

The Heterotopia of Exile in the Autobiography of Jewish Refugee

Tang Jie¹, Yu Changfei²

¹*School of European Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Shaanxi 710128, China*

²*School of language, Literature and Law, Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology, Shaanxi 710055, China
tangjie0526@sina.com*

ABSTRACT

In the present work Franziska Tausig's experiences of foreignness in Shanghai and the heterotopia of exile are presented. The focus is on a presentation of the individual perception of Shanghai and China, the gender stereotypes there as well as the confrontation and coping with strangeness from the perspective of Tausig.

Keywords: *the heterotopia of exile, Shanghai, Franziska Tausig*

1. INTRODUCTION

"In all societies there are utopias that have a precisely definable, real place that can be found on the map and also a precisely definable time that can be determined and measured according to the everyday calendar." [2]

The French humanities scholar Michel Foucault coined the term "heterotopia" as an alternative to utopia in the 1960s. In 1987 the autobiography of the Austrian exile Franziska Tausig (1895-1989) with the title "Shanghai Passage. Flucht und Exil einer Wienerin" published by the publisher for social criticism in Vienna. It is the first autobiography of an Austrian emigrant in Shanghai. [11] In 2007 her autobiography was titled "Shanghai Passage. Emigration ins Ghetto" published again by Milena Verlag in Vienna. Her life at home, her escape from Austria and her time in Shanghai were summarized in it. In 2013, Tausigplatz in Vienna was named after her and her son Otto Tausig. The Shanghai exile can be identified in this text as a heterotopia, "as a real existing space, but an end-time space excluded from society, in which the existence of those in it progresses, but broken out of previous life and a connection to that life before fleeing is doomed to failure after a possible return home." [13] In addition, the German writer Ursula Krechel describes the fate of Jewish refugees in the novel "Shanghai fern von wo?" Published in 2008. The life of Franziska Tausig and her family serves as a template for the main character, Mrs. Tausig. This work, "undoubtedly conceived and structured as a novel, is composed of life reports, documents and stories of the exiles." [3] Due to the connection of historical documents with fictional narration, this novel is "a highly emotional, affectively effective work of art" [3].

In the present work, Franziska Tausig's experiences of foreignness and heterotopia in exile are presented in relation to heterotopia. The focus is on a presentation of the individual perception of Shanghai and China, the gender stereotypes there as well as the confrontation and coping with strangeness from the perspective of Tausig.

2. THE SHANGHAI EXILE FROM A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

In the autobiography, Franziska Tausig is both the first-person narrator and the main character. Using simple and humorous language, she describes her life story, in which a brave and hardworking Jewish exile is portrayed. "In her own unpretentious and lively language, Franziska Tausig describes everyday life in exile, always observing closely, often with humor and a touch of self-irony." [5]

Franziska Tausig arranged two ship passages to free her husband from the concentration camp. They then immediately looked for a way to leave Austria. Western countries such as America, France and England closed their borders to destitute Jewish refugees, so Franziska Tausig and her husband left for Shanghai on the steamer "Usaramo". She remembers that moment as follows: "I went through a lot of terrible things. But now I was lucky enough to have two passages to Shanghai in my hands." [10]

From 1933 to 1941 about 25,000 refugees came to Shanghai on various escape routes. For the Jewish refugees in their life-threatening situation, the Chinese port city was the last place of refuge. Although the foreign culture posed a great challenge to the integration of Jewish exiles, it was able to ensure their survival.

After the war, some Jewish refugees wrote autobiographical texts that they used to process their memories of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, of fleeing Europe and of life in exile in Shanghai. The exact number of autobiographical texts is uncertain, research to date has recorded around 20 publications. Many male emigrants expounded on their exile experiences after the war, while female voices were largely absent. This is due to the lower female refugee rate in Shanghai. In Germany, for example, the proportion of Jewish women was over 57%, but there were significantly more men than women among the German-Austrian refugees in Shanghai. [1] It took almost forty years before the first female autobiography was made available to the public. Franziska Tausig's report was

described as the first description of a “self-made” woman in exile in Shanghai. [11]

3. SHANGHAI AS A FOREIGN HAVEN

In Western literary works, the Far East has mostly been portrayed as a mysterious place, a utopian myth. The free trade city of Shanghai gained a lot of reputation in the 1930s and was called the “Paris of the East”. However, the so-called “Sin Babel” also gave rise to an image of Shanghai as a “synonym for crime, prostitution, corruption and illness” [4], as the economic upswing also resulted in social problems. “Shanghai was a city of contradictions and superlatives: splendid wealth contrasted with drastic poverty.” [12] For most Jewish emigrants, Shanghai was not a destination, but rather a place of refuge in the context of need and misery.

Tausig’s memory of Shanghai begins with the following description: “The years in Shanghai were bitter years. They were like a goblet, filled to the brim with a cruel fate that I had to empty to the last drop.” [10] After a nine-week voyage, the couple arrived penniless in the exotic free trade town.

As the ship approached Shanghai, Franziska Tausig received her first impressions of life in the strange city: “An unspeakably dirty boy was driving a water buffalo with a stick. He was the first person we met in China.” [10] After the passengers had greeted the boy, he held out his hand to them. They threw a piece of cake ashore. The boy picked up the cake from the bank mud and ate it immediately. This reflected the poverty of the Chinese people during the war. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out, hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees from other parts of the country poured into Shanghai to seek protection in the French concession and international settlement. In 1937 Shanghai came under fire from the Japanese and the Chinese areas was captured by the Japanese occupying forces, with the Hongkew district being completely destroyed in the “Battle of Shanghai”. The aggravated political situation and the unfamiliar living conditions in Shanghai were therefore very challenging for the newly arrived exiles. In order to own the bread for herself and her sick husband, Franziska Tausig worked as a baker in the Viennese restaurant “Kolibri”. There she came into contact with the locals. As she went about her job in the kitchen, they stared curiously at “fourteen slit eyes”. [10] This impression of the Chinese appeared to Tausig as a confirmation of the prejudices against Asians that existed in Europe. “The ideological simplification ‘Schlitzaugen’ is to be seen as ‘foreign’ according to the local theme of interpretation.” [7] During the course of her stay, however, her impression changed significantly, and she soon described the Chinese as hard-working and clever. For example, Tausig stated: “The Chinese residents of Shanghai could learn German incomparably more easily than we could stutter Chinese.” [10]

At the market she came into contact with the life of the lower class in Shanghai. Every morning the head of the

restaurant picked her up for the market. There she saw food that she had never seen before: “strange and shiny silver fish, the famous buried eggs, the splendid tuna, the cheese made from soy milk, the mountains of yellow pineapples.” [10] She always looked at this with great interest: “There were always more people to see than goods. But still the Chinese market was a great picture for me.” [10] On the other hand, she observed numerous beggars. Because of the great misery, the poor people took to the streets to beg or steal. Some women became sex workers in order to support their families.

The subtropical climate in Shanghai was also hardly bearable for the European refugees. With a view to the sultry summer days, Tausig writes: “It was a glowing August day, followed by an equally glowing night. My mattress was so soaked in sweat as if I had been in a bath. I had the window and the door of my chamber open so that the drafts would soften the boiling heat, but there was no cooling.” [10] There was always a fan in Chinese homes. Mr. Matoncz, the boss of the bakery, had it dismantled, after Tausig was fired. It was a painful memory for Tausig: “It was like pressing a gag into the throat of a suffocating person.” [10]

Chinese culture has always remained foreign to European emigrants. One of the reasons was that the language barrier was a major obstacle for many people. At best, the Jewish refugees could exchange ideas with the Chinese in “pidgin English”. In the double biography “Last Refuge Shanghai”, the author Stefan Schomann tells of the living conditions of the emigrants in Shanghai: “Hardly none of them had ever dealt with Chinese before. And even during their almost ten years of forced residency, contact was limited to the bare minimum. Only a few manage to overcome China’s true wall, the language. Many of them never ate Chinese food and hardly interact with the locals. Perhaps ten of the 18,000 married a Chinese partner.” [8]

4. SHANGHAI AS A HETEROTOPIC SPACE

The Jewish emigrants in Shanghai were exposed to uprooting and social segregation. Although they spent many years in Shanghai, they increasingly distanced themselves from the city and its culture. The divergence came to the fore especially in the encounters with the locals, reinforced by the maintenance of the homeland culture in the refugee circles. The Jewish emigrants tried to construct a heterotopic space abroad. They created heterotopias in exile in the sense of Foucault, as mentioned in the introduction.

Many Viennese restaurants, coffee houses, bakeries, hairdressing salons and shoe shops opened in the heavily destroyed Hongkew district. In 1940 there were more than 3,000 Austrian Jews living in Shanghai. “A Viennese subculture on Chinese soil” [10] was created by the Austrian emigrants. The refugees were thus shaped by the migration to Shanghai and had a reciprocal influence on Shanghai: “The structural repairs of Hongkew, the

establishment of European services and ways of life also influenced the surrounding areas.” [11]

However, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the situation of Jewish refugees deteriorated. All “stateless refugees” were to be forcibly relocated in a restricted area in Hongkew established by the Japanese military authorities. By moving to the ghetto, Franziska Tausig lost her job and thus her livelihood. By investing all her savings, she took over a branch of the bakery from the Armenian Matoncz in the emigrant district. From the serving cups to the curtain, the entire pastry shop was subsequently decorated in the Viennese style and referred to by the emigrants as “the Demel of Shanghai”.

Under persistently difficult conditions, the refugees developed a diverse cultural life with theaters, operettas and other cabaret. Even after the beginning of the Pacific War, cultural events were organized by emigrants in the Shanghai ghettos. “The continuation of European cultural forms stands for the will of self-assertion of the emigrants even in a exotic, often life-threatening environment.” [6] Through the numerous cultural activities, the Jewish emigrants tried to restore a social and cultural identity in a foreign world. These people played a prominent role in Shanghai’s cultural life. As Michael Philipp said, “There was not a single prominent artist, scientist or politician among the Shanghai emigrants.” [10]

After the death of her husband, Franziska Tausig worked as a kitchen assistant in a hospital. She received many marriage offers from other exiles, but turned them down because she longed for her son. For Tausig, the most memorable experience was the celebration that held in a kitchen. The kitchen assistants decorated the kitchen and everyone wore their best clothes. “The gentlemen, who without exception do their duty during the day in coarse linen aprons, wore a dark suit or even a tuxedo. Almost all of them had gold cufflinks, pure silk ties, and some even had gold cigarette cases. The ladies wore a small evening toilet or a good afternoon dress. They were all dressed by an excellent Viennese hairdresser who ran a good salon in Shanghai. One hardly recognized this select company, the picture was so different.” [10]

After dinner, a cabaret performance began with a subsequent dance. This art form was very popular in Austria before the Nazi era. This is how the heterotopic space was created. In the heterotopic exile, the refugees were able to temporarily forget the misery and tried their best to preserve the traditions of their homeland. Tausig remembers: “It was a starry night and you could go for a walk and dream of driving home.” [10]

5. CONCLUSION

In Tausig’s autobiography, forms of gender relations among the emigrants in Shanghai are shown. As formulated in the text, Mr. Tausig suffered from social degradation and years of illness. Compared to men, women tended to find it easier to adapt to difficult living conditions, as political circumstances forced them to break

out of their traditional roles. In life-threatening situations, they showed the strength that they did not expect. [1] Unlike the reports from the male emigrants, Tausig’s portrayals illuminated the life stories of women from different countries, which were significantly shaped by social, political, cultural and ethnic influences.

Shanghai, both a real refuge and a heterotopic space in which Tausig lived with many emigrants, had become a rich memory for them. As Tausig writes in her autobiography, “The smaller the joke about our bread of life, the smaller life becomes and the greater the number of memories. Many of us only live from our memories. And they don’t get cloudy from wear and tear. On the contrary, the more you wear them out, the more shiny and glittery they become.” [10]

Franziska Tausig died in Vienna two years after the publication. She never return to Shanghai again.

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