



# Strange Haven: A Jewish Childhood in Wartime Shanghai

*Sigmund Tobias*

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In the wake of Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, Sigmund Tobias and his parents fled their home in Germany and relocated to one of the few cities in the world that offered shelter without requiring a visa: the notorious pleasure capital, Shanghai. Seventeen thousand Jewish refugees flocked to Hongkew, a section of Shanghai ruled by the Japanese, and they created an active community that continued to exist through the end of the war.

Tobias's coming-of-age story unfolds within his descriptions of Jewish life in the exotic sanctuary of Shanghai. Depleted by disease and hunger, constantly struggling with primitive and crowded conditions, the refugees faced shortages of food, clothing, and medicine. Tobias also observes the underlife of Shanghai: the prostitution and black market profiteering, the brutal lives of the Chinese workers, the tensions between Chinese and Japanese during the war, and the paralyzing inflation and the approach of the communist "liberators" afterward.

Richly detailed, *Strange Haven* opens a little-documented chapter of the Holocaust and provides a fascinating glimpse of life for these foreigners in a foreign land. An epilogue describes the changes Tobias observed when he returned to Shanghai forty years later as a visiting professor.

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