Video Essay Script

What is a monument? What makes a monument meaningful? Does the story behind the monument offer the meaning to it or does the viewers’ feeling grant the importance to it? Today we will be exploring the Jewish Refugee Monument within the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum. Located in Hongkou District, the Jewish Refugee Monument is erected in the past Jewish quarter in Shanghai during the 1930s and 40s.

During the early twentieth century, there were at least 18,000 European Jewish Refugees fled to Shanghai, China in order to escape from the persecution of the nazis (Jiang 2014). The homeless Jewish refugees sailed around half the planet to Shanghai from Europe, hoping for a new beginning of life. Because Shanghai didn’t require entry visa from the Jews. This part of history isn’t highlighted by the society. Indeed, around 1930s, Shanghai was occupied by Imperial Japan. By the time, Shanghai didn’t seem to have the condition of accommodating refugees from other countries because most of the Shanghainess themselves were under severe living conditions. So it’s a bit shocking to see that there were so many Jewish refugees in Shanghai and gather in this district during and after World War II. These groups of European Jewish people in Shanghai adapted the life style of Shanghai and became a part of the community, finding their sense of belongings. But their existence and their tragic stories have
never been forgotten. In 2014, the Shanghai Jewish Refugee Museum created a special monument in memory of the Jews during World War II.

After walking through a long corridor, visitors can see the monument on their right hand side. The sculpture of a group of six people comes to our vision. The designer of the statue design these people based on real proportions of human bodies. These people are around the same height of normal adults and kids in real life. A guide of the museum told me that these six people on the statue together symbolize the six million Jewish victims who were killed in the Nazi Holocaust.

In the middle of these people, we can see a middle-aged man and a child riding on his neck. The close and intimate action of this little boy and this man proves that they are likely to be father and son in a family. According to our guide, the little kid represents the future and the middle-aged man conveys the determination of the Jews. From the viewer’s perspective, it’s interesting to see that both the man and the boy look into the same direction and stare into the distance. Their eyes indicate their firmness of the bright future as long as they keep insisting and never giving up on themselves. In addition, this little boy is opening up his arms. His action symbolizes accepting and embracing the upcoming future.

On the left side of this statue is a jewish male. According to his long payos sidecurls and beard, this gentleman symbolizes the Orthodox Jews. The Jewish bible holding on his hand shows people’s perseverance in their own faith and how religion plays an important role in Jewish people’s life. Based on our guide, the elderly Jewish woman stands by the Orthodox man represents sufferings. Viewers are able to see the shapes of her eyes are dropping, her eye brows
are frowning, and even her hands are holding her clothes tightly. Visitors can sense the hardships and misfortune this woman represents from these details.

Here’s a pair of young couple on the right hand side of the monument. The young man holds the candlesticks on his hands, commemorating the Jews who passed away during the Second World War. This young woman puts her right hand on the young man’s shoulder and leans towards the candle light which symbolizes the candles are guiding their way. One thing is worth noting that Jews usually use candlesticks during special events and festivals, like Hanukkah which is also known as “Festival of Lights” (Brittanica). For viewers, people can also interpret this young couple as representing the bright future of these Jewish people who were able to survive after undergoing this tough time.

In addition, visitors can see there are not only six people on the monument, but there are many more people’s faces behind these people. Each figure is carved with distinctions: different facial traits and different head dresses. Everyone of them shows Jewish people from different families, different genders, and different ages. These people together represent millions of the Jews who were killed during the 1930s and 1940s. Visitors can immediately sense the enormous numbers of Jews who had tragically experienced the Holocaust.

Indeed, the wall next to the monument is also worth noting. Having a closer look at the salvation wall, you will discover the names of 13,732 Shanghai Jewish Refugees (Jiang 2014). Viewers could sense the existence of these Jewish people who used to live in Shanghai during wartime. The wall is about 37 meters long and 2.5 meters high (Duke Migration Memorial). By looking at the wall, visitors would be surprising to see that there were so many Jewish people living in this district during the 1930s and 40s. By the time, Shanghai was one of the two places
which accept Jews. So many European Jews came to Shanghai to seek for sanctuary. Soong Ching-ling, female leader of the Republic of China, also condemned the inhumane action of the Nazis to the Jews and offered help to accept Jewish refugees in Shanghai. Reading through these names after seeing the monument, visitors would generate the feelings of cherishing the moment they are living now. Enjoy the peace while remembering the painful past. This monument as well as the wall reminds their viewers to realize the importance of collaborating with each other to build a better community.

Furthermore, the meaning of monuments are likely to vary based on their geographical locations. Particularly, for this monument, it’s surrounded by the past Jewish quarter in Shanghai as well as the old Jewish church. This way, it remains the authenticity of the past living experience of Shanghai Jewish people. So, visiting this monument and seeing its surrounding of where Shanghai Jewish refugees used to live helps viewers who have never experienced this part of history to understand it. When this monument becomes more known nowadays, many of the visitors here are Chinese and they come from different cities. They may not be familiar with the life and ideology of the Jewish people. But people who see this monument will mourn the Jews who passed away during WWII and arouse the feelings of cherishing the moment now. Therefore, this monument successfully conveys the hope of people remembering the past, and most importantly, working together to create a better life.
Bibliography

