

SHANGHAI JEWISH REFUGEES MUSEUM

Born in Shanghai

The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on The Empty Suitcase

The Empty Suitcase

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About this text

On 21 October 2025, Dinah Feldman spoke about *The Empty Suitcase* at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. A week later, on 28 October, the museum published this article on its official WeChat account. This is a full translation from the Chinese. Our title takes the museum's own words: a play "born in the museum, born in Shanghai".

Visits from refugee descendants | An "empty suitcase" full of memories spanning three generations! This play longs to return to Shanghai

On 21 October, Dinah Feldman, a theatre producer from São Paulo, Brazil, and a descendant of Jewish refugees, visited the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. She shared with us the creative journey of a play "born in the museum, born in Shanghai".

[Photo] Dinah speaking at the museum

In 2019, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and the Jewish Museum of São Paulo, Brazil, jointly held the exhibition "Jewish Refugees and Shanghai". Dinah's cousin William Jedwab, also a descendant of refugees, was deeply moved when he saw it. He donated the old suitcase his grandmother had left, together with a collection of family records, to the Jewish Museum of São Paulo.

[Link to an earlier article by the museum] "Visits from refugee descendants | Nine years in Shanghai: the memories of grandparents and father, all sealed in an old leather suitcase"

[Photo] Dinah (far left) and William (second from left)

While working at the Jewish Museum of São Paulo, Dinah found that the story of William's grandmother could keep an audience "listening intently for forty minutes". It convinced her that "this story deserved to be brought to the stage". Dinah told us that William's family history "was like a secret gathering dust", and that "all the documents were kept in that suitcase". Written in German and Chinese, these documents became important material for her later creative work.

Historical records of the Jedwab family in Shanghai

- [Photo] Ghetto pass
- [Photo] Identity card in China

— [Photo] Kadoorie School report card

— [Photo] Ship ticket to Shanghai

In March 2024, *The Empty Suitcase* premiered on stage in São Paulo, Brazil, and it has since drawn an audience of 40,000. Built around an old suitcase full of family memories and secrets, the play portrays "a profound journey interwoven with pain, love and transformation". It has won unanimous praise from critics and audiences, and has been nominated for several theatre awards. Dinah said that students, teachers, Holocaust survivors and descendants of the Jewish refugees who once lived in Shanghai have also taken an active part in talks and other events held by the company, because "each of these exchanges shows the resonance that the story of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai evokes, and also inspires a new generation of young people."

[Photos] Scenes from *The Empty Suitcase*

"In the past, all we usually heard was the number of people who died... Now we have the chance to share how people really lived in Shanghai." Dinah believes that *The Empty Suitcase* has changed the way the history of the Holocaust in the Second World War is told. To her, the exhibitions of the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum and the play complement each other: the two "preserve and pass on this precious legacy in different yet unified ways".

Dinah and William both hope the play can be performed in Shanghai. Through the museum, Dinah got in touch with Cathy Barbash, an adviser to the Shanghai International Arts Festival. Together they are working to bring this Shanghai-born story "back to where it began".

[Photo] Dinah with Cathy Barbash (right)

Source and translation

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