

Shanghai
—
The Port of
Last Resort

A brief history
of a decade
when Jewish
life thrived in
Shanghai

Paul French

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**Published by Jeremy Goldkorn
Nashville**

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*Published on the occasion of the premiere of
Hello Gold Mountain, composed by Wu Fei
February 23, 2019*

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The Jews of Shanghai, and you and me

A note from the publisher

This slim volume is published to celebrate the premiere of *Hello Gold Mountain*, an original composition by Wu Fei for chamber orchestra, on February 23, 2019, in Nashville, Tennessee. The performers: chatterbird ensemble, together with Wu Fei on the guzheng and Shanir Ezra Blumenkranz on the oud — traditional Chinese and Jewish plucked-string instruments, respectively.

Hello Gold Mountain is a requiem for the lost possibilities of the Jewish community of Shanghai. The work tells the stories of Jewish refugees who fled from Europe to Shanghai during World War II, and later from Shanghai to San Francisco and other places.

The Port of Last Resort was written especially for this occasion, for which I extend my deepest gratitude to author Paul French.

I hope that readers of this short history will take away something, aside from an interest in the little-known stories of Shanghai's World War II Jews: the idea that anyone — even you and I — could lose their comfortable lives and become refugees.

Some of the Jews who made a temporary home in Shanghai were from a social class very different from my own bicycle-repairing, shtetl-dwelling grandparents, who grew up in impoverished villages in Latvia. Many of the Shanghai Jews had considered themselves part of the elite of Austrian and German society. Yet they had to flee, and seek the comfort of Chinese strangers across the oceans. They were fortunate to find refuge in Shanghai.

History laughs at certainty. We — especially those of us in the lucky lands of America and Western Europe, and other comfortable bubbles across the globe — have a responsibility: to treat people who have had their lives destroyed by forces beyond their control with the same generosity that ordinary Chinese people and Chinese officials offered to the Jews of wartime Shanghai.

—

Jeremy Goldkorn
An immigrant to the United States from South Africa via China
And — disclosure — husband of Wu Fei

*February 2019
Nashville, Tennessee,
United States of America*

About the instruments and the music

A note from Wu Fei 吴非, composer of Hello Gold Mountain

The Chinese zither, or *gǔzhēng* 古筝, has a history of at least 2,500 years in China. The oud is thought to have been first played around 3,500 years ago in Persia and Egypt. Versions of the oud are found throughout the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and North Africa. The *guzheng* has many cousins throughout Asia, including the Japanese *koto*, Korean *kayagum*, Indian *swarmandal*, Mongolian *yatga*, Vietnamese *đàn tranh*, and Indonesian *kacapi*.

Asian zithers and European Alpine zithers share a common ancestry. The oud is the ancestor of the modern Chinese *pípá* 枇杷, a four-string lute that came to China over the Silk Road around 2,000 years ago.

The Western classical instruments featured in *Hello Gold Mountain* were familiar to the Shanghai Jews — many of the emigrés had been active in the rich musical life of cities like Vienna and Berlin.

There were quite a few classical musicians and composers who taught and performed in Shanghai after they arrived. Many of their students later became conductors, soloists, and professors in China's music academies and conservatories. One example is *Niè Ěr* 聂耳, who studied with the Russian-Jewish composer Aaron Avshalomov. Nie went on to write the national anthem of the People's Republic of China.

Immigrants and refugees in America

*A note from Celine Thackson, artistic director of
chatterbird ensemble*

Prior to the February 23 premiere of *Hello Gold Mountain*, Wu Fei and chatterbird partnered with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC), the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, Nashville Public Library, and the Chinese Arts Alliance of Nashville to offer community programming that shares the stories of the Jewish refugees of Shanghai.

Why?

We want to honor the memories of these refugees while highlighting the important and often difficult work that is being done each day by organizations like TIRRC.

We are so grateful for the opportunity to present the premiere of *Hello Gold Mountain* here in Nashville. The stories that inspired the work are deeply moving and need to be shared. The displacement of people across the globe continues to be a humanitarian crisis. Having the opportunity to shine a light on the loss of identity caused by displacement, while celebrating the cultural enrichment that happens when we open ourselves to the lived experiences of others — this is the important work that we can do as artists. We are here to honor the memory of these refugees, highlight the connections to the current landscape, and bear witness to the important and difficult work that is being done to create positive change. Please continue to speak up and support those in the community who give hope to the most vulnerable among us.

Paul French

Shanghai



The Port of Last Resort

A brief history of a decade when
Jewish life thrived in Shanghai



SITE OF MAIN COTTON, FLOUR & OIL MILLS

Shanghai North Railway Station

INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT

Hongkew Market

WHARVES

SITE OF MAIN MANUFACTURING COMPANIES

RIVER

Bubbling Well Police Station

Country Club

Portuguese Consulate

Swiss Consulate

British Consulate

Public Recreation Ground

Town Hall

Market

Cathedral

Central Police

Fire Station

Banking Houses

THE BUND

Japanese Consulate

American Consulate

German Consulate

French Consulate

FRENCH CONCESSION

Franco Chinese Institute

Aurore University

CHINESE CITY

Shanghai South Railway Station

NANTAO

WHANGPOO

To Hangchow

To Nanking



Shanghai

Scale of Miles



ONE

**Fabritsky — Chaimowitz — Spielmann
Kahn — Herzberg — Pollack — Stolpin
Berger — Levy — Silberstein — Sachs
Krebs — Frieser — Weiss — Jacobson**

Over 20,000 refugees with names like these came to Shanghai between 1933 and 1941. Mostly from Germany and Austria, they fled to escape the Nazis. Shanghai — that prize brutally won after victory in an opium war — was an imperial possession. And yet, for so many — Chinese fleeing drought, flood, disease, hunger, poverty, and warlords, as well as Russians fleeing Bolshevism — it became a port of last resort, a sanctuary from violence and brutality elsewhere.

The refugees settled in the Shanghai International Settlement, a unique treaty port that was not China proper, and offered access to the stateless, those without passports, visas, or laissez-passer. Although far away and a strange unknown land, Shanghai might provide a possibility of safety.

The Austrian-Jewish movie director Josef von Sternberg, who was obsessed with Shanghai, in the 1930s wrote: “Years ago, a speck was torn away from the mystery of China and became Shanghai. A distorted mirror of problems that beset the world today, it grew into a refuge for people who wished to live between the lines of laws and customs — a modern tower of Babel.”

And the European-Jewish refugees added to that tower of Babel — German, Yiddish, Wienerisch, Polish, Hebrew, Czech. A trickle arrived in 1933; more in 1934; still more in 1938. Then, following Kristallnacht, the numbers jumped from a thousand or so a year to nearly thirteen thousand in 1939. Despite all-out war in Europe and the disruption of the sea-lanes, two thousand more arrived in 1940 and four thousand in 1941. Seventeen thousand Jewish refugees came aboard the ships of the Italian Lloyd Triestino Line, boarding in the Port of Trieste and sailing to Shanghai via Suez, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, and Hong Kong in twenty-four days.





There were other routes to Shanghai. Famously, the Polish and Lithuanian Jews were given transit visas by Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Lithuania. They traveled by train from Vilnius, across the Soviet Union, from Vladivostok to Kobe in Japan by boat and thence to Shanghai. Ho Feng-Shan (何鳳山 Hé Fèngshān), the Chinese consul-general in Vienna, similarly signed visas (disobeying the orders of the Chinese ambassador in Berlin), allowing Jews to leave Nazi-occupied Austria.

Then — December 1941: Pearl Harbor. The Japanese army occupied the International Settlement. The once-open gates clanged shut for the duration.

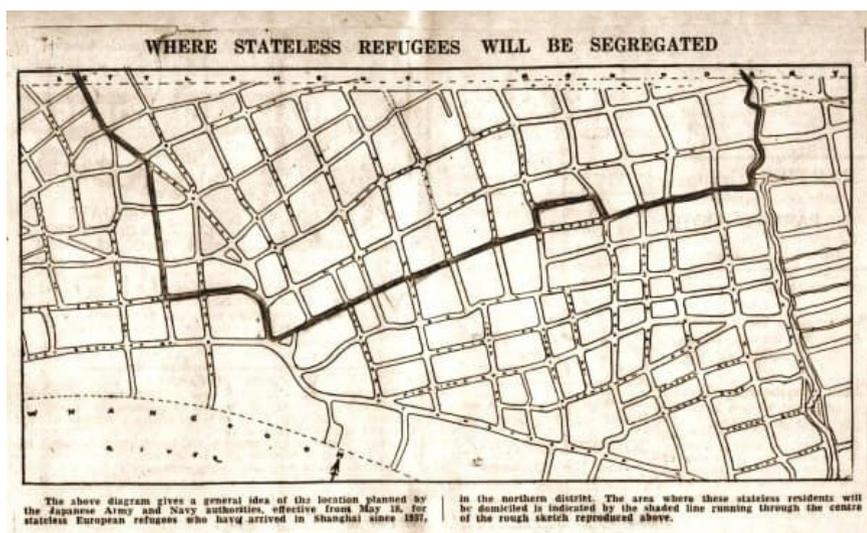
The Jewish refugees in Shanghai organized in their new home. Long-established and wealthy Shanghai Jews, such as Sir Victor Sassoon, set up the International Committee for European Immigrants; the similarly wealthy Baghdadi Jewish family, the Kadoories, financed the Committee for the Assistance of European Jewish Refugees. And the refugees themselves organized — soup kitchens, thrift shops, clinics, yeshivas, mikvahs, sports teams, reading circles, sewing circles, education classes, kindergartens, and newspapers.

Life was tough for everyone in Shanghai, tough for everyone in China. For the most part, the local Chinese community welcomed, befriended, and helped the refugees. But with Japan a full Axis power and now at war with Britain and America as well as China, things were to get tougher still.



TWO

Seward Road — Yoochow Road — Wayside
Road — Tong Shan Road — Ward Road
Kung Ping Road — Chaou Foong Road
Dent Road — Chusan Road — Muirhead
Road Lay Road



The Shanghai Ghetto had borders — outside its roads, passes and permissions were required; a curfew was imposed; Japanese soldiers patrolled the perimeters. All life was lived within its streets.

Starting in November 1942, Allied nationals were herded into civilian internment camps. Those British and American Jews who had supported charities helping the refugees found themselves behind barbed wire. In the same month, the idea of a restricted ghetto for Shanghai's stateless Jewish refugees was approved. In February 1943, the Japanese authorities declared a "Designated Area for Stateless Refugees" and ordered those who arrived after 1937 to move within it. By May 1943, the Hongkou Ghetto, the "Heime" or "Little Vienna," was in operation — barely three-quarters of a square mile and home to 17,000 Jewish refugees, as well as to the roughly one hundred thousand Chinese already living there.

Within the Ghetto, the situation was hard — food always short, work hard to find, chronic overcrowding, petty arguments and disputes, friction with the Japanese. But a community did thrive and support was given — doctors set up clinics; dentists treated those in pain; mothers pooled resources to provide childcare; yeshivas gathered. Those poorly equipped to survive due to old age, infirmity, disability, and the sheer stress and trauma from what life had thrown at them found charity both within the community and from the wider Chinese population. The winter of 1943 was one of the coldest on record in Shanghai, but people survived despite widespread hunger and freezing temperatures.

The Ghetto would remain enforced until it was finally liberated on September 3, 1945. The last six to eight months of the war were the most dangerous. Refugees formed resistance groups to help downed Allied aircrew, hiding them from the Japanese. The United States Air Force bombed Shanghai and many of those bombs, targeting the power and waterworks, as well as the gasoline dumps, which were all near the Ghetto, meant the threat of a blitz on Hongkou. The refugees improvised air raid shelters or, when they were full, simply crawled under the kitchen table and pulled mattresses on top. In one raid, when several off-target bombs fell on the Ghetto, thirty-eight refugees and several hundred Chinese died. Despite the threat, the Japanese maintained the Ghetto's restrictions and did not allow an exodus to safety.

Soon after the liberation, the new United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which was succeeded a few years later by the UN Refugee Agency, started the long process of resettling the Shanghai Jewish refugees. Many went to the United States, with a sizable population settling in and around San Francisco; others went to the U.K., and, as

housing conditions in Britain were bad due to the Blitz, more often to Canada and Australia, where many settled in Sydney near Bondi. Still others found their way to the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Rarely did any opt to return to Germany or Austria. By the mid-1950s, only a handful of Jews remained in Shanghai, invariably those who had come to support the new communist government.

As the Bamboo Curtain descended over the People's Republic of China, the story of the Shanghai Jewish refugees slipped from public consciousness. Veterans of the Hongkou Ghetto would gather in San Francisco hotel ballrooms or Sydney restaurants for get-togethers. Mimeographed newsletters circulated, carrying notices of deaths, marriages, births, memoirs published, old friends looking each other up across continents, grainy old photographs of Chusan Road or Wayside Road. Those newsletters came by post, then got faxed, then came as emails, though with each passing year, the number of Ghetto veterans grew fewer and fewer.

In the 1980s, as China began to open up slightly, and then in the early 1990s, with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and Israel, many now-elderly former Shanghai Jews came back to visit. They came to see if their old homes were there, if Chinese friends had stayed in the area or moved away in the tumult of China's last three decades. Plaques went up on some buildings, a new generation of foreigners in Shanghai, as well as Chinese scholars, became interested, walking tours started, more memoirs were published, and the Ohel Moshe Synagogue reopened as the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on the old Ward Road (now Changyang Lu).

Shanghai remembered.



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報日論回海五
Shanghai ECHO
TÄGL. NACHRICHTENBLATT · DAILY NEWSPAPER

Ist taeglich ab 6 Uhr morgens im Strassenhandel erhaeltlich.
Sonntag, den 5. Mai, erscheint unsere Sondernummer "77 Jahre Emigrantenpresse".

DIE MASKEN FALLEN
von Mark Siegelberg und Hans Schubert.

Dr. Paul Brach, Journalist	Robert Weiss-Cyla	Kirsky	Heinz Gantner	Fraunhofer	Fritz Heller
Christine, seine Frau	Lily Flohr	1. Kriminalbeamter	Harry Walden	Lehmann	Gerhard Gottschalk
Susi, beider Kind	Klein Olly Gutstadt	2. Kriminalbeamter	Max Brandt-Bukofzer	Elsa	Jenny Rausnitz
Josaf Brach, Paul's Vater	Victor Flamm-Geldem	Blumenreich	Richard Stein	Stenotypistin	Marion Lissner
Dr. Forstner	Herbert Zornik	Heller	Siegfried Katzeel-Cardo	Kallnar	Max Guenther
Dr. Huber	Erwin Frieser	Waegerer	Kurt Lewin	Chauffeur	Robert Beer
Rokofsky, Journalist	Herzch Friedmann	Nigl	Berthold Meiss	Die Stimme des Ungeistes Hitler	Fred Lang

Im 4. Bild singt Max Warschauer: „Al Tschlichenu“ von Lewandowski

Regie: Robert Weiss-Cyla
Beleuchtung: Rosenbaum

Buehnenbild: Walter Kornitzer
Friseur: Fessler

Technische Leitung: Hans Cassel
Verstaerkungsanlage: Aerialie, Hahn

Zwischen dem 3. und 4. Bild ist eine Pause von 20 Minuten.
Die Moebel wurden in liebenswuerdiger Weise von der Firma "Old and New Arts", 20 Muirhead Road, zur Verfuegung gestellt.

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THREE

Josef Bunk, Silversmith — F.M. Sternfeld,
Architect — Linsker & Strauss,
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Hoffmann, Restaurateur — Helene Stein,
Artificial Flower Maker — F. Wilezinski,
Glazer — Weinmann Bros., Importers &
Exporters — Ernst Herzog, Bookseller
Leo Weil, Vintner — Sally Frankfurter,
Painter

The Emigranten Adressbuch fuer Shanghai lists pretty much every Jewish refugee and their businesses in Hongkou and across the city for 1939. It was the most basic way of keeping in touch — names, addresses, telephone numbers, and, in many cases, hometowns given. A hundred and fifty pages of names and stories: from Abbe Siegbert, Breslau, Pianist, at 990 Bubbling Well Road, to Zylberstein Josef, Schneider, domiciled at 24/3 Ward Road.

“Little Vienna,” indeed. Viennese-born Lily Flohr had been a star of the silent screen in Berlin until the Nazis’ anti-Semitic regulations forbade Jewish actors from performing on the stage or screen. She came to Shanghai and was a star still among the refugee community. She appeared on the stage of the Eastern Theatre on Muirhead Road — a genuine celebrity in the Hongkou Ghetto, offering a night to forget your troubles and listen to the old songs of home. Lily found everything she needed on Muirhead Road, even in 1944 — she had her makeup and nails done at Senorita Warshawski’s beauty parlor next to the theater and her hair at Salon Mosberg just across the street.

There were, if you could afford it, many doctors to choose from — Dr. Jacobson on Chusan Road; Dr. Steiner, a gynecologist; Dr. Wolff, who specialized in kidney complaints. Your prescription could be filled at the Draxler Sina Apothekerin on Broadway. Alex Baumgarten offered dental treatment from his surgery on Tong Shan Road while Herbert Jacobsohn specialized in false teeth from his rooms on Wayside.

The Jews of Shanghai attempted to maintain a sense of normality in this most abnormal of situations: Leopoldine Vogel, a corsetière from Vienna, opened a store at a time when one might think corsets could be disposed of as unnecessary items. She clearly wished to maintain standards. The Shanghai Hat

Mill on East Seward Road was owned by two Jewish milliners. Heinrich Morgenstern gave pedicures from his apartment.

There were also tradesmen of all types — Hans Freund, an electrician; Mr. Eisler sold light bulbs; Mr. Kohn, Mr. Einricht, and Mr. Fabrikat set up an engineering consultancy; Mr. Brandt and Mr. Sachs were plumbers for hire; Ernst Karliner had a shop on Chusan Road that could fix your wireless.

Between errands, the school run, and work, the refugees stopped to eat and drink. A justified twenty minutes kvetching at the Express Café, the Café Imperial, Felicia’s, or the Zuntz Coffee Shop, perhaps. And, once in a while, if finances allowed, something to eat at the Barcelona Restaurant or the Wayside Diner.

Life, perhaps against the odds, went on in the Ghetto.

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berühmte
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JOSEF WANK
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REPARATUREN UND VERÄNDERUNGEN WERDEN
SOFORT BEWIRKT

KAUFE
GOLD
SILBER
JUWELEN





FOUR

The Black Cat — Oceana Bar
The Mascot — Roy's Roof Garden
Tabarin — Delikat — Zum Weißen Rössl
The Green Kakadu



A cultural life of sorts was also maintained. Two Ghetto residents, Hans Schubert and Mark Siegelberg, who had escaped from the Buchenwald concentration camp and somehow managed to make it to Shanghai, composed an opera about life in the Hongkou Ghetto — *Die Masken fallen* (The Mask Is Fallen). The German consulate in Shanghai, under the control of the Nazis, took a major dislike to the opera and did all it could to stop performances, telling the organizers, and Paul Komor of the Jewish Émigré Committee in Shanghai, that if the opera continued to be staged, reprisals would be taken against the Jewish community left in Nazi-controlled Europe. The performances continued despite the threats.

Lily Flohr appeared in *Die Masken fallen* and also was seen regularly with the comedians Herbert Zernik and Gerhard Gottschalk, who ran the Tabarin cabaret and supper club on Broadway — a taste of Weimar Berlin in Hongkou. There were stage shows at *Zum Weißen Rössl* (The White Horse) on Ward Road and *The Green Kakadu* (Cockatoo) just around the corner.

The violinist Alfred Wittenberg, the musicians Otto and Walter Joachim, and the singers Rose Albach-Gerstel and Monica Herenfeld could all be seen — perhaps at Roy's Roof Garden above the Broadway Theatre on Wayside Road, which was packed in the stifling summer months. Rattan chairs and plain deal tables, a makeshift bar, ice buckets, red and green light bulbs strung around the wood planking that made a small stage, and, perhaps, best of all, a cooling breeze from the nearby Huangpu River to ease the Shanghai humidity.

In January 1946, as the former inhabitants of the Hongkou Ghetto started to scatter to the four winds and find new lives, the Jewish Welfare Board organized one last, great celebration of Jewish culture in Shanghai: the All Star Parade. It was held

at the Eastern Theatre on Muirhead Road, where Lily Flohr had performed at Yiddish culture nights and appeared in productions of Bertolt Brecht, singing songs by Kurt Weill. When she walked onstage for one last performance, there was rapturous applause for this last fling of Jewish culture in Shanghai.

Further Reading and Listening

The China History Podcast: The Jewish Refugees of China
<https://goo.gl/sq7R16>

Ursula Bacon, *Shanghai Diary: A Young Girl's Journey from Hitler's Hate to War-Torn China* (M Press, 2002)

I. Betty Grebenschikoff, *Once My Name Was Sara: A Memoir* (Original Seven Publishing, 1993)

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Kathy Kacer, *Shanghai Escape* (Second Story Press, 2013)

Vivian Jeanette Kaplan, *Ten Green Bottles: The True Story of One Family's Journey from War-Torn Austria to the Ghettos of Shanghai* (St. Martin's Press, 2002)

Rena Krasno, *Strangers Always: A Jewish Family in Wartime China* (Pacific View Press, 1992)

Rena Krasno, Audrey Friedman Marcus, *Survival in Shanghai: The Journals of Fred Marcus 1939-49* (Pacific View Press, 2008)

Sam Moshinsky, *Goodbye Shanghai: A Memoir* (Real Film and Publishing, 2016)

Ester Benjamin Shifren, *Hiding in a Cave of Trunks: A Prominent Jewish Family's Century in Shanghai and Internment in a WWII POW Camp* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2012)

Sigmund Tobias, *Strange Haven: A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Shanghai* (University of Illinois Press, 1999)

Liliane Willens, *Stateless in Shanghai* (Earnshaw Books, 2010)

Roads Index

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Broadway East	Daming Road East
Bubbling Well Road	Nanjing Road West
Chaou Foong Road	Gaoyang Road South
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Dent Road	Dantu Road
Kung Ping Road	Gongping Road
Lay Road	Lanzhou Road
Muirhead Road	Haimen Road
Seward Road	Dongdaming Road
Seward Road East	Changzi Road East
Tong Shan Road	Tangshan Road
Ward Road	Changyang Road
Wayside Road	Huoshan Road
Yoochow Road	Yuezhou Road

About the Author

Paul French lived and worked in Shanghai for many years and is now based in London. French's 2018 book, *City of Devils: The Two Men Who Ruled the Underworld of Old Shanghai* (Picador), was his much-anticipated second literary nonfiction book and was a Kirkus Book of the Year. It followed *Midnight in Peking* (Penguin, 2013), which was a New York Times Best Seller. In 2019, he published a collection of his writing, *Destination Shanghai* (Blacksmith Books) — eighteen tales of old Shanghailanders, famous, infamous, and previously forgotten.





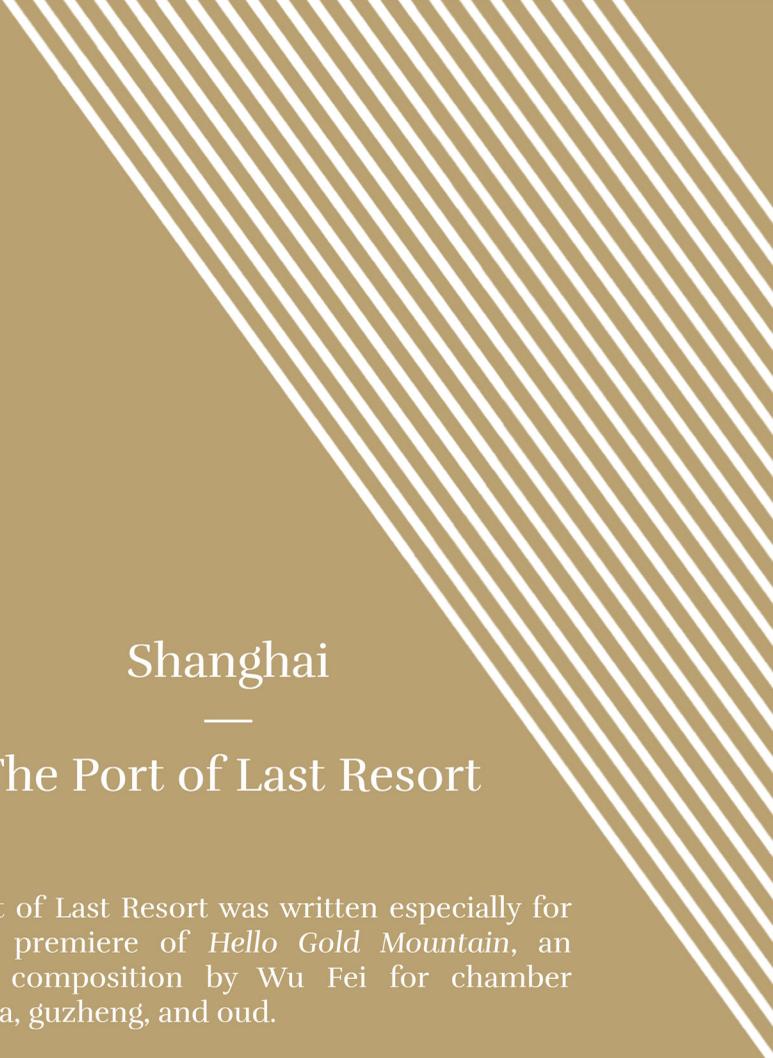
About the Photographs

Photographs of Shanghai in the fall of 1939 were taken by Melville Jacoby, and are courtesy of Peggy Stern Cole via Bill Lascher.

To learn more about Jacoby, see the book *Eve of a Hundred Midnights*, by Bill Lascher — more information at eveofahundredmidnights.com.

Scans of advertisements, maps, and print media are from the personal collection of Paul French.

The cover illustration is by Emma Vendetta Reimers.



Shanghai

The Port of Last Resort

The Port of Last Resort was written especially for the the premiere of *Hello Gold Mountain*, an original composition by Wu Fei for chamber orchestra, guzheng, and oud.

Paul French's brief historical volume details the lives of Jewish refugees from Europe who fled to Shanghai during World War II, illustrated with newspaper advertisements from 1930s Shanghai and rare photographs of the city in 1939, by adventurer and war correspondent Melville Jacoby.

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cover illustration and book design — Emma Vendetta Reimers

