

DOCUMENTS RELATED TO *VISAS FOR LIFE* AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CHIUNE SUGIHARA



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SUMMARY. This article addresses several questions. First of all, the Japanese committee of the UNESCO applied documents held in Yaotsu Town, Gifu Prefecture, concerning historical facts how Sugihara rescued Jews from the Holocaust in Lithuania during WWII, as a candidate of the Memory of the World Resister in 2017 – UNESCO. Later, it presents the reasons, due to which the memory about Sugihara's activities in Kaunas in the summer of 1940 was enhanced in Japan, and quite a lot of attention was given to the analysis of historiography on Sugihara. The main trigger was his wife Yukiko's memoirs provided in her book entitled *Visas for Life*, based on Chiune Sugihara's own hand written, unpublished memoirs. Later, other books followed, such as Hillel Levine's *In Search for Sugihara*, and others. There is no doubt that Sugihara issued visas on a large scale in Kaunas, but the exact number of persons rescued is still unknown and disputable. In Sugihara's own report to Japanese government dated February 28, 1941 it is said that in Kaunas 2,139 visas were issued. But usually the number 6,000 denoting the number of persons saved by Sugihara is given. However, some new researches about Sugihara have already appeared in Europe and Russia. The article presents different historiographical considerations about people saved by Sugihara. Finally, summing up the discussed material, it is very important to discover and examine documents of Immigration Office in Tsuruga and reports on registration of refugees in Kobe.

KEYWORDS: Chiune Sugihara, Jewish refugees, UNESCO Memory of the World, historiography on Sugihara.

1. DOCUMENTS RELATED TO *VISAS FOR LIFE* AS A CANDIDATE OF THE UNESCO MEMORY OF THE WORLD: INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Committee of the UNESCO decided to inscribe documents related to *Visas for Life* held in Yaotsu Town, Gifu Prefecture, as a candidate of the Memory of the World Resister in 2017 – UNESCO, on 24 September 2015.¹ Chiune Sugihara, Japanese consul to Kaunas, Lithuania, issued the transit visas to Jewish

¹ “Sekaishitekini mite juyo: Inochino biza, Ueno sanpai, sekai kioku isanno kokunai kohō sentei”, *Asahi Shimbun* on 25.09.2015.

refugees in 1940 and it is said that he rescued almost 6,000 Jews from the Holocaust.

Sugihara's rescue story is acclaimed in Japan. Sugihara attracted the Japanese attention when his wife Yukiko published her memoir book in 1990 on her husband's life and his activities, and the story was introduced in a TV program on 18 December 1992.² Thereafter, some books and translations concerning Sugihara were published, several TV programs were made, and even the film *Sugihara Chiune*, telling the story of the visa issuance in Kaunas, was produced in Japan.³ The *Jindono oka* (Hill of Humanity) Park and the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall were founded in order to honour Sugihara publicly in Yaotsu Town, his birth place. The *Jindono minato* (Port of Humanity) Tsuruga Museum was also established in Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture, where the Jews, who had got the visas from Sugihara in Kaunas and took passenger liners at Vladivostok, landed in 1940–1941.

In this article, I provide a list of documents related to *Visas for Life*, which were applied to the Memory of the World, and historiography of Sugihara in Japan.

2. THE CONTENTS OF DOCUMENTS RELATED TO *VISAS FOR LIFE*

The documents related to *Visas for Life*, which were applied to the Memory of the World Resister in 2017 – UNESCO, are classified into five groups.

- a) 12 Telegrams from the correspondence between Kaunas and Tokyo from 23 July to 6 September 1940.

Sugihara asked Yosuke Matsuoka, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to issue Japanese transit visas to the Jewish refugees in July 1940. In its many replies the Foreign Ministry advised Sugihara not to go against the principle of the Rule of Transit Visas. The rule established by the Japanese government required that visas should be issued only to those who had gone through appropriate immigration procedures

² Sugihara Y. *6000 ninno inochino biza: Hitorino nihonjin gaikokanga yudayajinwo sukutta*, Tokyo: Asahi sonoroma, 1990. The TV Fuji's fortieth anniversary program, *Inochino biza* on 18.12.1992.

³ For example, Levin H. *In search of Sugihara: the elusive Japanese diplomat who risked his life to rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust*. New York: Free Press, 1996. translated into Japanese by Suwa Sumio and Shino Teruhisa. Tokyo: Shimizu shoin, 1998. Sugihara S. *Sugihara Chiuneto Nippon gaimusho*, Tokyo: Taisho shuppan, 1999. Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. *Historia stosunków polsko-japońskich: 1904–1945*, Wydawn. Bellona, 1996. Translated into Japanese by Shiba Riko. Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2009. Shiraishi M. *Chohono tensai Sugihara Chiune*, Tokyo: Shincho sensho, 2012. Yomiuri TV drama special, *6000 ninno inochino biza: Nipponno Schindler Sugihara Chiune monogatari* on 08.12.2005. *Persona non grata*, Toho movies film released in December 2015.

and had enough funds for travel and accommodation. It was written in the Yuki-ko's memoir that Sugihara regarded the responses from Tokyo as a refusal of issuing the visas and decided to issue the visas to the refugees by himself against the Ministry's answers, which, to his mind, did not meet the humanitarian perspective.

b) Sugihara's List of Visas, issued in the summer of 1940

Tokyo asked Sugihara on 4 February 1941 to submit the number of transit visas that had been issued in Kaunas in summer 1940, since many refugees holding Sugihara's visa came to Vladivostok in the autumn and winter 1940 and requested the entry into Japan. But the Japanese Government had never permitted him to issue so many visas to the refugees.

Sugihara, being a consul in Prague, sent a list of the visas (31 pages) to Tokyo on 28 February 1941 and reported that 2,139 visas were issued for the refugees (Lithuanians and Poles, including 1,500 Jews), who came to the front of the Japanese consulate in Kaunas in July and August in 1940.

c) Original *Visas for Life* and their copies

There is only one original passport with Japanese transit visa in Yaotsu Town, Japan. Alexander Hahtka, a Polish Jew, came from Kaunas to Tsuruga via the USSR with his wife Ola and daughter Sylwia Marie. His wife's and daughter's photos were inserted into his passport, which provided the possibility to certify not only the holder's but also his family members' identity and citizenship. The wife and the daughter did not need to hold their own passports. They went from Japan via the USA and later to Canada. Sugihara's List, however, contains only Alexander's name. It was regarded that three persons had been rescued by only one Sugihara's visa. Due to the extension, the number of Jews rescued by Sugihara reached 6,000, which was almost three times bigger than the number showed on the list. 13 non-original (photo copied) passports with Japanese transit visas were also applied to the UNESCO.

There are 32 Safe-Conducts (non-original) issued in Lithuania in 1939–1940 with Sugihara's visa. Many Jews, who escaped from Poland to Lithuania, did not hold their own passports. After the Lithuanian government accepted them as refugees, it had to issue each of them an identification document, the so called "Safe-Conduct" in order to certify their identity and citizenship and to entitle them travelling under its protection to and from foreign countries. Part of them were issued by the Lithuanian authority, but the others were produced by the embassy of Poland in Kaunas or, later, the consulate of Britain in the Lithuanian capital, which was an acting representative of the Polish government in exile. Some of the documents were necessary to certify the holder's and his family's identity and citizenship.

d) *Yudayajin 4,700 ninwo sukutta Sugihara ryojino ketsudan*

It is a handwritten memoir “Vice-Consul Sugihara’s Decision of Rescuing 4,700 Jews” (49 pages), written by Chiune Sugihara himself after 1983. Yukiko’s memoir was based on her husband’s memoir. Currently, there is a rumour that this memoir could have been corrupted in the 1990s.

e) A List of Foreigners entering into Fukui in October 1940, submitted by Fukui Prefecture to the American Division, Foreign Ministry, dated on 20 November 1940

The Fukui Prefecture informed to the Foreign Ministry that 308 foreigners had landed on Tsuruga in October 1940. Most of them were Jewish refugees with Sugihara’s visa. However, there is no list of refugees that arrived on the other months in 1940 and 1941. It is rather difficult to verify the number of refugees that had entered Japan at the beginning of the Second World War only on the basis of Japanese archival documents.

Yaotsu Town and the Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall are preparing to present the above documents to the public, for example, by placing them on the web or the Facebook in future.

3. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CHIUNE SUGIHARA

Before the publication of Yukiko’s memoir in 1990, almost no one in Japan knew Chiune Sugihara’s rescue story. Therefore, after it emerged into the light of the day, it was amazing that a Japanese diplomat had rescued thousands of Jews from the Holocaust, though Japan was the main participant in the group of Axis Powers. However, there were some doubts about the descriptions provided in Yukiko’s book as the memoir had not been written by herself, but by a ghostwriter. Even though many of the publications, TV programs and movies in Japan were based on her memoir without any academic criticism.

a) The Number of Jews rescued by Sugihara

It is interpreted by the title of Yukiko’s memoir that Chiune Sugihara rescued 6,000 Jews from the Holocaust. He reported in his List of Visas that 2,139 transit visas had been issued at the Japanese consulate in Kaunas in July and August 1940. The number of the rescued could be explained as follows: By a passport or safe-conduct not only its holder’s, but also his wife’s and children’s identity, as well

as citizenship were certified. Sugihara issued visas, which were inserted either into the passport or the safe-conduct. It means that at least three Jews were rescued by each of the above document.

Ewa Palasz-Rutkowska pointed out that the Polish underground organization made an extra stamp to produce the transit visas, when Sugihara ordered the stamp to speed up the work of visa issuance. The Polish underground organization issued a lot of false transit visas for its members and others, who had not obtained the Japanese visas since Sugihara left Kaunas at the end of August 1940. Certainly, there were many more Japanese transit visas than the number provided on Sugihara's List. However, as Zorach Warhaftig noted, many Jews, who had accepted the visas, hesitated to leave Kaunas and to travel towards the unknown Far East, because the political situation in Lithuania in 1940 was rather uncertain, but mass-murders by the Nazis or exile to prison camps in Siberia by Stalin had not yet happened. This is the reason why the number of transit visas differs from the number of Jewish refugees who travelled towards Japan.

Chiune wrote in retrospect in his handwritten memoir that 4,700 Jews had been rescued by the transit visas. Hillel Levine even presumed that if calculated using extrapolation, it should be regarded that the number of Jews rescued by Sugihara is about 10,000.⁴ However, the above numbers are pure assumptions. There is not enough statistical material on the real number of Jews in the Japanese side, who landed from Vladivostok onto Tsuruga in 1940–1941. Warhaftig wrote in his memoir that 2,166 Jewish refugees arrived from Lithuania in Japan between July 1940 and May 1941.⁵ Tadeusz Romer, the former Polish ambassador to Japan, sent a coded telegram from Teheran to the Polish Foreign Ministry in exile in London on 6 October 1942 stating the following: Almost 2,300 refugees came from Poland to Japan via Vladivostok between the autumn of 1940 and the summer of 1941. Ninety-seven percent of them were Jews, almost all of whom came from Vilnius and Kaunas.⁶ Most of the above Jewish refugees mentioned by Warhaftig and Romer must have held the transit visas issued by Sugihara.

Ilya Altman used the documents of the Intourist, the official travel agency of the Soviet Union, and clarified how many Jews had passed through the Soviet Union in 1940–1941. He stressed that not more than 2,500 refugees bought train tickets from Kaunas or Vilnius to Vladivostok and paid in US dollars in 1940–1941 with the help of the American Jewish organisations. In the Soviet periods, it was not easy

⁴ Levine H., 1998, 13.

⁵ Warhaftig Z. *Refugee and Survivor: Rescue Efforts during the Holocaust*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988. Translated into Japanese by Takigawa Yoshito. Tokyo: Hara shobo, 1992, 160.

⁶ Rutkowska & Romer 2009, 238.

for Soviet citizens to travel from their living place to other regions without permission. Why did the Soviet government give permission to travel for such refugees? Altman explained it as follows: The government suffered from the lack of foreign currency because of the outbreak of World War II. That was the reason why it permitted the Jews to travel from Lithuania to Japan via the Soviet Union – in order to get a large amount of dollars from the US Jewish organisations.⁷

b) The refugees' identity

Yukiko mentioned the Jewish refugees standing in front of the Japanese consulate in Kaunas in her memoir. She regarded that they must have run away for their lives from the German-occupied Poland, where the storm of Holocaust was raging, and the refugees in misery were waiting for the issuance of Japanese transit visas. What kinds of identity did the refugees hold? Warhaftig stressed that there were two types of refugees in Lithuania: about 2,500 of them came from Suwalki region, adjacent to the Lithuanian-German border; some 9,000 came to Vilnius from the Soviet-occupied Polish territory after 17 September 1939, where the Jewish inhabitants faced the alternative either to acquire Soviet citizenship or suffer political exile across the Urals. Half of the Jewish refugees in Vilnius were Judaists, such as Zionists, candidates for Youth *Aliyah*, planning their immigration to Israel, rabbis, and *Yeshivah* students.⁸

Simonas Strelcovas' research showed that the composition of the refugees in Vilnius was as follows: 75% of males, 20% of females and 5% of children. He regarded that the population consisted from rabbis, students and their families of *Yeshivahs*, Orthodox Jewish religious seminaries situated in the eastern part of Poland. Strelcovas emphasized that the Jewish refugees, to whom Sugihara had issued the visas, were zealous believers of Judaism, who ran away from the Soviet-occupied Poland not because of the Holocaust but because of Communism that denied any kind of religion. When the independent Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union on 15 June 1940, those refugees had to leave the newly communized republic to regain the freedom of their religion.⁹

⁷ Альтман И. Чиунэ Сугихара и разрешение СССР на транзит в Японию еврейских беженцев, *В отблеске «Хрустальной ночи»: еврейская община Кёнигсберга, преследование и спасение евреев Европы*. Под ред. И. А. Альтмана, Ю. Царуски и К. Фефермана, Москва–Калининград, 2014, 197–205. Altman I. “Roshia oyobi kaigai kobunshokanni okeru ‘Seigino hito’ Sugihara Chiuneni kansuru aratana bunshono hakken: kokusai kyoryokuno keikento tenbo”. *Asia Japan Journal*, Tokyo: Asia Japan Research Center, Kokushikan University, 2015, 65–66.

⁸ Warhaftig Z., 1988, 81, 395–403.

⁹ Strelcovas S. “The Phenomena of Past and Memory: Chiune Sugihara’s Activities in Lithuania 1939–40”. Paper of the 60th Anniversary Conference of the Japanese Association of International Relations, Makuhari, Japan on 14 Oct. 2016.

c) Identity documents issued in parallel with the visas by Sugihara

Yukiko wrote that Chiune issued *Visas for Life* for the refugees. In common-sense terms, he issued the visas on their passports. But the refugees did not pick up their own passports from Poland due to a great hurry. Those persons, who did not plan their foreign travel, had not even obtained passports from the authority at all. A question is how Sugihara issued the visas for such refugees.

The role of Lithuanian government newly appears in the spotlight. Lithuania gained its independence in 1918, and was a small nation state with the population of two million that maintained its own language, culture and society up to the beginning of the Second World War. When the Germans and the Soviets invaded Poland in September 1939, more than 30,000 refugees entered the Lithuanian territory from Poland inevitably. Though the Lithuanian government was perplexed by the sudden entrance of more than one percent of Lithuania's population, of course, it prepared to accept the refugees, for example, by establishing refugee camps and providing food and medical treatment with the help of the International Red Cross and the US Jewish organizations. It was really necessary for the Lithuanians to resist each of them as refugee. If the refugees did not keep any identity documents, the Lithuanian authority issued them identifications, the so-called "Safe-Conduct" in order to certify their identity and citizenship in its territory and to entitle them to travel under its protection to and from foreign countries. It was not necessary for all of the refugees to issue the identification separately. Not only the husband of a family but the wife and the children were certified by a piece of the identification. In order to certify without a hindrance, photos of husband, wife, and children were stuck on the Safe-Conduct. It became possible for all the family to travel to and from foreign countries, when the husband acquired an entry or transit visa on the back side of the identification at certain diplomatic representatives. One visa applied to a number of persons.

The Safe-Conducts were also issued by the Embassy of Poland in Kaunas. After the closure of the embassy in October 1939, the British Consulate in the capital took part in the issuance of the identifications as an acting Polish diplomatic representative in exile. The service had been continued up to the closure of the consulate in August 1940. The Lithuanian government was not able to issue the identity documents after the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in the same month. It has not been clarified yet why both the Lithuanian authority and the British Consulate issued almost the same kind of the Safe-Conducts in the same time.¹⁰

¹⁰ Inaba's interviews to Simonas Strelcovas in Tokyo and Osaka on 25–29 October 2016.

4. DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON SUGIHARA: CONCLUSION

Even Jewish refugees, who did not hold any passport, were provided with the freedom of movement by acquiring Safe-Conducts. The identifications were effective after the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in August 1940. It has been continuously clarified what was going on behind the scenes when Sugihara issued *Visas for Life* in the summer of 1940.

As Yukiko wrote, the figure of Jewish refugees rescued by Sugihara's visas is 6,000. However, it was pointed out that the figure was rather exaggerated. The real figure should be between 2,000 and 2,500. The Japanese lukewarm research is extremely irritating, though the results of new studies have been presented in Europe and Russia. Expectations might be expressed by Japan, such as to discover documents of the Immigration Office in Tsuruga, where refugees initially landed in Japan, or reports on the registration of refugees in Kobe, where the Jews had been waiting for some months for their departure towards new destinations.

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Chiharu Inaba

DOKUMENTAI, SUSIJĘ SU KNYGA *VIZOS GYVENIMUI*, IR ISTORIOGRAFIJA
APIE CHIUNE'Ę SUGIHARĄ

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnis analizuoja keletą klausimų. Pirmiausia – tai Japonijos UNESCO komiteto siūlymas Jaotsu mieste, Gifu prefektūroje, saugomus dokumentus, įrodančius Chiune'ės Sugiharos atliktus žydų gelbėjimo veiksmus Antrojo pasaulinio karo metais Lietuvoje, 2017 m. įtraukti į UNESCO tarptautinį registrą „Pasaulio atmintis“. Vėliau aiškinama, kodėl Japonijoje domimasi Sugiharos veikla 1940-ųjų vasarą Kaune, taip pat šio klausimo istoriografijos analize. Pagrindinė priežastis – Sugiharos žmonos Yukiko išleista knyga „Vizos gyvenimui“, kuri parengta pagal paties Sugiharos nepublikuotus memuarus. Po jos pasirodė kitos knygos, pavyzdžiui, Hillel Levine „In search for Sugihara“ ir kitos. Nėra abejonių, kad Sugihara Kaune dideliais kiekiais išdavinėjo visas, bet kol kas vis dar nežinomas tikslus išgelbėtųjų skaičius. Paties Sugiharos ataskaitoje Japonijos vyriausybei, rašytoje 1941 m. vasario 28 d., minima, kad Kaune buvo išduotos 2139 vizos, bet bendras Sugiharos išgelbėtųjų skaičius įvardijamas apie 6000 asmenų. Pažymėtina, jog šiuo metu Rusijoje ir Europoje pasirodė naujų tyrinėjimų, susijusių su Sugihara, o šiame straipsnyje gretinamos ir analizuojamos skirtingos istoriografinės pozicijos, susijusios su Sugiharos išgelbėtų asmenų skaičiumi. Galiausiai apibendrinant esamus tyrimus tampa aišku, kad labai svarbu rasti ir išanalizuoti Imigracijos tarnybos Tsurugoje, taip pat pabėgėlių registracijos Kobėje dokumentus.

RAKATAŽODŽIAI: Chiune Sugihara, žydų pabėgėliai, UNESCO tarptautinis registras „Pasaulio atmintis“, istoriografija apie Sugiharą.