

Japan and Jewish Refugees (1940-1941)
— In the Weyland-Jakubowicz family's footprints —

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Abstract

During my six-month sabbatical in Australia in 2016, I was amazed and overjoyed to make the acquaintance of Maria Kamm, née Weyland, and Marcel Weyland. These nona- and octogenarian sister and brother of Polish-Jewish origin are former refugees who in 1941 briefly stayed in Kobe, Japan, travelling with their 'Sugihara visas', nowadays known around the world.

Together, Maria, Marcel, their parents, elder sister and brother-in-law Jakubowicz, all left Łódź at the very beginning of the German invasion in September 1939, reached Wilno, which was then in Poland and was soon to become Vilnius, Lithuania. They were granted their 'Sugihara visas' at the Japanese consulate in Kaunas in August 1940 and set out on their adventurous journey of escape to the Far East, via Siberia, in February 1941. The Japanese steamship *Amakusa-maru* took two nights to take them from Vladivostok to Tsuruga, Fukui Prefecture. From there, the 'Jew Com Kobe' operated by Russian Jewish immigrants administrated their precarious status as refugees in Japan on the eve of Pearl Harbor.

Based on Maria's personal account, Marcel's autobiography *The Boy on the Tricycle* (2015) and testimony provided by their nephew Andrew Jakubowicz (professor at the University of Technology Sydney), this historical reconstruction also uses Japanese archival documents (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives, local newspapers, Kobe City archives).

Within the limitations of the article's length, this initial study concludes with the Weyland-Jakubowicz's move to Shanghai, China, in September 1941, however, subsequent works will complete the account of this incredible family saga.