

The Myth of the Manchukuo Schindler: Lieutenant General Kiichiro Higuchi



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I have written a series of articles regarding the history of what I've come to term '*the Other Schindler's*' before and during the Second World War who allegedly '*saved*' jews from the '*Holocaust*' that allegedly occurred from 1942 to mid-1945.

What is interesting is that – as Israeli academic historian Rotem Kowner has pointed out several times in recent years – (1) the role of these '*Other Schindler's*' is extremely inconsistent and the standard applied to make them '*Righteous Among the Nations*' by Yad Vashem (2) similarly inconsistent as well as often poorly investigated.

Further he documents – much to the official chagrin and displeasure of Yad Vashem I might add – (3) that these '*Righteous Among the Nations*' awards are actually used by Israel as a form of diplomacy to warm up relations with other countries and not because of their own historical merit as claims and involve significant amounts of political jockeying and trading of favours inside Israel to achieve.

One such example that Kowner has documented in detail with fellow jewish historian Joshua Fogel is the case of the Manchukuo Schindler: Lieutenant General Kiichiro Higuchi.

The historical claim made by proponents of Higuchi as a member of the '*Righteous Among the Nations*' is that:

Though far lesser known than Sugihara, efforts to attract attention to Higuchi have received mild success: through a manga series, media reports, and other commemoration efforts, such as a statue in his hometown of Awajishima. The Japanese embassy in Israel has reportedly been in discussions with Yad Vashem since 2005 about Higuchi's Righteous Among the Nations status, but efforts have been unsuccessful.' (4)

The Sugihara mentioned is Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat in Kovno, Lithuania between October 1939 and September 1940; who I have discussed in a previous article (5) and Kowner happily shares my scepticism about the official Israeli and Japanese claims regarding Sugihara's '*efforts to save the jews*'. (6)

The Higuchi story is similar to many '*Other Schindler*' stories in that it makes a large claim about Higuchi's saving '*thousands*' of jews from the Third Reich in this case by letting them cross from the Soviet Union into Japan's puppet state in north-east China of Manchukuo in 1937-1938.

The narrative seems solid until you realise that there is no actual documentary evidence for '*thousands*' of jews being allowed into Manchukuo from the Soviet Union by Higuchi in 1937-1938.

All Dylan Hallingstad O'Brien of the University of California, San Diego could uncover was '*at least*' 18 cases where jews had been allowed to cross from the Soviet Union into Manchukuo by Higuchi in 1937-1938. (7)

Kowner and Fogel have followed up Hallingstad O'Brien's research and documented that despite Higuchi's alleged actions being '*extolled in dozens of articles appearing in national newspapers and in the foreign press, in magazines, books, documentary films, and even a manga series currently in print.*' (8)

They document how the origin of the story appears to be Higuchi himself after 1945 in order to paint himself in a more favourable light and avoid/lessen his punishment for '*war crimes*' committed as part of the Imperial Japanese Army and head of the Special Branch of military intelligence in Harbin at the post-war Tokyo trials:

'In this capacity, the story goes, Higuchi was informed of a large number of German Jewish refugees stuck in the freezing border Soviet town of Otpor (present-day Zabaykalsk) situated

opposite the Manchurian town of Manzhouli. There were “about 20,000 of them,” he wrote. Escaping persecution by the Nazi regime, they crossed Siberia by trains at the peak of the winter of 1937-38, seeking to enter the safe haven of Manchukuo. “It was clear that if these refugees were left alone,” Higuchi recalled years later, “it would become a matter of life and death.” With this sense of urgency, he resolved to help them and discussed the matter with the chief of the Harbin delegation of the Manchukuo Foreign Affairs Office. When permission arrived, Higuchi provided the refugees with trains and food, and so “saved their lives.” (9)

The problem with this aside from the fact that our only source for this story is Higuchi himself is that:

‘There is not a single person who ever testified to having been stranded in Otpor and entering Manchukuo due to Higuchi’s intervention. Likewise, there are no official Japanese documents that mention the arrival of this group of refugees during the time Higuchi served in Harbin.’ (10)

Indeed as Kowner and Fogel point out the Higuchi claim simply makes no sense given that the numbers involved would mean that most if not all of jews who fled the Third Reich for the Far East – this in itself is misleading since most of the jews who ‘fled’ to the Far East only used it as a transit point to immigrant to the Australia, New Zealand and the United States and for the majority it appears it was never intended to be anything other than that – were saved by Higuchi’s actions but also that the timeline is off in that this jewish emigration really only occurred after Kristallnacht in November 1938.

Since as they rightly observe:

‘The second gap involves the historical facts about the Jewish flight to East Asia and its scale. Overall, some 20,000 Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria, and Poland did seek safe haven in East Asia, but the vast majority of them arrived while boarding ocean liners in Italy. Moreover, most of them did so after the Nazi pogrom – “Kristallnacht” – in November 1938 and at least eight months after the episode described by Higuchi. There are some indications that a few dozen Jews reached the Manchurian border by land in 1938. Nonetheless, they did not face any risk to their lives at the time, nor was any official policy in force to prevent them from crossing into Manchukuo territory.’ (11)

I'd also like to call attention to the last sentence of Kowner and Fogel's point here in that *'they did not face any risk to their lives at the time'* in that it is common to claim that the Soviet Union under Stalin – which was incidentally in the middle of the purges of the 1930s – was not a friend of jews which is simply untrue due to the massive overrepresentation of jews in the Soviet Union as well as the Soviet Union's own *'jewish national homeland'* project of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Siberia (aka Birobidzhan) near the Russo-Chinese border.

The simple fact is that the jews fled from the Third Reich through the jew-friendly Soviet Union – where they were broadly speaking quite safe – and that there wouldn't have been any need to either leave the Soviet Union nor would there have been any real issues with them doing so precisely because in order to leave in the first place they would have had to have had an entry clearance visa for their country of destination which would have been issued by Japanese diplomats like Sugihara in Kovno, Lithuania.

Kowner and Fogel's point is simply enough and validates Hallingstad O'Brien's research that only a few jews crossed this way and it also makes sense in the context I have added above where-in a scenario where thousands of jews didn't have entry visas for Japanese territory is almost unthinkable given how travel documentation worked in the 1930s and a couple dozen unusual cases makes far, far more sense.

Indeed, as I've pointed out as is the case with numerous *'Other Schindler's'* – including Sugihara – (12) the reality is that at best Higuchi was just an official doing his job not going out of his way to *'help'* anyone in particular because this alleged event occurred four to five years before the so-called *'Holocaust'* even officially began according to the orthodox narrative.

So, the idea that that Higuchi is a *'Holocaust rescuer'* is just ludicrous to begin with.

Kowner and Fogel summarise their point (and also agree with my own contentions above) as follows:

'In retrospect, Higuchi's involvement in this episode, if it indeed occurred, was no more than a clerical approval for the passage of a small group of refugees some 18 months before the outbreak of the war in Europe. It was certainly not a matter of life and death. If refused, the

refugees could have continued to Vladivostok and then headed by sea to Shanghai, a war-torn city that did not require visas for entry, the only such port in the world at the time.’ (13)

In essence the Higuchi story is clearly absolute nonsense and made up in addition to the historical framing being wrong because – as Kowner and Fogel rightly point out – the jews involved could simply have gone on to Shanghai without a visa from Vladivostok!

The origins of the Higuchi story itself as a piece of self-justifying public relations propaganda are also something Kowner and Fogel cover since Harbin – the city where Higuchi was stationed and headed up the Special Branch of Japanese military intelligence there – was one of the major jewish centres of the Far East and Japanese occupation policy was to set ethnic groups against each other in order to insure the civic stability of the occupied region/city.

As they explain:

‘One way in which Japanese authorities exerted control over the local population was by turning its ethnic groups against each other, especially the White Russian community against the Jews. In one notorious case, in which the son of a local Jewish hotel owner was kidnapped and murdered, its echoes reached the League of Nations.

In the aftermath of this murder, the Japanese authorities temporarily stopped their maltreatment of local people. Higuchi seemed particularly positive towards the Harbin community and soon became involved in launching the first Far Eastern Jewish Congress in December 1937. Whatever he personally felt about them, the motives he represented – those of his government – were self-serving. While some believed the congress could attract foreign capital to Manchukuo, Japan’s primary aim was avoiding rupture with the United States. As historian Naoki Maruyama points out, this was Japan playing the “Jewish card”.’ (14)

In essence then we can already see that Higuchi likely wanted to excuse his involvement in encouraging White Russian pogroms against the jews in Harbin in the 1930s after 1945 and the story of Higuchi ‘rescuing’ thousands of jews in 1937-1938 by allowing them into Manchukuo clearly is meant to help spread the idea that Higuchi was a friend not the enemy of the jews given the Nuremberg trials and then the Tokyo trials.

Finally, Kowner and Fogel trace exactly where the fantasy concerning Higuchi’s ‘rescue’

of ‘thousands of jews’ in 1937-1938 comes from:

‘Against this backdrop, it is striking that the largest gap in the legend of General Higuchi lies between the harsh reality of the Jewish community in Harbin and this rescue fantasy. This gap explains why historians ignored this over-dramatized and inflated anecdote during the first two decades after it appeared in 1971. So how did this minor and obscure affair, of a small number of refugees entering Manchukuo, turn into a major epic? How is it that many now refer to Higuchi as the “Japanese Schindler,” alluding to Oskar Schindler, the German businessman honored in Steven Spielberg's award-winning film for having saved the lives of 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust?’

The current version of the Higuchi legend began when his grandson, retired musicology professor Ryuichi Higuchi, decided to salvage this story from oblivion. Nonetheless, the crucial turning point came somewhat later, when the late Hideaki Kase (1936–2022), a prolific diplomacy commentator and one of Japan’s leading historical revisionists, joined the fray. The two formed an association for the commemoration of Higuchi and brought the story to the media’s attention. The association quickly gathered many willing enthusiasts enchanted by the general’s goodwill. Kase also managed to recruit international backing by several American and Israeli Jews who were willing to lend support to the story, often without scrutinizing its credibility.’ (15)

Kowner and Fogel’s historical research then shows two things.

Firstly that many if not most of the ‘*Other Schindler*’ stories are ahistorical nonsense and are often based on removing their actions from the historical context that should be situated within and presented as paragons of moral virtue without serious examination of the historical claims or the timelines involved, which leads – as in the case of the ‘*Iranian Schindler*’ Abdol Hossein Sardari – (16) to some absolutely ludicrous historical claims that are based purely on unjustified assumptions that often contradict each other.

Secondly that jews are often willing to perjure themselves in supporting historical claims for their own benefit and simply don’t perform basic validation before they start promoting their historical claims.

We can only express our gratitude at the fine work Kowner and Fogel have done supported by Hallingstad O'Brien in exposing yet another 'Holocaust' related claim as an utterly self-serving hoax without any significant historical foundation.

Thank you for reading Semitic Controversies.

This post is public so feel free to share it.

References

(1) Rotem Kowner, 2017, 'Sugihara Chiune in Israel: A Delayed Reception', Deeds and Days, Vol. 67, p. 241; cf. Rotem Kowner, 2023, 'A Holocaust Paragon of Virtue's Rise to Fame', American Historical Review, Vol. 128, No. 1, pp. 31-63

(2) On the revealing logic behind the term 'Righteous Among the Nations' see my article: <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-meaning-of-righteous-among-the>

(3) For example: <https://unitedwithisrael.org/holocaust-hero-criticized-in-leading-history-journal/> also <https://jewishjournal.com/commentary/358716/holocaust-hero-attacked-in-leading-history-journal/>

(4) <https://jewishjournal.org/2023/07/19/researchers-say-japan-has-exaggerated-the-story-of-chiune-sugihara-the-japanese-schindler/>

(5) See my article: <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-chiune-sugihara>

(6) Cf. Kowner, 'A Holocaust Paragon', Op. Cit.

(7) <https://jewishjournal.org/2023/07/19/researchers-say-japan-has-exaggerated-the-story-of-chiune-sugihara-the-japanese-schindler/>

(8) Rotem Kowner and Joshua Fogel, 'Questionable Heroism', December 2022, Number 1 Shimbun (<https://www.fccj.or.jp/number-1-shimbun-article/questionable-heroism>)

(9) Ibid.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.

(12) See my articles: <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-chiune-sugihara>;
<https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-moritz-hochschild>; <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-the-brazilian-schindler>; <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-manuel-quezon-the-filipino>; <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-ho-feng-shan>

(13) Kowner, Fogel, Op. Cit.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Ibid.

(16) See my article: <https://karlradd14.substack.com/p/the-myth-of-the-iranian-schindler>



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