

## News from under the Southern Cross- Edition 47.

### *Persona Non Grata* film screening

21 December

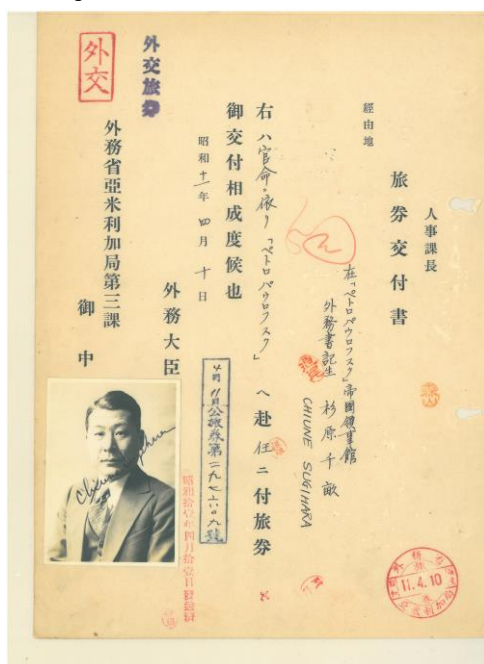
On 2 December in Canberra, I attended a screening of the film *Persona Non Grata*. The film was about a Japanese diplomat, SUGIHARA Chiune. In this issue I would like to talk about this screening.

#### 1. “Visas for Life”

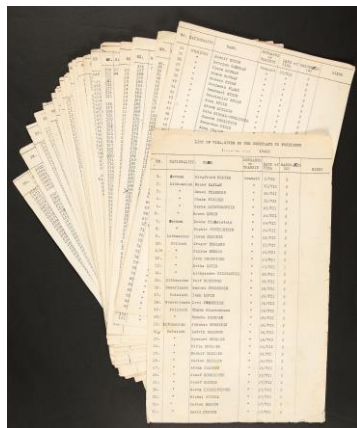
As many people in Japan will already know, SUGIHARA Chiune was a Japanese diplomat. He is one of my distant predecessors in the Japanese foreign service. He was appointed to the position of Consul in Lithuania as the horrors of the Second World War swept across Europe. He issued Japanese transit visas to Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution.

Thanks to his actions, thousands of Jews were able to escape through Japan to safe places such as the United States and Australia and these visas issued by SUGIHARA Chiune became known as “Visas for Life”. It is said that there are now as many as 100,000 descendants of those who were saved by SUGIHARA's actions.

In recognition of his remarkable humanitarian acts, SUGIHARA was officially designated as Righteous Among the Nations in 1985 by the Israeli government, making him the only Japanese person to have received this commendation.



SUGIHARA Chiune's Diplomatic Passport Issuance Certificate



SUGIHARA's Visa Issuance List



SUGIHARA Chiune

※Provided by Diplomatic Archives of  
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

The film, which was produced in 2015, starred the acclaimed Japanese actors KARASAWA Toshiaki and Koyuki as SUGIHARA Chiune and his wife. Much of *Persona Non Grata* was filmed over a two-month period in various locations in Poland, a neighbor of Lithuania. With elegant architecture, beautiful streets and rural landscapes, this film is bursting with charm.



KARASAWA Toshiaki and Koyuki in a ball scene as Mr and Mrs SUGIHARA

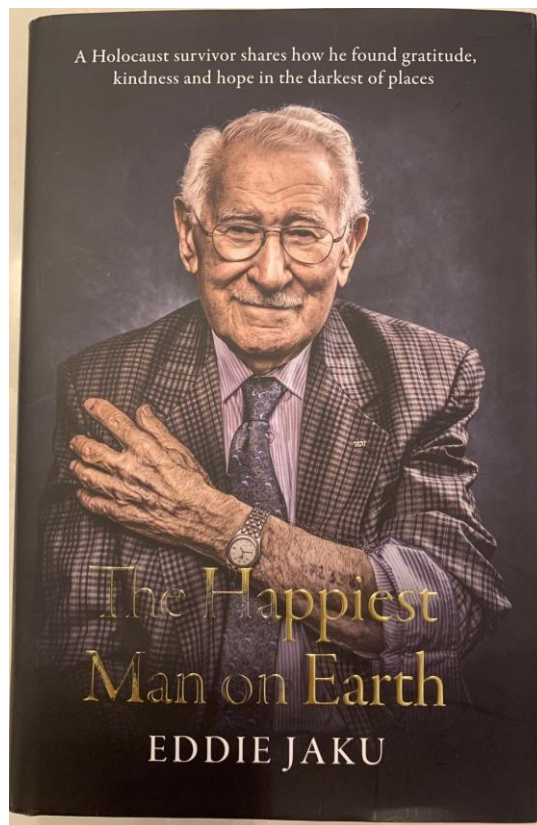


Right: Polish actor Borys Szyc

### 3. Why show a movie about SUGIHARA in Australia?

Some readers may wonder why I introduced this film in Australia. In fact, there is a fair number of people who escaped the Holocaust and fled to Australia from Poland and other places in Europe.

While I was having a discussion with Federal Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, I discovered that his parents also went through similar experiences. The Treasurer presented me with the autobiography of Eddie Jaku, *The Happiest Man on Earth* in which he talks about living a new life to the fullest after escaping to Australia. The book draws the reader in and makes them keep reading all the way through. It made a strong impression on me.



Eddie Jaku's *The Happiest Man on Earth*

I understand that the Governor of Victoria, the Honourable Linda Dessau AC, as well as Mr and Mrs John and Pauline Gandel, whom I talked about in *News From Under the Southern Cross* (Edition 45): *Business Trip to Melbourne*, are descendants of Polish Jews.

In Australia, where mateship is highly valued, the reaction to people arriving after escaping persecution and tyranny, and choosing Australia as their safe haven, was to kindly accept them into society.

#### 4. Polish Ambassador Kołodziejcki's Initiative

My friend, Ambassador Michał Kołodziejcki made this film screening possible. The Ambassador and his wife, Barbara are both very knowledgeable of Japan, having both studied at Kanazawa University. Additionally, our residences are fairly close, so we also get along well with each other as neighbours.

I was very happy to receive the proposition of a joint film screening of *Persona Non Grata* from Michał. Unfortunately the Japanese embassy building, approaching 60 years since it was built, does not have a hall fit for screening a film. Therefore, the Japanese embassy supplied the film,

and Polish embassy supplied the venue and served even some delicious refreshments, including Polish dumplings. We had reached the stage where a joint screening was possible, but it was postponed a few times because of COVID-19 concerns. However, with the easing of lockdown restrictions, we were able to hold the screening at last.

This was a productive collaboration between Japan and Poland despite its difficulties, and it was the fruit of the efforts of staff from both embassies.



At the screening (Centre left: Ambassador and Mrs Kołodziejski, Centre Right: Matthew Mason-Cox, President of the Legislative Council of NSW and his wife)

#### 5. Contributors other than SUGIHARA

For those of you who already know the history this will be preaching to the choir, but SUGIHARA was not the only Japanese person to contribute to aiding Jews at this time.

An example of one such person is Lieutenant General HIGUCHI Kiichiro who was the commander of the Harbin Special Branch. He is known for helping Jewish refugees from Europe who reached the border of Manchuria, by allowing them to transit across Manchuria to a safe destination via what came to be known as the “Higuchi Route”.

I took the opportunity to reference these events in my speech at the film screening. (The speech transcript can be viewed [here](#).)

#### 6. Responses

There is a scene in the film where SUGIHARA's child offers some bread to a Jewish child who is waiting outside the fence of the Japanese embassy all night with her mother desperately



hoping for visas. People like me with overactive tear glands were thoroughly undone at this point. Judging from the sounds I heard and of the way other guests were moving, I was not alone in this reaction.

After the screening, people came to me and said: “It was amazing”, “We hadn’t heard this story before”, and “I understood an aspect of history from a Japanese point of view”. It was an evening that reminded me of the powerful role that films can play.

### 7. Japanese Film Festival

There are many Japanese film fans in Canberra. In fact, on the occasion of the annual Japanese Film Festival, which was held recently this year, a number of people asked me how they can get tickets. Sadly, the Festival had to be reduced in scale considerably due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, the Royal Norwegian Embassy screened a film about Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, to a favourable reception. To my surprise and delight, the British High Commission showed the latest 007 film. The dress code was “black tie (the same as James Bond) or a villain costume.” How stylish. Such is Canberra, soft power of many countries is blossoming like hundreds of flowers!



At the film screening of 007 hosted by British High Commission (Far Left: German Ambassador Thomas Fitschen, Centre: High Commissioner Vicki Treadell, to her right the German Ambassador’s wife, Dr Ilona Stölken)

Next year, I want quality Japanese films to entertain the people of Canberra. The embassy will do all we can to make that happen.



The Japanese Film Festival hosted by Japan Foundation in Sydney.

Next year I would like to see the same scene in Canberra!

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