

In ancient China, civil servants were chosen by an exacting exam system that allowed even the poorest scholars a chance at fame and glory. At the Shandong Qingzhou Museum, a scroll tells that story. Wang Qian and Ju Chuanjiang report.

# WINNING PAPER

This was an examination paper — one submitted more than 400 years ago by a candidate in the imperial examinations, the *keju*, a system that has served the Chinese dynastic courts well for at least 13 centuries.

Remarkably, it is still in fine condition, and the print is as clear as the day it was written, when Zhao Bingzhong sat for the final test in the presence of the emperor himself in 1598.

Zhao became the top scholar that year, at 25, and won the title of *zhuangyuan* (狀元). He was appointed minister of rites, which translates to minister of culture or education in today's terms.

There have only been 777 top scholars chosen from the imperial examinations since they were inaugurated, from the thousands who had been gradually short-listed from local to regional to provincial levels.

This system of recruiting the top talents from the country lasted more than 1,300 years from its founding during the Sui Dynasty (AD 581-618) to its abolition in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

It was open to people of all ages and held every three years.

The qualifying rounds were at three levels, with provincial, national and Palace examinations. Only those who passed all the lower levels were eligible to sit before the emperor for the final and deciding test.

Every successful candidate would get an official post, and the top scorer would be granted the title of *zhuangyuan*, and endowed with rank and wealth.

Often, if the scholar was still single, the emperor would marry one of his princesses to the eligible bachelor.

At the Qingzhou Museum in Shandong province, Zhao Bingzhong's winning paper is one of the museum's most prominent exhibits.

"The paper is arguably the only *zhuangyuan* paper from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) or before that

has been discovered in China. Only a few from the later Qing Dynasty had been collected at the Taipei Palace Museum," says Wang Ruixia, the deputy curator of the Qingzhou Museum.

"It was rated a first-class national treasure by experts of the Palace Museum in Beijing, as it provides unique and precious records of the Chinese imperial exam system and our cultural heritage."

The paper, set in an accordion-fold book, is protected by an exquisite cover of damask silk.

Made from three layers of rice paper, the book is about 330 centimeters long and 38 cm wide when fully extended.

The first part, a brief introduction of the candidate and the three generations of his family, is sealed to prevent tampering and fraud.

The main body contains 90 vertical rows and 2,460 words written in *xiao-kai* (small script), the scholar's dissertation, a profound and philosophical discourse on outdated management strategy and current affairs.

It was executed in superb brushwork without any spelling mistakes or modification.

Zhao's paper captured the emperor's attention and admiration, and he marked "the best of best" in red ink on the paper, thus confirming the top scholar's destiny.

The winning papers were normally kept closely guarded in imperial courts, as state secrets, and anyone who moved them without permission could be punished by death.

Nearly all were destroyed or lost as a result of dynastic changes, war or turbulence, and there are many versions on why Zhang's paper managed to survive.

Some experts believe that Zhang stole his paper from the palace when he was minister of rites in charge of the imperial examinations, so his descendants would have a record of his glory days.

Another story says Zhao suffered persecution in the whirlwind of court politics.

Depressed, he tried to steal his paper and asked to leave his post for fear that he would be trapped by his political enemies because of the ideas he had expressed.

Zhao's descendants did not let him down. They carefully kept his exami-

nation paper for nearly 400 years until Zhao Huanbin, his 13th-generation descendant, donated it to the Qingzhou Museum in 1983.

"I used to hide it in my pillow and never show it to anybody," Zhao Huanbin recalled. Eight years later, it was nearly lost again.

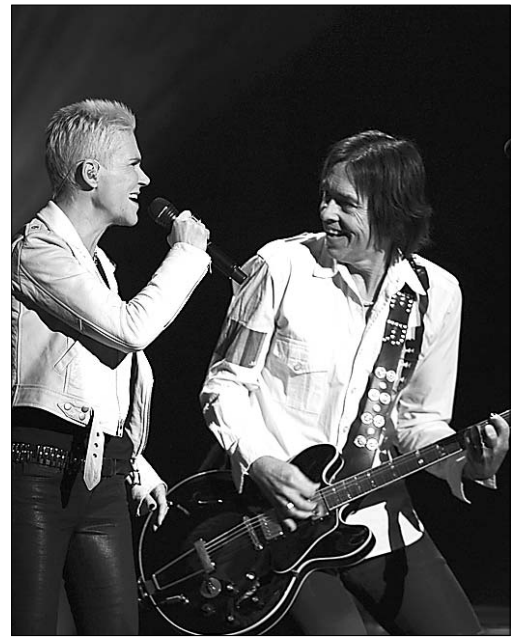
In 1991, a security guard named Lin Chuntao who worked in the museum managed to steal the paper and tried to sell it to an antiques dealer for 1.5 million yuan (\$236,400).

Fortunately, Lin was caught before the deal was made. Since then, the paper has been kept in vaults and seldom displayed.

You may contact the writers at [sundayed@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:sundayed@chinadaily.com.cn).

## IF YOU GO

QINGZHOU MUSEUM  
9 am-4 pm  
1 Fangongting Xilu, Qingzhou,  
Shandong province  
0536-3266-219  
Free admission



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Marie Fredriksson and Per Gessle sing love ballads and folk-rock hits familiar to their Beijing fans.

# SWEDISH EVERGREENS

By CHEN NAN  
[chennan@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:chennan@chinadaily.com.cn)

Old pop formulas never die. Roxette, the Swedish band that made its China debut 17 years ago, is proof positive. It recently returned to the capital and captivated another sell-out crowd of 8,000 at the Mastercard Center in Beijing.

Marie Fredriksson and singer-guitarist Per Gessle sang love ballads and folk rock as guitar-driven beats powered the two-hour show.

They played nearly all of their hits from the 1980s, including *Perfect Day*, *Dressed for Success*, *Listen to Your Heart* and *It Must Have Been Love*.

The audience, most of whom were over 35, sang along and danced — a rare sight in China. Roxette fans had obviously not forgotten their favorite tracks and each song was a chance for the crowd to relive their loyalty.

Fredriksson, known for the characteristic sob in her voice, wore a boyish blond hairdo and skin-tight costumes. At 54, she

still sounded gutsy and robust in her energetic renditions of the golden tunes.

Gessle, who plays rhythm guitar and wrote the lyrics and most of the music, went off-stage to leave Fredriksson alone on stage for *Perfect Day*.

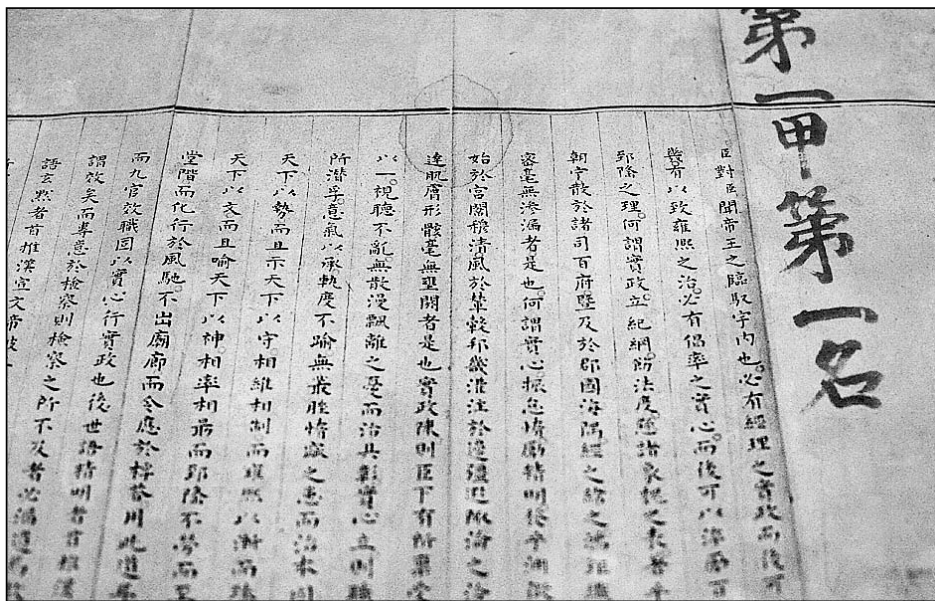
*How Do You Do* had half the audience members on their feet and singing along. The excitement continued for the next song, *Dangerous*.

"We had songs from 25 years ago. It's crazy, isn't it," Gessle says.

The duo's performance, with such spot-on pitch on the end notes, left the audience gasping in admiration.

When Fredriksson sang, "Hello, you fool, I love you; c'mon join the joyride," her voice carried the certainty that everyone would be up on their feet.

"We can't leave you without this one," Gessle said, and launched into one of their most famous hits, *Listen to Your Heart*, bringing the fun-filled evening to an end.



The Ming Dynasty scholar's scroll is still very well-kept and in fine condition.

JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

## cityguide

# TRIBUTE TO THE JEWS

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai  
[zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn)

*North Bank Suzhou Creek* tells the story of thousands of Jewish refugees finding shelter in Shanghai during World War II, and this original musical production will premiere at the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum on March 22.

From 1933 to 1941, the city received more than 40,000 Jewish refugees, mainly because it was an open port that did not require a visa for entry. These Jews made Shanghai their home, established businesses, got educated and fell in love here.

"The play is fictional, but there are many true stories behind it," says Han Yi, from the museum.

An exhibition in Haifa, Israel is also telling the stories of Jewish life in Shanghai till the end of March, and the Shanghai museum plans to put on an exhibition in April in collaboration with a history museum from Auschwitz. It will be at a venue that is a simulation of a real Jewish shop in Hongkew Ghetto.

*North Bank Suzhou Creek* draws heavily from the memoirs of Fred Antman, *A Tale of Three Cities*. Antman, now 82 years old and grandfather of six, has been president of the Elwood Talmud Torah Hebrew Congregation for 24 years. He decided to record his life story from Berlin to Shanghai and then to Melbourne, Australia.

In August 2011, Antman and his wife, Eva, came back to Shanghai for the first time after they left in 1946, and he presented his memoir to the museum.

The museum itself is on the site of an old synagogue on Ward Road, where the Jewish population worshipped after they were forced to move into the Hongkew Ghetto during the War of



## IF YOU GO

SHANGHAI JEWISH REFUGEES MUSEUM

9 am-5 pm  
62 Changyang Lu, Shanghai,  
near junction of Zhoushan Lu  
Nearest Metro station: Dalian Lu  
Station, Metro line 4  
021-6512-6669

Resistance Against Japanese Aggregation (1937-45).

Antman arrived in Shanghai with his parents and brother from Berlin in 1939, refugees from the massacre in Germany. He was just a boy of 9. Here, he went to school, served as the captain of the school football team, and met the love of his life, Eva.

The Antmans were originally from Poland, and Fred's father, Samuel, and his brother were sent to Berlin by their parents to protect them from conscription to fight in World War I. When Fred was born in 1930, Samuel was running a tailor's shop in Berlin, making garments for women.

The family's peaceful life was shattered when Samuel was taken away by the Gestapo. As a boy of 8, Fred

witnessed the "Kristallnacht" from the third-floor apartment window, when stained-glass windows were smashed and Torah scrolls thrown into the streets.

It was his mother Erna who saved them, Antman recalled.

"My mother clearly realized that amid all this Nazi violence and madness there was no future for Jews in German," Antman wrote in the memoir. "She rushed to a travel agent, and learned that there were only two places that did not require entry visas: one was La Paz in Bolivia and the other was Shanghai, China."

Erna Antman booked the last four tickets for Shanghai. The Antman family soon settled in the new home city, and Samuel served as the cantor for the synagogue.

In 1941, after the Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the Ghetto was established in Hongkew area, where no Jew could leave without permission. It was in Hongkew that Fred met Eva Teicher, who had fled Berlin to Shanghai two months before the Antmans.

Eva was two years younger than Fred, and a naturally happy girl, but the horror of war still haunts her. And in 1946, Fred and Eva had to part after World War II, as the two families decided to leave Shanghai, the Antmans to Australia, and the Teichers to the United States.

"Three times in his life, my father had to start his business from scratch," Fred Antman says, "In Berlin, then Shanghai, and again, Melbourne, after the war."

Samuel worked hard, with the help of Fred, to build Antman of Melbourne into an award-winning garment brand available in major department stores in the country. To Fred's great joy, Eva and her family moved to Australia, and they got married in 1953.

## BEIJING Wagner's opera

As the opening act of the National Center for the Performing Arts Opera Festival 2012, Wagner's opera *Der Fliegende Holländer* will charm the Beijing audience. The opera represents the beginning of Wagner's artistic maturity. This NCPA production of Wagner will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the artist's birth in 2013. The opera tells a story of a doomed seaman from the Netherlands arriving ashore with a ghost ship. The curse on him is to be unlocked only by true love. Top artists worldwide are gathered in the show, together with a stage designed to produce a 3-D effect.

7:30 pm, April 3-8. Opera House, National Center for the Performing Arts, east of Tiananmen Square, 010-6655-0000

## Cuban Swan Lake

The Ballet Nacional de Cuba presents *Swan Lake* to launch the 12th Meet in Beijing Arts Festival. The troupe's prima ballerina and founder Alicia Alonso stages her new version of the three-act ballet. Her dance combines academic technique and the personification of a woman/swan in dance, and is influenced by Cuban folk dance. The plot includes transformations, magic spells and monstrous curses, as well as the power of love.

7:30 pm, April 28-May 1. Opera House, National Center for the Performing Arts, east of Tiananmen Square, 010-6655-0000

## New Realities

Russian-born artist Julia Winter is bringing a Russian touch of the contemporary arts with her exhibition *Present past*.

Winter applies installations, paintings, and photographic assemblages to interpret her understanding of time, especially in the context of Russian reality. Her themes vary from political issues to portraits and cityscapes. She even playfully uses old photographs that are covered with objects or other layers of images of our time to visualize new realities.

10 am-5 pm, until April 22. Other Gallery, 1 Beijing Space, North 3rd Street 766, 798 Art District, Chaoyang district. 010-6431-9684

## SHANGHAI Russian and Swiss

Russian violinist Viktoria Mullova will perform with the Sinfoniorchester Basel in Shanghai. Born in 1959, Mullova is known for her performances and recordings of classic works and her innovative interpretations of popular and jazz compositions. SOB is one of the Switzerland's three major symphony orchestras, and the program includes Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Symphony No 7.

7:30 pm, April 7. Shanghai Oriental Art Center, 425 Dingxiang Lu. 021-6854-1234

## Yunnan funky bird

*Sparrow God Funky Bird* is a slang phrase from Yunnan province. It is used to describe someone who is eccentric in temperament, and treats ordinary things in an extraordinary, odd or peculiar way.

As the title for this exhibition, *Strange Birds* is intended to illustrate the continual impact of Yunnan and Ye Yongqing's unique spiritual perspective on life.

Ye has spent most of the past 10 years painting flowers and birds. But his true focus is on expressing his impressions on the ambiguity between contemporary and Chinese art.

10 am-6:30 pm, until March 31. Longmen Art Project, 23 Sinan Mansions, 515 Fuxing Zhonglu. 021-6472-2838

## HONG KONG Celluloid dreams

Movie buffs are treated to the best of world cinema over 16 days when the 36th Hong Kong International Film Festival returns. Along with star-studded gala premieres, film competitions, documentaries and tributes, the Jockey Club Cine Academy offers a retrospective of Hong Kong filmmaker Peter Chan Ho-sun's movies and a master class with Matrix leading man Keanu Reeves as he presents his documentary *Side by Side*.

This year's opening film is the world premiere of Pang Ho-cheung's *Love in the Buff*, starring Miriam Yeung and Shawn Yue and a fitting sequel to his 2010 *Love in a Puff*.

March 21-April 5. Various venues. Schedule and ticket booking [www.hkiff.org.hk](http://www.hkiff.org.hk)

## Identity crisis



Greek mythology has long been a ripe source for drama, and Jean Racine's 17th-century play *Phedre* examines the legend of a wife's forbidden desire for her husband Theseus' son. The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts' production of *I Am Phedre* is a one-woman show starring master-in-acting student Ophelia Ho as a modern Phedre struggling with her own inner demons. Through her interpretation of the tragic Greek heroine, she deals with contemporary issues of love, family and social responsibility in ways that will resonate with today's audience.

8 pm, March 23, 24; 3 pm, March 24. Fringe Studio, Hong Kong Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Road, Central. 852-2521-7251

## MACAO Green thumbs

Macao goes green this week and you can be a part of the fun. Organized by the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau, the city's Green Week Carnival is themed Green City, Ideal Home and includes a fair held throughout the week at Tap Seac Square. Check out new books and ideas on gardening while stopping to smell the roses and other flowers in colorful displays exhibited. Ending the week is a Green Week Walk and Tree Planting at Seac Pai Van Park. Enjoy a stroll through subtropical forests and do a little digging to personally help keep Macao green.

*Green Tree Walk and Tree Planting*: 10 am, March 25. Seac Pai Van Park, Estrada de Seac Pai Van, Coloane. 853-2888-0087