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Love and Hope in the Darkest of Times: SJM Collection Spotlight

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Figure 1: Sydney Jewish Museum Collection: Object number M2000/005:001.

In the "Culture and Continuity" section of the Sydney Jewish Museum there hangs an unobtrusive framed document that might easily be overlooked. Upon closer inspection, one notices that it is somewhat out of place since it is written in Chinese. Indeed, the document commemorates a Jewish wedding held in Shanghai in 1946. It has a colorful border incorporating dragons, phoenixes and peonies. The Chinese text is surrounded by peach blossoms, swallows, butterflies, lotus flowers, and even a pair of mandarin ducks.[1] Nevertheless even with these additional symbols, it would be easy for a museum visitor to quickly move on. However, underlying this framed document is the tale of a Jewish couple and a community of people that is both inspiring and miraculous. This article will detail their story.[2]

1. In Chinese folklore, mandarin ducks are symbolic of marital love and fidelity. Jing Sun and Arba'iyah Bt Ab. Aziz, "Fully Understand the Cultural Context of Traditional Auspicious Patterns Commonly Used in China," in *2022 4th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2022)*, ed. Bootheina Majoul, Digvijay Pandya, and Lin Wang (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2023), 874–82. Dragons, phoenixes and butterflies represent blessings and festivities, lotus flowers are symbolic of nobility and love, and peonies and swallows are indicators of good fortune. Wenqian He, "Research on the Design and Innovative Application of Marriage Certificate in Modern China" (masters dissertation, Soochow University, 2020), 18, 24-26, 37.

2. The authors would like to thank Shannon Biederman, Senior Curator of the Sydney Jewish Museum, for her help in gathering information used in this article, Dr. Danny Beran (Sydney) for his personal insights, Serena Li (Hong Kong) for her help in locating the material on Shijing, Dr. Konrad Stein (California) for his transcription of the Chinese text of the marriage document, and Alice Cheng (Sydney) for her photographs used in this article.

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Historical Background

In 1933 the Nazis were elected to power in Germany. From the outset, they urged all German and Austrian Jews to emigrate. However, only two regions were willing to accept them: the Dominican Republic and Shanghai. The latter had become the world's fifth largest city whose population included 70,000 foreigners. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) established British, French and American concessions in Shanghai whose multiple governing authorities precipitated administrative gaps conducive to foreign immigration.[3] However, Shanghai's role as a refuge for European Jews became more crucial with the passage of the German Nuremberg Laws in 1935. Even with the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1937, Jews continued to flee to the city.

The first Austrian Jews arrived in Shanghai in 1938. Many of them were aided by Dr. Feng Shan Ho, the Chinese consul in Vienna, who issued thousands of visas allowing Austrian and German Jews to emigrate between 1938 and 1940.[4] In August 1941, the Japanese closed Shanghai to further Jewish immigration, and by 1943 the infamous Shanghai Ghetto (formally known as the Restricted Sector for Stateless Refugees) was established inside one square mile of the Hongkou district. There the city's 20,000 Jewish refugees were forced to live in squalid conditions.[5] The ghetto existed until 3 September 1945 (the day after Japan surrendered) when it was officially closed after a tour by the American Rescue and Goodwill Mission.[6] After that, its Jewish inhabitants slowly left for other parts of the world including Australia. When the Chinese Communists entered Shanghai in 1949, the Shanghai Ghetto had all but disappeared.[7]

The Bride and the Groom[8]

Edith Frischmann (nicknamed "Ditta") was the only child of Sigmund and Franzi Frischmann. Born on 19 March 1925, she and her family fled Vienna one week after Kristallnacht in November 1938. They arrived in Shanghai via Genoa on an Italian ocean liner with several suitcases containing their meagre belongings. It was there that Sigmund and Franzi,

3. Qingyang Zhou, "Interactions Between the Chinese and the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai During World War II," *Penn History Review* 25 (2019): 52.

4. Although these visas provided proof of Shanghai as a destination, the majority of those who received them eventually traveled elsewhere. Manli Ho, "Diplomatic Rescue: Shanghai as a Means of Escape and Refuge," in *A Century of Jewish Life in Shanghai*, ed. Steve Hochstadt (New York: Touro University Press, 2019), 117–26.

5. The exact number of Jews who occupied the Shanghai Ghetto has always been uncertain. Estimates number them between 17,000 and 25,000. Steve Hochstadt, "How many Shanghai Jews were there?" in *A Century of Jewish Life in Shanghai*, ed. Steve Hochstadt (New York: Touro University Press, 2019), 8-9.

6. David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis & Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community in Shanghai, 1938-1945* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976), 566.

7. Cedric Devroye. "Jewish Presence in China and the Shanghai Ghetto," *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire. Revue pluridisciplinaire de la Fondation Auschwitz* 131 (2020): 22–29, https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/9334#:~:text=6Nearly%2020%2C000%20of%20the,financial%20assistance%20in%20some%20form.

8. Many of the details in this section are provided in a biography written by Dr. Danny Beran, the son of the groom and bride. That biography is in the wedding document's file at the Sydney Jewish Museum, https://sjm-web.adlibhosting.com/AIS/Details/museum/1091.

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Figure 2: Ditta and Paul Beran at their wedding in Shanghai. Photo courtesy of Dr. Danny Beran, Sydney.

together with the Fried and Taussig families, established a Viennese coffee shop called "Barcelona" in the French Concession part of the city. However, in 1943 it was forced to relocate to the ghetto.

Paul Beran was born in Vienna on 18 April 1920, the younger of two sons of Richard and Alice Beran. He and his brother arrived in Shanghai in 1939 where Paul managed to find work as a police officer. One afternoon,

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Paul was assigned to provide security at a local soccer game where one of the teams was comprised of patrons of the Barcelona coffee shop. It was there that he met Ditta who was in attendance along with her girlfriends. Their relationship blossomed, and a wedding date was set. The wedding ceremony was held on Sunday, 17 November 1946, and the reception immediately followed at the Barcelona coffee shop in the Shanghai Ghetto.

Participating in the Beran-Frischmann wedding was the renowned cantor Günther Gassenheimer (1913–1981) who had reached Shanghai by ship in 1939.[9] Gassenheimer (far left in the wedding photo) was a prominent figure in the Shanghai Ghetto: he led religious services, taught in local schools, and helped establish the Community of Jewish Cantors. After the war, Gassenheimer sailed to San Francisco arriving in 1947. There he established himself as a rabbi and educator.

Paul and Edith Beran remained in Shanghai only until 31 December 1946 when they boarded the ship Hwa Lien with over three hundred other Jewish passengers (of 523 total) bound for Australia.[10] The ship had been built in New Zealand in 1907 and did not have the standards necessary for transporting such a large number of people. Moreover upon their arrival in Sydney in January 1947, the passengers endured another four weeks aboard because of a strike at the dockyards. Finally they were able to disembark in Newcastle, after a long journey that had begun a decade earlier in Austria.[11] Paul and Edith Beran eventually settled in Sydney and bore two sons, Roger and Danny, who married, raised families, and reside there today.

Text, Transliteration and Translation of the Beran Wedding Document

Over half a century after it was signed, the Beran-Frischmann wedding document was donated by Ditta Beran to the Sydney Jewish Museum on 4 April 2000. It measures 518 mm (width) x 372 mm (height). The document is a secular one written in Chinese as opposed to a religious Jewish wedding contract (*ketubah*) which

9. Sophie Fetthauer, "Günther Gassenheimer," in *Lexicon of Persecuted Musicians of the Nazi Era*, ed. Claudia Maurer Zenck, Peter Petersen, and Sophie Fetthauer (Hamburg: Universität Hamburg, 2017), https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/object/lexm_lexmperson_00006944.

10. Antonia Finnane, *Far from Where?: Jewish Journeys from Shanghai to Australia* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1999), 187–90; Jayne Persian, "'The Dirty Vat': European Migration to Australia from Shanghai," *Australian Historical Studies* 50 (2019): 33.

11. "Hwa Lien Taking Back Hong Kong Evacuees," *The Townsville Daily Bulletin*, April 16, 1947, 2.

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would have been written in Aramaic or Hebrew.

The Beran-Frischmann wedding document has a Chinese revenue stamp in the amount of fifty yuan affixed to it at the top left-hand corner.[12]

Figure 3: Chinese revenue stamp from the Beran-Frischmann *ketubah*. Sydney Jewish Museum Collection.

The presence of revenue stamps indicates that the government had a mechanism to certify weddings, and that Jewish couples were willing to pay for such recognition. From a religious perspective the *ketubah* would suffice to legitimize a marriage.

Appearing just below this stamp is a purple-inked imprint containing the words "Communal Association of Central European Jews – Shanghai" and "Juedische Gemeinde".

This organization (CACEJ) was founded in November 1939 by a more liberal faction of German and Austrian Jews who had emigrated to Shanghai to escape Nazi persecution. It was established to facilitate religious services, education, funeral arrangements and other social affairs inside the ghetto.[13] The Beran-Frischmann wedding was conducted at the CACEJ offices on Tong Shan Road.

12. The official Chinese revenue stamp contains the Chinese wording for "Republic of China Revenue Stamp" (across the top) along with the words "fifty yuan" and the number "50⁰⁰" (bottom right and left corners, respectively). It is one of the 1946 Transportation Series revenue stamps depicting various types of land, sea and air transport. By comparison, the identical Braginsky document dated only two months later has twelve revenue stamps totaling 360 yuan affixed to it. See China Stamp Society – Chang Qing Long Chapter, "Revenue Stamps of China 1896 to 1949," https://web.archive.org/web/20190804131248/https://www.chinastampsociety.org/files/Revenue_Stamps_Dan_Cordwell_OCR.pdf.

13. Guang Pan, *A Study of Jewish Refugees in China (1933–1945): History, Theories and the Chinese Pattern* (Singapore: Springer, 2019), 30–31.

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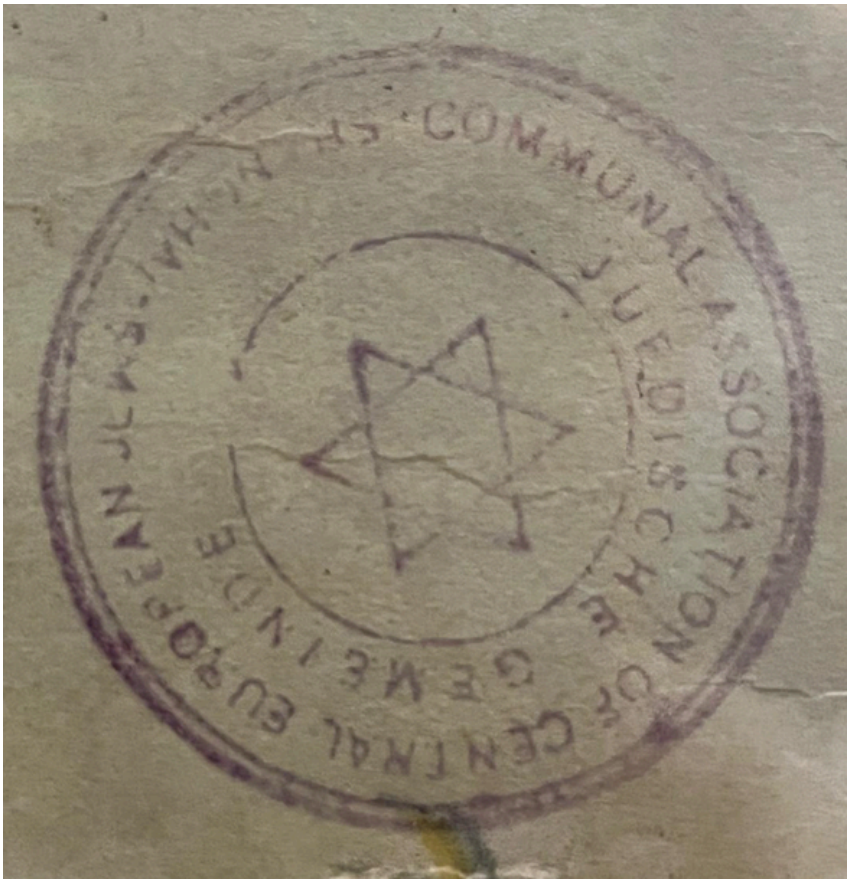

Figure 4: Close-up of imprint of the Communal Association of Central European Jews – Shanghai. Sydney Jewish Museum Collection.

The text of the Beran-Frischmann wedding document consists of eighteen vertical lines written in Chinese and laid out from right to left across the page. It is, in fact, a general template wherein the names and signatures (written in English) of the groom, bride, witness and matchmakers are entered along with the date and address of the ceremony.[14] Its colorful artwork has been commented upon as follows:

> The graceful shape of the document with its border of fantasy birds and dragons as well as the decor of the middle section made of branches, lotus flowers and mandarin ducks belies the harsh reality of the Jews who fled from the German sphere of influence to the "treaty port city" of Shanghai.[15]

The following is the Chinese text of the Beran-Frischmann wedding document accompanied by its transliteration and translation.[16]

14. The identical wedding template with different names inserted is in the Braginsky Collection in Zurich. This latter document was completed at the same street location in Shanghai but dated 12 January 1947, http://www.e-codices.ch/en/list/one/bc/k-0114.
15. Emile Schrijver and Falk Wiesemann, eds., *Schöne Seiten: Jüdische Schriftkultur aus der Braginsky Collection* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2011), 228–29. Translation by the authors.
16. To the authors' knowledge, this is the only complete translation ever written of a Chinese wedding document.

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波而皮倫五 係 奧國 [空]省 [空] 縣 人
PAUL BERAN XI AO GUO [KONG] XING [KONG] XIAN REN
Paul Beran is from Austria, Province [blank], County [blank]

歲 一九二零年四月十八日 [空] 時生
SUI YI JIU ER LING NIAN SI YUE SHI BA RI [BLANK] SHI SHENG
Born 1920, fourth month, eighteenth day [blank] Time

愛迪脫狄太弗立許 門五 係 奧國 [空]省 [空]縣 人
EDITH DITTA BERAN XI AO GUO [KONG] XING [KONG]XIAN REN
Edith Ditta Beran née Frischmann is from Austria, Province [blank], County [blank]

歲 一九二五年三月十九日 [空] 時生
SUI YI JIU ER WU NIAN SAN YUE SHI JIU RI [BLANK] SHI SHENG
Born 1925, third month, nineteenth day [blank] Time

今由
JIN YOU
Today from

維克土套雪克
MR. VICTOR TAUSSIG
先生介紹 謹詹於
漢五子雪懷志 *JIE ZHAO JIN ZHAN YU*
MR. HANS SCHWARZ
Sincerely on

中華民國三十五年十一月十七日上午九時三刻
ZHONG HUA MING GUO SAN SHI WU NIAN SHI YI YUE SHI QI RI SHANG WU JIU SHI SAN KE
The thirty-fifth year of the Republic of China, eleventh month, seventeenth day[17] at three quarters past 9 a.m.[18]

在上海唐山路 四一六弄 二十二號猶 太總會
ZAI SHANGHAI TANG SHAN LU SI SHI LIU NONG ER

17. This corresponds to Sunday, November 17, 1946 of the Gregorian calendar. Endymion Porter Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 184–85.
18. The time of day is important here: the Jewish day begins at sundown, and there would be a potential for confusion about the precise date of the wedding in the Jewish calendar. The corresponding date in the Jewish calendar is 23 Cheshvan 5707; that is the date that would have been written in a traditional Jewish wedding contract (*ketubah*).

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SHI ER HAO YOUTAI ZONG HUI
At Shanghai, Tong Shan Road, Lane 416, Number 22, in the Jewish quarter

舉行結婚典禮恭請
JU XING JIE HUN DIAN LI GONG QING
The wedding ceremony was held, respectfully inviting

龍石夫先弗先生證婚兩姓聯姻一堂締約良
緣永結
JOSEF SCHAEFER XIAN SHENG ZHENG HUN LIAN XING LIAN YIN YI TANG DI YUE LIANG YUAN YONG JIE
Josef Schaefer to witness the wedding ceremony. Two family names were joined, the marriage contract was signed in a grand room, a fine and predestined union to last forever

匹配同稱看此日桃花灼灼宜室宜家卜
PI PEI TONG CHENG KAN CI RI TAO HUA ZHUO ZHUO YI SHI YI JIA BU
Well-matched, looking today at peach blossoms, bright and luminous, building a harmonious family, predicting[19]

他年瓜瓞綿綿爾昌爾熾謹以白頭之約
TA NIAN GUA DIE MIAN MIAN ER CHANG ER CHI JIN YI BAI TOU ZHI YUE
Future years, like plentiful melons, there will be many children and grandchildren, becoming prosperous and successful, a solemn agreement to last until all hair turns grey

書向鴻箋好將紅葉之盟戴明鴛譜此證
SHU XIANG HONG JIAN HAO JIANG HONG YE ZHI MENG DAI MING YUAN PU CI ZHENG
This document is written on grand, red marriage license paper like poems documented on mandarin duck records

19. Portions of this and the following line can be found in the classic Shijing 诗經 book of poetry. See Jia Sheng Li, ed., 诗经: 全译全评 [*The Classic of Poetry: Complete Translation and Commentary*] (Beijing: Shang Wu Printing International Company Limited, 2019), 9–10, 411–13; Xiao Ou Yao, ed., 诗經: 必'读，一百首 [*The Classic of Poetry: Must Read; One Hundred Poems*] (Hong Kong: Shang Wu Printing International Company Limited, 2016), 8.

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Paul Beran + signature of Paul Beran
結婚人 波而皮 倫五
JIE HUN REN /
People getting married
\
愛迪脫狄太弗立許 門五
Edith (Ditta) Beran née Frischmann + signature of
Edith (Ditta) Beran née Frischmann

證婚人
ZHENG HUN REN 龍石夫先弗律师
Witness[20] Dr. Joseph Schaefer + signature of Josef Schaefer

Victor Taussig + signature of Victor Taussig
介紹人 維克土套雪克
JIE SHAO REN
/
People who introduced them[21]
\
漢五子雪懷志
Hans Schwarz + signature of Hans Schwarz

主婚人
ZHU HUN REN
Officiator [blank]

中華民國三十五年十一月十七日 謹訂
ZHONG HUA MING GUO SAN SHI WU NIAN SHI YI YUE SHI QI RI JIN DING
In the thirty-fifth year of the Republic of China, eleventh month, seventeenth day, solemnly recorded[22]

Some Final Thoughts

The Shanghai Ghetto is arguably the most prosperous of any exilic period in Jewish history (cf. Assyria 722 BCE, Babylonia 538 BCE, England, 1290, France 1306, Spain 1492). Immigrants who had made the tortuous 10,000-kilometer journey from Europe to Shanghai with few

20. Josef Schaefer is designated as the "witness" for the wedding ceremony, and his signature appears here in attestation. A traditional Jewish wedding document (*ketubah*) would require the signatures of two witnesses. Dr. Schaefer may also have officiated at the ceremony. However, the entry (below) for "officiator" has been left blank.
21. It is noteworthy that the two men who introduced the groom and bride (along with their signatures) are recognized here. Such identifications would not be present in a traditional Jewish wedding document (*ketubah*).
22. See footnote 17 above.

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personal resources were able to establish businesses, schools, hospitals and communal organizations while crowded into a tiny Chinese enclave. The Beran-Frischmann wedding document epitomizes this prosperity. Within the Shanghai Ghetto, the sombreness of Lamentations was replaced by the celebration of the groom and bride. This growth and success are reminders of the will of those Jews who struggled to escape Nazi tyranny and persecution.

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Author Biographies

David Horowitz holds a doctoral degree in mathematics and a master's degree in history of science. He taught mathematics at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California for over thirty years. Since retiring, he has been studying the early work of eighteenth-century Scottish mathematician Colin MacLaurin. David and Kwok met each other and began working on this article while they were on a round-the-world cruise that visited Sydney. When David is not at sea, he resides in Las Vegas with his son and their three Japanese chin.

Kwok-Kam Yeung was born in Hong Kong in 1949. He attended colleges in the United States and earned a Ph.D. in biochemistry. Most of Dr. Yeung's career was with Bayer Corporation, where he retired as vice president of research and development and chief scientific officer. Dr. Yeung's expertise was in the development of diagnostic tests for cancer and diabetes. He also had a second career working at Idexx Laboratories, where he built diagnostic tests for food and animal safety. Dr. Yeung was responsible for several inventions that resulted in patents and has published many articles in scientific journals. He served as the president of the North America Chinese Clinical Chemists Association in 2002. In his retirement, Dr. Yeung resides in Maine, USA and volunteers tutoring students in mathematics and sciences at Portland Adult Education.

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