

# EMERGING HEROES

A Story  
in 7 Photographs

WWII-Era  
Diplomats,  
Jewish Refugees,  
and Escape  
to Japan

## JUDAISM AND JEWISH LIFE

### **Series Editor**

Simcha Fishbane (Touro College, New York)

### **Editorial Board**

Geoffrey Alderman (University of Buckingham, Buckingham)

Meir Bar Ilan (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan)

Herbert Basser (Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario)

Donatella Ester Di Cesare (Universita La Sapienza, Rome)

Roberta Rosenberg Farber (Yeshiva University, New York), **Series Associate Editor**

Andreas Nachama (Touro College, Berlin)

Ira Robinson (Concordia University, Montreal)

Nissan Rubin (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan)

Susan Starr Sered (Suffolk University, Boston)

Reeva Spector Simon (Yeshiva University, New York)



# EMERGING HEROES

A Story  
in 7 Photographs

WWII-Era  
Diplomats,  
Jewish Refugees,  
and Escape  
to Japan

Akira Kitade

Translated by **Kuniko Katz** and  
Edited by **Donna Ratajczak**

BOSTON  
2022

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

**Names:** Kitade, Akira, 1944- author. | Katz, Kuniko, translator. | Ratajczak, Donna, editor.

**Title:** Emerging heroes : WWII-Era Diplomats, Jewish refugees, and escape to Japan. A story in 7 photographs / Akira Kitade ; translated by Kuniko Katz and edited by Donna Ratajczak.

**Other titles:** Inochi no biza, haruka naru tabiji. English | Story of the Japanese saviors of Jewish WWII refugees through 7 photographs

**Description:** Boston : Academic Studies Press, 2022. | Series: Judaism and Jewish life | Includes bibliographical references.

**Identifiers:** LCCN 2022012405 (print) | LCCN 2022012406 (ebook) | ISBN 9781644698686 (hardback) | ISBN 9781644698693 (paperback) | ISBN 9781644698709 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781644698716 (epub)

**Subjects:** LCSH: World War, 1939-1945--Jews--Rescue--Japan. | Righteous Gentiles in the Holocaust--Japan. | Sugihara, Chiune, 1900-1986. | World War, 1939-1945--Jews--Rescue--Lithuania--Kaunas.

**Classification:** LCC D804.6 .K5713 2022 (print) | LCC D804.6 (ebook) | DDC 940.53/180952--dc23/eng/20220328

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022012405>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022012406>

Copyright © 2022 Academic Studies Press All rights reserved

ISBN 9781644698686 (hardback)

ISBN 9781644698693 (paperback)

ISBN 9781644698709 (adobe pdf)

ISBN 9781644698716 (epub)

Book design by Kryon Publishing Services, [www.kryonpublishing.com/](http://www.kryonpublishing.com/)

Cover design by Ivan Grave

Published by Academic Studies Press

1577 Beacon Street

Brookline, MA 02446, USA

[press@academicstudiespress.com](mailto:press@academicstudiespress.com)

[www.academicstudiespress.com](http://www.academicstudiespress.com)

# Contents

Message from the Mayor of Tsuruga City <i>Takanobu Fuchikami</i>	vi
Foreword <i>Harriet P. Schleifer</i>	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. Encounter with an Album	1
2. The Sugihara Survivors I Met, and the Follow-Up	9
3. People in the Album Whose Identities Were Discovered	45
4. Jan Zwartendijk, Consul of the Netherlands in Kaunas	66
5. Saburo Nei, Acting Consul General in Vladivostok	79
6. N. A. J. de Voogd, Consul of the Netherlands in Kobe, Later Ambassador of the Netherlands to Japan	92
7. Yoshitsugu Tatekawa, Ambassador to the Soviet Union	102
8. Tadeusz Romer, Polish Ambassador to Japan	116
9. Tracking Down the 2,139 People on the Sugihara List	124
Conclusion	134
List of Major References	135
Index	136



# Message from the Mayor of Tsuruga City

Congratulations on the publication of the new book *Emerging Heroes: WWII-Era Diplomats, Jewish Refugees, and Escape to Japan—A Story in 7 Photographs*.

Who could have imagined that the seven photos, taken seventy years ago, would lead us to such an epic journey?

This book expresses the author's affection for people whom he met, with admiration for his superior Mr. Tatsuo Osako and the Japanese people who communicated with refugees at that time such as the staff of Japan Tourist Bureau. The interviews conducted on the families of those who appear in these photos and Sugihara Survivors tell us their lives and feelings.

The author wrote also about other diplomats besides Mr. Sugihara, and this expands his epic journey. I sincerely look forward to Mr. Kitade's continued success as a reader and a friend of his.

The album Mr. Osako left was donated to Tsuruga City through the kindness of Mr. Osako's family and Mr. Kitade. I'd be very happy if you could visit our "Port of Humanity Tsuruga Museum" to enjoy its exhibition.

**Takanobu Fuchikami**  
**Mayor, Tsuruga City**





# Foreword

The legacy of Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara is one that might have easily been forgotten, if not for the survivors themselves coming forward and recognizing his humanitarian effort. Sugihara defied orders because he saw a moral obligation and issued over 2,000 life-saving travel visas. As a result, he rescued thousands of Jews. His legacy lives on in their progeny today.

Sugihara's courageous actions alone could not have delivered those Jewish refugees all the way from Kaunas, Lithuania to safety in Kobe, Japan. Travel visas required an end destination, outside of Japan, and many countries had closed their doors to Jewish refugees. In addition, many of these Jews were impoverished, with no money to support the journey. The refugees were able to reach safety and survive the Holocaust, thanks to crucial support received from many individuals and organizations.

Even eighty years after these actions, we are privileged to be able to continue to learn further details of Sugihara's life-saving visas, as well as the roles of other courageous, selfless individuals. The research efforts undertaken by Akira Kitade portray tenacity and dedication to preserving history. I am grateful to him for shining a spotlight on key diplomats from Japan, as well as from the Netherlands and Poland, who were critical to the rescue of so many refugees—and to the many survivors for sharing their personal stories. It is inspiring to learn of courageous individuals who stood for righteousness in a time of such bleakness in human history.

As President of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), I'm proud that the American Jewish community, too, was instrumental in facilitating the survival of Sugihara's visa-holders. American Jews did critical work in fundraising and advocating for these individuals, many of whom eventually immigrated to the United States and contributed to Jewish life in America. I had the opportunity to meet Rick Salomon, the son of a Sugihara visa-holder, whose story is captured within these pages. I met him in January 2017 when he gave a keynote address in New York City. I also had the pleasure of reading his son Mark's essay, which is excerpted in this book.

My own family's history was not so lucky. My parents survived the concentration camp. My father was the sole survivor of his family, and my mother lost her mother and siblings, save for one. Had they had the protection of such

courageous diplomats as are portrayed in this book, their wartime experience might have taken a different turn.

Today, the need for American Jewish engagement in global issues remains, and as a community, we continue to respond to this call. There are many lessons we can learn from the actions of Chiune Sugihara and others who aided the effort to rescue the Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust. AJC strives to follow the spirit of Sugihara, not only in helping global Jewry, but also by helping many others throughout the world who are in need.

As we build with others a world with less hate and more understanding, respect, and peace, I am grateful for such accounts as Akira Kitade's *Emerging Heroes: WWII-Era Diplomats, Jewish Refugees, and Escape to Japan—A Story in 7 Photographs*, which inspire and energize us along the way.

**Harriet P. Schleifer**  
**President, American Jewish Committee**

# Acknowledgments

Despite the difficulties brought about by COVID-19, I was fortunate enough to have been able to publish the original Japanese version of this book in December 2020.

It is also fortunate that thanks to the warm encouragement of many people its English translation has been made possible in less than a year. I would like to thank the following individuals for their assistance and contributions presented in these chapters.

## Chapter 2

Mr. Paul Hamer, Mr. David Manski, Prof. Charles Manski, Ms. Karen Leon, Mr. Damon Krukowski, Mr. Mark Salomon, Mr. Junichi Kajioka

## Chapter 3

Ms. Aya Takahashi, Ms. Judith Lerner Crawley, Dr. Victoria Steele, Ms. Deborah Reed, Mr. Masayuki Mochizuki, Mr. Jean-Nöel Grinda, Mr. Ernst Scherz, Ms. Linda Birnbach, Mr. Mark Halpern, Mr. Kiyotaka Fukushima

## Chapter 4

Mr. Robert Zwartendijk, Mr. Nathan Lewin

## Chapter 5

Mr. Mark Halpern, Ms. Kim Hydorn, Ms. Deborah Remer

## Chapter 6

Mr. Hans de Vries, Mr. Ton van Zeeland

## Chapter 7

Rabbi Aaron Kotler, Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi, Mr. Yosuke Watanabe

## Chapter 8

Prof. Ewa Palasz-Rutkowska, Dr. Olga Barbasiewicz

## Chapter 9

Prof. George Bluman, Prof. Chiharu Inaba

In addition, I am especially grateful to Ms. Harriet P. Schleifer, President of the American Jewish Committee, for contributing the heartfelt foreword to this book.

I am also grateful to a group of French friends of mine who have taken an interest in my research activities and rendered moral support to me during these past years.

And for the most important job of translating this book from Japanese into English, my sincerest thanks to Kuniko Katz, and editor Donna Ratajczak. Without their teamwork, the English version would not have been published.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my wife Fumiko for allowing me to devote much time to writing.

# Introduction

This year marks exactly ten years since I went to the United States to begin work on my previous book, *Visas of Life and the Epic Journey: How the Sugihara Survivors Reached Japan*, which was published by Kotsu Shimbunsha in June 2012.

On August 29, 2010, I flew out of Narita Airport knowing that I would be able to meet some of the people who were said to have been saved by Sugihara visas. I was excited, but also anxious that I might not get the results I hoped for. In any case, I was determined not to turn back.

The people I interviewed during my three-week trip to Houston, Boston, New York, Washington, DC, and Chicago impressed me strongly, as might be expected of survivors of the unthinkable cruelties of the Holocaust. Fortunately, my book about these people was unexpectedly well received in Japan.

My focus on what happened to the Jewish people who obtained the Sugihara visas and how Japanese people helped their escapes seemed to be why the book was highly reviewed.

With the encouragement of others, I published an English translation of the book in June 2014. This version was accessible to a broader audience. As a result, I have now given more than a dozen lectures in various cities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Lithuania.

In the process, however, a change in my thinking occurred. I had been in awe of the courageous actions of Mr. Chiune Sugihara, but as I continued my research and inquiries, I began to realize that there were other diplomats, both Japanese and foreign, who had worked to save Jews.

It is now said among experts that without the cooperation and goodwill of those people, the escape of these Jews from Europe would not have been possible.

I believe that unless we focus on this point, the story of Mr. Sugihara's "visas for life" will not be properly passed on to future generations.

Objectively speaking, it is undeniable that the way Mr. Sugihara has been portrayed in Japan to date has tended to overly heroize him. Now that international research on Sugihara is progressing, I believe that a broader perspective is necessary.

It would be my great pleasure if this book helps its readers to expand their understanding of the history of the Holocaust.

This book is divided into two main parts: chapters 1 to 3 are sequels to the previous book, and chapters 4 to 8 are introductions to diplomats other than Sugihara who also saved Jewish refugees. In addition, the English version includes an extra chapter summarizing the results of my recent research into details of the Sugihara list—the official list of recipients of transit visas issued by Chiune Sugihara. Because the first half of the book is a sequel, I must warn those who have read my previous book on this topic that some information has been repeated in these chapters.

**Akira Kitade**

## Encounter with an Album

Photos of seven faces in an old album ... I could never have imagined that an ordinary object would hold so much drama.

It was more than twenty years ago, in May 1998, when I visited my former boss to report that I had returned home after five years of overseas service.

The report was a formality. But there was something else I wanted to discuss. After a perfunctory greeting, I began.

“Mr. Osako, I was surprised to learn that at the beginning of World War II, you were in charge of transporting Jewish refugees who were fleeing Europe to escape Nazi persecution. Could you tell me about that time?”

Mr. Tatsuo Osako joined the Japan Tourist Bureau, the predecessor of today's JTB, in 1938. After the chaotic war and postwar periods, he was transferred to the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) in 1966, at the beginning of the country's rapid economic growth. At the same time, I graduated from university and joined JNTO, and became his subordinate.

Mr. Osako said modestly, “Oh, you mean *that time*. If that's the case, here are some photos from then. Take a look.”

What he offered me was an old album.

Most of the photos were in sepia tones. There were five or six pages of meticulously arranged photos of Mr. Osako's time at sea. On one of the pages were photos of seven people's faces. One man, six women. Some showed a lonely expression, some a dark and stern gaze, and one wore a faint smile. Each face seemed to tell a story. The portraits were shockingly moving.

*How could they have been preserved for nearly sixty years?*

Mr. Osako's story went roughly as follows:

Around the first half of 1940, the Japan Tourist Bureau began to support the escape of European Jews to the United States at the request of an American Jewish organization. The route was to take the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok and go to Tsuruga in Fukui Prefecture on a Japanese ship (the *Amakusa Maru*, 2,346 tons). This long journey was the last escape route left for Jewish refugees because most of Europe had been overrun by Nazi Germany.



Seven photographs taken around 1940

Mr. Osako was assigned the task of conveying the refugees by sea between Vladivostok and Tsuruga. His task continued from the end of 1940 to the spring of 1941, during the harshest time of winter in the Sea of Japan.



Mr. Osako (left) with a female refugee passenger

“The wind and waves were so fierce we were afraid we would sink.” Mr. Osako continued, “I don’t know how we made it back alive. Most of the passengers on the ship were dressed in shabby clothes and had downcast eyes, giving off the sadness of wandering people who were forced to leave their homeland. I’ve never been so glad that I was born Japanese as I was then.”