

Refugees in Lithuania and Chiune Sugihara in 1939-1940

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In Lithuania, the number of commemorative sites for Chiune Sugihara is growing every year. Sugihara is well known figure, especially in Kaunas and Vilnius, two largest cities of Lithuania. The reason he is well-recognized there is also widely known in Japan. Does it allow us to speak about memorializing links between Japan and Lithuania? Is there any opportunity to manage academic activity in the field of memory? In this case, we have to research historical, cultural and communicating memories of him. But first of all, we have to find out what was going on in 1940 to answer very important questions. During the first weeks of World War II, while the German–Polish front line was moving to the East, thousands of people were moving towards unoccupied regions. The refugees might be described as a different huge mass, the absolute majority of which was Polish and Jewish refugees. The civilian refugees and internees came to Lithuania escaping from the war and there was no free will for such a decision, except a natural survival instinct. The archival sources provide information that some of Polish underground organizations had very close connections with foreign embassies and consulates. The underground network covered Warsaw, Berlin, Stockholm, Paris, London, and Tokyo. Meanwhile, after June 15, 1940, the situation changed drastically. When the Jewish refugees fell under the Soviets influence for the second time they had an interest in leaving Lithuania which was being annexed. The Jewish refugees began to seek for alternative ways of leaving Lithuania which was losing its independence. Foreign diplomat in Lithuania-Japanese plenipotentiary consul Sugihara was the rescuer who helped Jewish refugees leave Lithuania. Despite the fact that many years have passed away since the summer of 1940, there are still too many unanswered questions. The precise circumstances of connection between Polish underground and Japanese consulate are still unknown. What about as-yet-unknown role of links between refugees, foreign embassies in Kaunas and countries, from which the Jewish refugees tried to escape in the summer of 1940? The answers are brick materials for creating a building of memory, and enables us to speak about the links between Japan and Lithuania.