. Having lifted floorboards and broken through hollow masonry, the stunned Soviet bureaucrats discovered 2.5 million dollars worth of gold rings, necklaces, brooches, diamonds, gold bars, old Russian coins, and piles of Republican Chinese banknotes.<sup>86</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The personal histories of Russians in Shanghai, supported by statistical and administrative records, display a materialist mosaic of economic and social processes that accompanied the emergence and dissolution of the community. This portrait of the material life of the diaspora leads to a number of conclusions.

Over three decades in Shanghai, the Russian refugees lifted themselves from widespread poverty, denial and marginalization to relative well-being, integration and independence—a progression that was cut short by the Chinese civil war and the Communist takeover in 1949. The economic, social and political composition of the diaspora was not a static feature during its sojourn in Shanghai, nor was it determined by the pre-existing class structure. The Russians were in a unique position to carry on a restructuring of their community towards a market organization with the middle class driving the development. Competitive conditions in the treaty port habituated the Russian exiles to the growing agency of the entrepreneurial class and the diminishing role of the aristocracy. Economically successful members of the diaspora were able to cross ethnic boundaries and enter the ranks of the city's foreign elite. The efforts of traditionally minded members to maintain the pre-revolutionary class structure were undermined by the free market economy that rewarded entrepreneurialism. Even when Russian fortunes were not built in Shanghai, but transplanted from elsewhere, they were not heirloom properties or establishments, but new business emporiums conceived in the Russian Far East and Manchuria.

The Russian presence in the port city also brought about a qualitative change to Shanghai society through widespread economic participation of expatriate women. Russian women were instrumental in creating a host of new industries in Shanghai because they took up careers in medicine, journalism, entertainment,

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<sup>86</sup> Amir Khisamutdinov, *Russkie v Kitae*, 497.

fashion, photography, catering, food production, vending, etc. There was a contemporaneous women's revolution taking place in the USSR, but the Soviet initiatives went along the lines of removing the private, domestic and familial from the women's sphere of competence and replacing it with communal, industrial and the anonymous.<sup>87</sup> In Shanghai, women's activity remained within the framework of a bourgeois society with women merely increasing their workload and performing in both the domestic and mercantile arenas.

Testimonials in Chinese-language memoirs and fiction of the 1920s and 1930s suggest a significant Russian influence on the economy and urbanity of the multinational city.<sup>88</sup> In the formation of a European-style street-level market economy, and in the trade of cultural skills and services, the exiled Russians became the conduit of European material sensibility and global modernity for the Shanghai Chinese. Russian spaces of consumption, cultural services and performance influenced the formation of a "modern" Chinese identity in Shanghai. Consideration of the material culture and consumer behavior of Shanghai Russians opens avenues in the examination of the mutual influence of the Chinese and Russian populations. The material residue of the Russian diaspora continues to inform urban experience in Shanghai, revealed in embedded elements of Slavic architecture, fashion, culinary customs and consumer habits that trace back to the heyday of Shanghai's "Little Russia."

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<sup>87</sup> Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford International Publishers, 1999), 42–43.

<sup>88</sup> The problem of translated modernity in China is illuminated by the following works: Lynn Pan, *Shanghai Style: Art and Design between the Wars* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008); Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Andrew Field, *Shanghai's Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919–1954* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).