

Help, Hygiene, and the Home: Shanghai's German-Speaking Jewish Refugees and Chinese Residents

Kimberly Cheng, New York University

Remembering her time in Shanghai, Gertrude Kracauer of Berlin explained, "I am ashamed to admit that we all copied the prevailing custom to call every male helper or servant 'boy,' the women *amah*, regardless of age." Kracauer's testimony reveals how German-speaking Jewish refugees in quasi-colonial Shanghai adopted pervading European attitudes toward their Chinese neighbors. Neither colonizer nor colonized locals, Jewish refugees, as a third party of sorts, had to carve out places for themselves in the network of overlapping imperialisms in China. Often aligning themselves with the city's European contingents, Jewish refugees negotiated their liminal status most commonly in the home. Using memoir and refugee guidebooks, this paper explores how refugees, particularly those of means, mediated their sense of self through their relationship with their Chinese domestic servants. Refugees used teaching their Chinese servants so-called European practices of hygiene, food preparation, and cleaning to demarcate their foreignness. Refugees who could not afford domestic servants still practiced culinary and hygienic customs within the home to maintain cultural boundaries between them and their Chinese neighbors. With this approach, this paper ultimately uses frameworks of empire both to consider how living on the margins of the colonial concession system in China impacted refugees' attitudes and behaviors and to shed light on the construction of foreignness and race in Shanghai more broadly.