

THE POLISH AMBASSADOR TADEUSZ ROMER – A RESCUER OF REFUGEES IN TOKYO



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SUMMARY. The issue of the rescue of war refugees, especially Jews, including Polish Jews, during World War II, as well as the questions “Who saved who?” and “Why did they save each other?” are still very important and widely discussed. The above mentioned issues apply to the Polish Jews and Poles, saved from Nazi Germans and Soviet Russians, who managed to avoid death or exile in Siberia by escaping through Kaunas in Lithuania, as well as to the role of Japan in these events. Among the relatively well-known rescuers of Jews acting in Kaunas at the beginning of the war there were two consuls, Sugihara Chiune from Japan and Jan Zwartendijk from the Netherlands. The author of the present article focuses on a lesser known stage in those efforts to save the people from exile or death – on the role that Tadeusz Romer, as the Polish Ambassador to Japan (1937–1941), and later as the Ambassador in Shanghai on a special mission (1941–1942), played in these efforts.

KEYWORDS: Tadeusz Romer, Sugihara Chiune, Jan Zwartendijk, Polish-Japanese military intelligence cooperation, the Embassy of Poland in Tokyo, Polish Jews, “Visas for Life”, Kaunas, Tokyo, Shanghai.

The issue of the rescue of war refugees, especially Jews, including Polish Jews, during World War II, as well as the questions “Who saved who?” and “Why did they save each other?” are still very important and widely discussed. The above-mentioned issues apply to the Polish Jews and Poles, saved from Nazi Germans and Soviet Russians, who managed to avoid death or exile in Siberia by escaping through Kaunas in Lithuania, as well as to the role of Japan in these events. Among the relatively well-known rescuers of Jews acting in Kaunas at the beginning of the war there were two consuls, Sugihara Chiune (1900–1986) from Japan and Jan Zwartendijk (1896–1976) from the Netherlands.¹ Now, I would like to discuss a lesser known stage in those efforts to save the people from exile or death and the

¹ Sugihara and Zwartendijk are very important figures in my research in the context of Polish-Japanese relations as well, see e.g.: Chapter 5 in Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. *Historia stosunków polsko-japońskich 1904–1945*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo TRIO, 2009, 235–284 (first edition: Warszawa: Bellona, 1996); in Japanese: *Nihon Pōrando kankeishi 1904–1945*. Transl. Shiba R. Tōkyō: Sairyūsha, 2009, 215–256.

role that Tadeusz Romer (1894–1978), the Polish Ambassador to Japan, and later the ambassador in Shanghai on a special mission, played in these efforts.

But prior to the development of this subject, I think, it is suitable to explain why there were so many Poles in Kaunas at the end of 1939, why they needed to escape, what were Zwartendijk's and Sugihara's roles at that time, and what was the significance of Sugihara's cooperation with Polish military intelligence.

POLISH WAR REFUGEES IN KAUNAS

The situation in Europe started to deteriorate rapidly from 1938, and the signature of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact on August 23, 1939 was a final warning that the world is under a threat of war. The Pact also influenced the Germany–Japan relations; Japan perceived this act as Germany's betrayal, since in 1936 both countries signed the anti-Soviet Anti-Comintern Pact. Thus, Japanese authorities lost trust in their ally and decided to create a new mission that would enable them to better observe both the Soviet Union and Germany. Kaunas was chosen as a desirable location for this mission. Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. On September 17, Soviet troops entered Poland and invaded eastern parts of the country. Many Poles, including members of the military, who were afraid of imprisonment, forced to migrate to Russia's inner territory or were escaping death, fled to the territory of neutral Lithuania. The second wave of refugees (approximately 40,000) fled to Lithuania at the beginning of October, when Polish territories were already under Soviet and German annexation. Poles were held in internment camps, but soon they started to escape them. A system of illegal aid was created, in which, at the request of the Department II of Polish General Staff, members of Polish intelligence group "Wierzba" (Willow),² among others, took part. This intelligence network was also created by Major Michał Rybikowski (1900–1991),³ an eminent expert in German affairs in the Department II. Amid his subordinates were, for example, Captain Alfons Jakubianiec (1905–1945) and Lieutenant Leszek Daszkiewicz.⁴

The second group of refugees fleeing from Poland were Polish Jews, who were escaping not only Germans and the Holocaust, but also Russians.⁵ At the time,

² Hryncewicz L. *Grupa pod kryptonimem „Wierzba” na Litwie Kowieńskiej działająca w okresie II wojny światowej*. Warszawa: 1988, unpublished (hereinafter as LH).

³ See various documents in: *Michał Rybikowski*. Archiwum Muzeum Wojska Polskiego. Warsaw. Rybikowski as Peter Ivanow cooperated later (1941–1944) with General Onodera Makoto in Stockholm; See: Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. *Historia... Ibid.*, 284–302; in Japanese: *Nihon Pōrando...*, *ibid.*, 256–278.

⁴ Daszkiewicz L. *Placówka wywiadowcza „G”. Sprawozdania i dokumenta*. England, 1948, unpublished (hereinafter as LD).

⁵ See: *Flight and Rescue*. Washington D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001, 3–17.

neutral Lithuania seemed a safe haven, especially after October of 1939, when Vilnius, which until that moment belonged to Poland, was returned to Lithuania by the USSR. The escapees planned to survive the war in Lithuania or to continue their further journey therefrom. Until the end of spring 1940, it was still possible to leave Lithuania and, though with certain difficulties, escape to the West, through Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, and further, across the Mediterranean Sea, to Palestine or to the United States. Subsequent German victories in Europe closed the possibilities of westward travel. The only possible escape route was leading to east, namely to Vladivostok via Trans-Siberian Railway. The situation, however, deteriorated rapidly after the annexation of Lithuania by the USSR at the beginning of August of 1940. On the one hand, anyone who declined the Soviet citizenship risked were exiled to Siberia, on the other hand, anyone who accepted it was forced to stay in the country. In 1941, leaving the country was made practically impossible.

To leave Lithuania, one needed a passport and a visa enabling him to travel to a particular country. Poles could obtain visas in the British diplomatic mission, which represented the Polish Government-in-Exile – this is where Daszkiewicz worked. The situation became complicated after the annexation of Lithuania by the USSR, when the Soviet authorities ordered all foreign missions to close until August 25 (this term was later prolonged to September 4). Quotas on entry visas were officially imposed by Great Britain, which limited the possibilities to travel to Palestine,⁶ and as the United States limited the immigration after the war started in Europe, the journey to this country was almost impossible. Who could issue visas? A helping hand was lent by the Dutch Ambassador and the Japanese Vice-Consul.

SUGIHARA CHIUNE AND POLISH INTELLIGENCE IN KAUNAS

Being the vice-consul, Sugihara Chiune opened a new consular office in Kaunas in November 1939.⁷ He wrote:

It became obvious why the General Staff of the Japanese Army insisted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs open a consulate in Kaunas. As a consul in Kaunas, where there was no Japanese colony, I understood that my main task was to inform the General Staff and the MOFA <...> about the concentration of German troops near the border.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷ On Sugihara appointment see documents in folio: M.2.1.0.10-92. Gaimushō Gaikō Shiryōkan, Tōkyō (hereinafter GGS).

This is how in a unique report, written in Russian at the request of Rybikowski in Moscow in 1960, Sugihara himself explained the reasons for the opening of the consulate in Kaunas. This document was later handed over to Andrzej T. Romer by one of the intelligence officers, and in 1997 I published it in Polish.⁸ It is noteworthy that for Japan any information concerning the USSR was very important.

Soon, he established contacts with some Polish Underground members and intelligence officers from the Polish General Staff in Lithuania (*see*: SCh, 134–135; LH 16–18), and, in the spring of 1940, he started a closer cooperation with Captain Alfons Jakubianiec (*nom de guerre* Jerzy Kuncewicz) and Lieutenant Leszek Daszkiewicz (*nom de guerre* Jan Stanisław Perz).⁹ Jakubianiec was officially assigned as a translator to the Japanese Military Attaché Office in Berlin, but in fact he was in charge of the new unit of Department II of the Commander-in-Chief's Staff, while Daszkiewicz accompanied Sugihara in Kaunas. He wrote that he “gave him <Sugihara> information concerning Russian affairs only” (LD, 21–24). After the consulate was closed at the end of August 1940, Daszkiewicz accompanied Sugihara in Berlin, Prague and Königsberg (till August 1941). Carrying out the exchange of information on Germany and the USSR, Sugihara aided the Polish Underground and Intelligence in sending mail from Lithuania to the West, to Polish Government-in-Exile, and from the West to Lithuania, or even further, to Warsaw via Japanese diplomatic mail.

VISAS FOR LIFE

It is important to note that the story of the visa issuance in Kaunas started in July 1940 in Riga, where the Dutch Ambassador, L. P. J. de Decker (1884–1948), issued a visa enabling entry to the Dutch dominions in the Middle America to Pessla Lewin, a resident of Vilnius, who was, until her marriage to Isaac, a Polish Jew, a Dutch citizen. De Decker wrote the following annotation in her passport: “for the admission of aliens to Surinam, Curaçao, and other Dutch possessions in the Americas, an entry visa is not required.”¹⁰ He intentionally omitted the clause

⁸ Raport konsula Sugihary Chiune, translation and comments Pałasz-Rutkowska E. *Japanica* No. 7, 1997, 131–140 (hereinafter as SCh).

⁹ See: Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. Polish-Japanese Co-operation during World War II. *Japan Forum*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1995, 285–317; in Japanese: Dainiji sekai taisen to himitsu chōhō katsudō. Pōrandō to Nihon kyōryoku kankei. *Polonica*, No. 5, 1995, 12–60. See also a summary of my lecture at Asiatic Society of Japan (Tokyo, 1995): <http://www.tiu.ac.jp/~bduell/ASJ/3-95_lecture_summary.html> [2016 08 20].

¹⁰ See: Lewin I. *Remember the Days of Old. Historical Essays*. New York: Research Institute of Religious Jewry, 1994, 171–176.

that the entry to the Dutch West Indies required permission of local colonial governors, which was granted only on rare occasions.

A few days later, Isaac, carrying his wife's passport, went to the Dutch Consulate in Kaunas to meet Consul Jan Zwartendijk. Copying de Decker's annotation, Zwartendijk wrote the same clause in Isaac's documents. The news of the "Curaçao visas" spread rapidly and hundreds of refugees started to flock to Vilnius and Kaunas. Although Zwartendijk knew that these visas would not be usable, he did not omit anyone of those who came to him. He worked like this from July 22 to August 2. Then he closed the consulate and left Kaunas. The exact number of such annotations issued by Zwartendijk is not known. His son, Jan Zwartendijk Jr., told me in Tokyo (1995) that as an eleven-year old boy he helped his father in Kaunas to burn all the documents. He claimed that his father managed to issue from 1,200 to 1,400 "Curaçao visas", but in fact 2,400 "visas" have been identified.¹¹

Refugees, having the annotations written by the Dutch Consul, started to prepare for the trip to Curaçao, although they knew that they would not be able to go there – the only route that remained was through the USSR and Japan. Sugihara's wife, Yukiko (1913–2008), told me during our meeting in her house in Kamakura (1993) that the entire matter with the refugees started on July 27.¹² As written in Chiune's report, the events took place at the beginning of August (SCh, 137), while the so-called Sugihara's list, the Consul's report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the subject of visa issuance in Kaunas from February 28, 1941 mentions the period from July 9 to August 29 of the year 1940.¹³ The number of visas increased rapidly from July 27.

I have to add that the above-mentioned Poles also assisted in this humanitarian endeavour, namely in the issuance of transit visas through Japan for Polish Jews escaping the Holocaust and for Poles fleeing from the imminent Soviet threat of deportation, or even death. In his report Daszkiewicz claimed that it was them, the Polish side, who had suggested issuing such visas for Poles, mostly Polish officers, who, with the help of such documents, would have been able to leave the occupied Poland and Lithuania and form a Polish army in exile (LD, 21–24).

As it is known, Sugihara decided to issue visas without the approval of the MOFA in Tokyo. From the end of July to the end of August 1940, he was issuing transit visas through Japan for the refugees waiting outside the consulate in Kaunas. In the majority of cases Sugihara inserted visas in documents containing

¹¹ *Flight and Rescue. Ibid.*, 63. There was another Dutch, a Consul in Stockholm, who issued some 400 „visas” in early 1941; *ibid.*

¹² See also: Sugihara Y. *Rokusenmin no inochi no biza*. Tōkyō: Asahi Sonorama, 1990, 25–28.

¹³ Folio J.2.3.0 J/X2-6, GGS. See also: Shiraishi M. Iwayuru 'inochi no viza' hakkyū kankei kiroku ni tsuite, *Gaikō Shiryōkanhō*, No. 9, 1996, 60–69.

Zwartendijk annotation that a Dutch entry visa is not required to enter Surinam, Curaçao and other Dutch territories. Such annotations were an infringement of the established regulation and thus the Dutch Consul risked his life, as he intentionally omitted the second part of the legal formula. As both consuls rescued thousands of Jews from the hands of Nazi Germans, both, Sugihara and Zwartendijk, were honoured by Yad Vashem, in 1985 and 1997 respectively.

The exact number of those saved by Sugihara remains unknown. According to the so-called Sugihara's list, he saved 2,139 refugees (more than 2,000 Polish Jews and Poles). The actual numbers are certainly much higher, around five or six thousand, as children often exited the country on the basis of their parents' visas. Furthermore, as the end of August was approaching, Sugihara was pressed for time and he issued some documents without marking them with sequential numbers. There were also some forged visas, issued after he had left Kaunas. This was possible because, in order to facilitate his work, as advised by Daszkiewicz, Sugihara had ordered a seal, and then a second, identical one was created, and later used by the Polish Underground in Vilnius (LD, 23).

Japanese MOFA, pressed by the Soviet authorities after the USSR annexed Lithuania in August 1940, ordered Sugihara to leave Kaunas. He did so on September 1, 1940 and through Berlin, he went to Prague. In March 1941, as Deputy Consul General he assumed the new post in Königsberg, where he also cooperated with Polish intelligence, mainly with Daszkiewicz. They collected information on the USSR and Germany, and mainly on German preparation for war against the Soviet Union. But Sugihara's activities did not remain unnoticed by the Germans and he was forced to close the consulate. In the second half of 1941, he left for Romania to hold the post of a Japanese diplomat in Bucharest, where he remained until the end of war.

Refugees who received transit visas from Sugihara still had to obtain transit visas through the USSR, which was not an easy task. If they succeeded, a long and strenuous journey awaited them. They travelled across the entire length of the USSR via the Trans-Siberian Railway, reaching Vladivostok, from which they took ships to the port of Tsuruga,¹⁴ where the representatives of the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Tokyo, Tadeusz Romer, awaited them.

¹⁴ The history of refugees who escaped persecution can be seen also at the Sugihara Corner in the Port Humanity Tsuruga Museum; <http://www.tmo-tsuruga.com/kk-museum/mr_sugiharas/mr_sugiharas_e.html> [2016 08 03].

TADEUSZ ROMER – A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Tadeusz Romer is one of the important figures in the history of Polish diplomacy, as well as the history of Polish-Japanese relations.¹⁵ He was the first and only Ambassador of Poland in Tokyo before and during the first years of World War II. He played a very important role in building and maintaining friendly relations between Poland and Japan until 1941, despite the war in Europe.

He was born in 1894, in Antonosz (then Kovyenskaya Gubernya of the Russian Empire), currently the Kaunas region of Lithuania, into a Polish landed aristocratic family with patriotic traditions.¹⁶ He studied law and political science at the University of Lausanne, where he obtained a Master's degree in political science in 1917. In 1915–1917, he was Secretary of the Committee to Aid War Victims in Poland (founded by the famous novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, and politician and pianist Ignacy Paderewski). In 1917, in Paris, he became the personal secretary of Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), the President of the Polish National Committee, which represented Polish issues at international forums and strove to gain recognition of Poland's independence. Together with Dmowski, he took part in the Paris Peace Conference that put an end to World War I. Then, after Poland regained independence, he became one of the first members of the young state's diplomatic service.

In July 1919, Romer was appointed First Secretary of the Polish legation in France. In 1921–1927 he held various positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, including the head of the Western Section in the Political-Economic Department (1925–1926). In 1928, he became Counsellor to the legation in Rome, then, a year later, assumed the post of the Polish Ambassador to Italy, which he held until 1935. He spent the next two years as envoy to Portugal. From there he left for East Asia, taking over the Polish mission in Tokyo in 1937 and remaining in the post until October 1941. After the closure of the Polish Embassy in Japan in late October 1941, Romer moved to Shanghai as the Polish Ambassador on a special mission to the Far East. In mid-August 1942, when Polish diplomatic personnel were to be evacuated from China under an exchange of diplomats, Romer entrusted Polish refugee affairs to the Executive Board of the Union of Poles in China. Then, starting in autumn 1942, he held the crucial post of the Polish Ambassador to the USSR, trying to stabilize the bilateral relations and take care

¹⁵ See: Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. *Historia... Ibid.*, 155–273. in Japanese: *Nihon Pōrando...*, *Ibid.*, 137–256. See also: Pałasz-Rutkowska E. Ambassador Tadeusz Romer. His Role in Polish-Japanese Relations (1937–1941). *Silva Iaponicarum*, Fasc. XVIII, 2008, 82–104.

¹⁶ For his biography and activity see: Szubtarska B. *Niezwykłe misje... Tadeusz Romer (1894–1978) dyplomata RP w świecie dyktatur i wojen*. Piotrków Trybunalski: Naukowe Wydawnictwo Piotrkowskie, 2014.

of the Polish citizens living in that country. He managed, among other things, to obtain permission to evacuate 600 Polish children and the families of Polish soldiers,¹⁷ who had not left together with General Anders' army. However, relations with the USSR were turbulent (due to the question of Poland's eastern borders, etc.) and were broken off in April 1943 after the Germans discovered the mass graves of Polish officers at Katyń and Poland demanded an investigation from the Soviets.

Then, Romer travelled to Teheran as the Polish plenipotentiary to the Middle East, and from July 1943 to November 1944 he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London. Afterwards, he emigrated with his family to Canada, and never returned to Poland. Finally, he became a professor of French literature and culture at McGill University and continued to devote a great deal of his time to the Polish affairs (e.g. he was the Director of the Polish Institute of Arts and Science in Canada).

ROMER AND POLISH REFUGEES IN JAPAN. THE POLISH COMMITTEE TO AID WAR VICTIMS

In mid-August 1940, first groups of refugees, mainly Polish Jews holding Sugihara transit visas, began to reach Japan, where Ambassador Tadeusz Romer took care of them. He established the Polish Committee to Aid War Victims under the aegis of the Embassy of Poland in Tokyo. The Committee was chaired by his wife, Zofia Romer; its secretary general was the merchant Klemens Zyngol; the treasurer was Mrs Zikmannowa, the wife of a Polish industrialist in Manchukuo; and the executive board members were Karol Staniszewski – secretary of the Embassy, Aleksander Piskor – the head of the Polish Press Bureau in the Far East; the wife of Bolesław Szcześniak, a contract employee, who later became a Japanologist, and professor at Notre Dame University, and Stefan Romanek, an intern.

The most important source of information about Romer's activities in Japan, as well as in China, are the collections of documents *Diplomatic Activities 1913–1975*, Vol. 1: *Japan (1937–1940)*, Vol. 2: *Japan (1940–1941)* from the Public Archives of Canada stored in Ottawa (hereinafter as TRDAJ), and documents *Tadeusz Romer* from the Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London (hereinafter as TRPI). The quantity of these documents is amazing, as well as their reliability, thoroughness and detail. In spite of the Ambassador's numerous duties

¹⁷ The list of Polish deportees in USSR was published as a booklet *Zesłańcy polscy w ZSRR* by the Embassy of Poland in Tokyo in September 1941.

at his mission in Tokyo, he regularly submitted detailed reports to his superiors at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sending them to Warsaw until September 1939, then to Paris and finally to London, where the Polish Government-in-Exile had been settled.

First notes on this matter can be found in a cable from August 9, 1940:

Refugees are starting to arrive here through Siberia, mostly from Lviv and Vilnius, the majority of them are Jews. They have transit visas on various makeshift documents and they are encountering great problems when trying to obtain the right of entry into other countries. <...> Answer by telegram what are, if any, the possibilities of directing them to either British Dominions or to South America (TRPI: A.12.53/37).

Eleven days later, Minister of Foreign Affairs August Zaleski (1883–1972) wrote that due to transfer reasons it would be difficult to relocate the refugees to British Dominions, that Canada would only accept children who were alone, that South Africa did not wish to accept any refugees, and that Brazil would provide 500 visas only for Jews, on the condition that the Government of the Republic of Poland supports the refugees financially.

On February 2, 1941 Romer sent the following cable:

With the inflow of refugees, I was forced to organize a temporary consular assistance in Kobe, where the refugees have been allocated in cheapest conditions <...>. At the moment, the assistance is funded by the consular revenue. We have also created a Polish Committee, founded mostly by American sources, which, in cooperation with general Jewish committees, is efficiently coping with the situation that has been until now difficult. Up until the end of January, 566 of our refugees arrived here, 95 per cent of whom are Jews. Of that number 300 have been sent to the following territories: the United States (142), Palestine (43), Canada (35), Middle America (29), Argentina (23), Brazil (16), Shanghai (5), South Africa (4), Australia (3). In February, we look forward to the arrival of approximately 250 people. In fear of the Soviet deportations I am tirelessly seeking to relocate a number of families of our civilian and military patronages from Vilnius. (TRDAJ, Vol. 2).

On February 3, minister Zaleski asked Romer to seek help from American authorities in granting visas for Poles from Vilnius Region. He also promised that the Government of Poland would use funds in order to cover transit costs for the refugees. Romer then started negotiating with American and British representatives in Tokyo.

In his report to Minister Zaleski dated February 6, 1941, Romer wrote:

Over 95 per cent of refugees with confirmed or presumed Polish citizenship <...> are Jewish <...>. This phenomenon can be attributed not only to their greater enterprise, but especially the organized support they find among their own abroad. <...> The low level of ethnic Polish refugees who have arrived so far can be attributed to their generally worse material circumstances, greater attachment to local conditions and life, and

<...> negative attitude, especially at first, toward undertaking a risky and costly journey East into the unknown. <...> As a result, the following ethnic Poles have arrived here among the refugees so far: clandestinely, 4 officers of the Polish army, several families brought here with the help of relatives abroad <...>, all together about 15 persons, some of whom have settled in Japan for longer, and some of whom have already or will soon leave. (TRDAJ, Vol. 2)

The Committee organized by Romer cooperated with Jewish organizations, mainly in Yokohama and Kobe, where the Committee also opened an office. Its representative regularly went to the port of Tsuruga, where successive refugees arrived. Jews were directed mainly to Kobe, where the local Jewish community took care of them. They were supported financially by the East-European Jewish community through the Committees for Assistance to Jewish Immigrants from Eastern Europe ("East-Jewcom"), and by the Jewish American Joint Distribution Committee ("Joint"). The costs of further travel for refugees, who were provided with destination visas by Ambassador Romer, but lacked their own funds, were covered by the Jewish organization HICEM. The few non-Jewish Polish refugees made their way to Tokyo.

Romer stressed that the refugees spoke highly of the Japanese Consulate employees, including those in Kaunas, Moscow and Vladivostok. However, I did not find the name "Sugihara" in any of the Ambassador's reports. Romer might not have known this name, although without any doubt he was aware of the events that were taking place in Kaunas at the time, as he wrote in the above report:

Signs of their <Consulate's; EPR> friendliness and kindness exceeded strict guidelines of bureaucratic convention and often bordered on personal dedication, and even sacrifice of the Japanese staff to whom many of our compatriots owe their lives. <...> Even in Japan, despite well-known feeling of this time, the attitude of the central authorities, as well as local ones, towards our refugees and their needs has been in most cases exemplary. (TRDAJ, Vol. 2)

Sugihara's transit visas were valid for ten days, which was a very limited time for undertaking almost any action. In response to Romer's request, the documents were prolonged to three weeks, and in some cases even longer. The Ambassador was trying not to overuse Japanese hospitality, besides he did not want to create a mutually harmful situation. Thus, in accordance with the Minister's suggestions, Romer personally sought to obtain quotas for visas from British, Australian and Canadian representatives. In order to achieve this, he created an extensive confidential memorandum in English entitled *The Problem of the Polish Refugees Coming to the Far East* (TRDAJ, Vol. 2). In his further correspondence, which reached London on March 23 he wrote:

It is urgent to enable migration of Jews out of Japan. As there are more than 1,500 of them here, the Japanese government decided to restrict the conditions for entry. This has put those on their way to Japan, including Poles, whom we care about deeply, in critical position. I am trying to resolve this crisis with all my might. <...> The Canadian diplomatic mission, which has already started issuing visas from assigned quotas, will probably increase its number to 140 persons. (TRPI, A.12.53/37)

The Polish Embassy in Tokyo led and supervised the entire humanitarian effort, including passport matters, by intervening with Japanese authorities in order to extend visas or obtain entrance and transit visas. The Embassy also discreetly registered volunteers for the armed forces and directed them to Canada and the Middle East (TRDAJ, Vol. 2).

Ambassador Romer operated in Tokyo officially until October 4, 1941. Despite the pressure applied by Germany, Japan consented to the further existence of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, mainly for the sake of information on the USSR (the cooperation between Polish and Japanese intelligence concerning Germany and the USSR started in 1920's).¹⁸ Japan's stance toward Poland began to change in the second half of 1941. First, because Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941 and, as the Red Army was driven east, it soon came to occupy all of Poland. Germany, which became allied to Japan under the Tripartite Pact in 1940 obliging signatories to provide mutual support in their efforts to create a "new order" in Europe and the Far East, now strove to wipe Poland off the map of the world. Second, because Japan was preparing to a war against the United States – that is, to create a "new order" in the East – and could no longer ignore the demands of its German ally, as it was counting on its support.

On October 4, Romer was officially notified of the Polish Embassy's liquidation.¹⁹ Together with his family and the majority of Polish Embassy staff he left Tokyo on October 26, 1941, sailing to Shanghai via Nagasaki.

ROMER IN SHANGHAI

In connection with the liquidation of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, the Japanese authorities sent all the refugees, who came from Poland and were staying in Japan, to Shanghai – about 1,000 people, nearly all of whom were Jewish. Romer, now as "ambassador on special mission", continued to take care of them.

¹⁸ See: Pałasz-Rutkowska E., Romer A. T. *Historia...* *Ibid.*, 122–138; in Japanese: *Nihon Pōrando...* *Ibid.*, 106–124.

¹⁹ Note verbale in Japanese see: M.1.5.0.3-30, GGS.; in French: TRDAJ, Vol. 2.

At the time, many Jews already lived in Shanghai, as the city had been a haven for them since mid-19th century (the variety of ethnic groups in the city included Sephardi Jews, refugees from Russia after the October Revolution, refugees from Germany and Austria and Jews from Poland). After the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in December 1941 Japan attacked Shanghai, and all diplomatic missions, including the Polish mission, had to be evacuated. Romer was still working tirelessly to provide as many Polish refugees as possible with the opportunity of leaving Shanghai. For instance, on April 8, 1942 he sent the Polish Embassy in Kuybyshev a copy of a list containing 737 out of 967 names of Shanghai refugees from Poland that could be evacuated from Shanghai through the Soviet Union countries (TRPI, A 11.49/Sow/36). On May 20, 1942, the next Minister of Foreign Affairs in exile, Edward Raczyński (1891–1993) informed Romer that the British government agreed to evacuate diplomatic representatives together with 50 Poles and 389 Jewish refugees from Shanghai. It was not possible to evacuate all Polish Jews; therefore, some of them had to stay there until the end of the war.

In the middle of August 1942, during the exchange of diplomats, Polish diplomatic staff was evacuated from China. Romer, together with his family, boarded the Japanese ship “Kamakura maru” and headed for Lourenço Marques (currently Maputo) in Mozambique. Just before his departure, he was seeking other sources of financing, and only few private individuals who were also being evacuated agreed to fund the refugee transfer. On October 6, 1942, after assuming another important post – that of the Polish Ambassador to the Soviet Union – he wrote an interesting report, which can be perceived as a kind of summary of these events.

From the autumn of 1940 to the summer of 1941, about 2,300 refugees from Poland came to Japan, 97 per cent of whom were Jewish, originating mainly from Vilnius and Kaunas, less often from the south-eastern frontiers of Poland.

Most of them had only certificates issued in Kaunas and Japanese transit visas. The refugees were allocated in 27 houses rented for that purposes in Kobe, as well as in Yokohama and Tokyo, while Polish representatives were looking for a refuge for them during the war. With the financial aid of Jewish organizations in the US (“Joint”), the local Jewish community provided the refugees with housing and food.

Health aid, clothes, cultural support, as well as assistance in contacting the families and arranging passport and visa issues, were provided by the Polish Committee to Aid War Victims that I established in Tokyo. I appointed Polish Jews to the posts in the refugee section of the Committee. The funds for the Committee, which were provided by government subventions, Polish organizations in America and donated by Poles from the entire Far East, proceeded from the local events. The Jewish organization HICEM covered the costs of further transfer of those, for whom visas had been obtained and who did not have sufficient financial means to travel. As of July 1, 1942, a total of approximately 350 thousand US dollars, collected from various sources, was spent on aiding Polish refugees in the Far East. (TRDAJ, Vol. 2)

The suspension of shipping links, then outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War thwarted further efforts to place all the remaining refugees in such countries as Australia, New Zealand, Palestine and elsewhere. Romer wrote:

Upon liquidation of the Polish Consulate in Shanghai in August 1942, soon before evacuation of all Polish Government personnel from the Far East, care of Polish citizens was unofficially handed over – with the consent of the Japanese occupation authorities – to an ad hoc committee entitled the Executive Board of the Union of Poles in China, which consisted of Polish residents as well as Jewish refugees with Polish citizenship.

<...> when given the opportunity at the last moment to evacuate 54 civilian Polish citizens together with Polish diplomatic and consular personnel from Japan, China and Manchuria, I assigned 45 places to Jewish refugees, choosing them so that all political, social and professional groups had their most active members among them, capable of effectively coming to the aid of those remaining from the outside.

Among the refugees that escaped in this manner with me to South-West Africa and then travelled further to England were 3 rabbis, 3 representatives of Rabbinical Schools, 7 Zionists and 5 members of General Jewish Labour Bund of Lithuania, Poland and Russia (also known as the Bund or the Jewish Labour Bund), etc. While still in Africa, I managed to obtain the right of entry to Australia for three of them, to Palestine for two of them, for five to East Africa and for seven of them to the Union of South Africa (present-day RSA; EPR). (TRDAJ, Vol. 2)

CONCLUSION

Helping Poles and Polish Jews in Japan and Shanghai, who were trying to escape the Holocaust, Soviet and German oppression, was one of the most important elements of Ambassador Romer's daily work, which he was carrying out with such diligence.

It is possible that without his devotion and help, many Polish refugees, who received visas from Sugihara and annotations from Zwartendijk, would have still been imprisoned or could have even died. But he was not recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among Nations, because, as far as I know, diplomats could be recognized only if they had risked their position and status, or if they acted against their government's policy or their superiors' instruction (like Sugihara and Zwartendijk). But what Romer did was not part of the instructions he received from his superiors in the Polish Government-in-Exile. He did it on his own, also because of humanitarian reasons, in order to save people. Let us not forget that Romer remained active in Shanghai until August 1942, despite the fact that the city was already occupied by the Japanese in December 1941, and shortly after the Asia-Pacific War broke out, on December 11, 1941 the diplomatic relations

between Japan and Poland were broken, which means that Romer was putting himself in danger. And thus, maybe it is the right time to interpret the rules adopted by Yad Vashem more broadly:

A person can be considered eligible for the title of “Righteous Among the Nations” when the available data, based on survivor testimony or other documentation, clearly demonstrates that a non-Jewish person risked his or her life, freedom and safety, in order to rescue one or several Jews from the threat of death or deportation without exacting monetary compensation or other rewards.²⁰

At the end I would like to quote a fragment of Oskar Schenker’s impression on his stay in Tokyo. He was one of the refugees saved by Sugihara in Lithuania. In *Dziennik Związkowy* (Polish Daily News) dating December 6, 1941 we can find the following passage:

I was lucky to be one of the first, who reached Japan through Siberia in October 1940. I must admit that I could not contain the emotion that accompanied me when, after a year of wandering and uncertainty about the next day, I was finally able to step on the threshold of the Polish Embassy. <...> The white eagle at the gates to the building, the Polish language, spoken loudly and openly, the uniform of our Defence Attaché <...> – all this made such an impression on me, that for a moment during the first audience with His Excellency Tadeusz Romer, the Ambassador of Poland, I could not utter a single word. The atmosphere of this and all subsequent meetings had left a mark on my entire stay in Japan, and, I must say, a very positive one. And so from the very start I decided to serve and use my experience in working in Civil Service in Poland for the benefit of the Polish Committee to Aid War Victims in Tokyo. <...>

This was a time of hard work for the entire Embassy staff. Ambassador Romer set the example himself, as he personally oversaw even minute details of planned refugee transit and settlement. He often worked tirelessly well into the night. In all this he exhibited <...> such balance, such understanding <...>, that anyone who came in contact with him was impressed by his deep and thorough approach to the problems he was faced with. <...> The refugees liked him a great deal.

All of those who had passed through the “Tokyo gates” have been scattered around the world by fate. <...> Many of them found their way to countries in North and South America, some of them went to Burma, and even more of them to Australia and New Zealand. The last group of refugees <...> left for Shanghai. All these people are now separated by vast lands and seas <...> but they are united by their warm memories of the Polish Embassy in Tokyo, and profound gratitude for <...> the fatherly affection we were shown within its walls and for the fact that whilst in its building, we felt as if we had been in our forever lasting Poland.

²⁰ See: <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/how_to_apply.asp> [2016 08 14].

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LENKŲ AMBASADORIUS TADEUSZAS ROMERIS – PABĖGĖLIŲ GELBĖTOJAS TOKIJUJE

SANTRAUKA. Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabėgėlių, ypač žydų, tarp jų ir Lenkijos žydų, gelbėjimo problema yra iki šiol aktuali ir plačiai diskutuojama. Ji tebekelia klausimus, kas ir kodėl gelbėjo. Ši problema neatsiejama nuo Lenkijos žydų bei lenkų, kurie buvo išgelbėti nuo Vokietijos nacių ir Rusijos sovietų ir kurie pabėgo nuo mirties ar tremties į Sibirą per Kauną į Japoniją. Prieš prasidedant karui Kaune buvo du konsulai, gana gerai žinomi žydų gelbėtojai, Chiune Sugihara iš Japonijos ir Janas Zwartendijkas iš Olandijos. Straipsnio autorė atkreipia dėmesį į mažiau žinomą pabėgėlių gelbėjimo atvejį, susijusį su Tadeuszu Romeriu, Lenkijos ambasadoriumi Japonijoje (1937–1941), o kiek vėliau specialiosios misijos ambasadoriumi Šanchajuje (1941–1942), kuris taip pat įdėjo pastangų gelbėdamas pabėgėlius.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Tadeusz Romer, Chiune Sugihara, Jan Zwartendijk, lenkų ir japonų karo inteligentijos kooperacija, Lenkijos ambasada Tokijuje, Lenkijos žydai, *gyvenimo vizos*, Kaunas, Tokijas, Šanchajus.