

5 ユダヤ難民を救おう 樋口の決断

1938年(昭和13年)3月10日、樋口のもとに重大事件の一報がもたらされました。満州国満州里と国境を接した連領オトポールに、ナチスのユダヤ人迫害から逃れてきた約2万人(諸説あり)のユダヤ難民が、吹雪の中で立ち往生しているということです。

これらのユダヤ人は、満州国に助けを求めるためにシベリア鉄道を貨車で揺られてきたのですが、満州国が入国を拒否したため、進むことも退くこともできない状態でした。

食料は既につき、飢餓と寒さのために凍死者が続出し危険な状態にさらされているということです。

当時のソ連政府は、ユダヤ難民に通過ビザは発給するがソ連領内にとどまることを拒否していました。こうなると、難民の入国先は満州国しかなかったのです。

カウフマンは直ちに樋口のもとを訪れ、同胞の窮状を訴えました。

しかし満州国外務部を飛び越えて独断でユダヤ人を受け入れるのは職務権限の逸脱であり、下手に動けばヒトラーからの横槍が入り、関東軍からにらまれるという状況でした。

樋口はこの緊急事態に、天皇陛下なら人道主義の道を取るだろうと考えました。保身と怠慢のために、助けを求める多くの人間を見殺しにしたら、それこそ世界に恥をさらす。

困っている人を助けることこそ、日本の武士道だ。

「カウフマン博士、難民の件は私が引き受けました。博士は難民の受け入れの準備にかかってください。食料と衣服をすぐに」。

力強い樋口の言葉にカウフマンは感極まり声を上げて泣きました。

5. Higuchi's decision to save Jewish refugees

On March 10, 1938, Higuchi received the first report that approximately 20,000 Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution were stranded in a blizzard in Otpor on the Soviet border with Manzhouli, Manchukuo (there are various theories regarding the number of those Jews).

These Jews had arrived there by freight train on the Trans-Siberian Railway to seek entry into Manchukuo but were stranded because Manchukuo refused their entry. Having run out of food in the extreme cold, they were on the verge of freezing to death.

The Soviet government at the time issued transit visas to Jewish refugees but did not allow them to remain in their territory, leaving those refugees no other option than to seek entry into Manchukuo. Dr. Kaufman forthwith visited Higuchi and appealed for assistance in easing the plight of his brethren.

However, for Higuchi to bypass the Manchukuo Foreign Ministry to receive the Jewish refugees was above and beyond his scope of responsibilities. If he took the wrong approach, he would be interrupted by Hitler and incur the displeasure of the Kwantung Army (the Japanese Army unit stationed in Manchukuo). Thinking that the Emperor of Japan would take a humanitarian approach toward the refugees, he concluded that it would be a shame for his country if all those seeking help were left to die just to protect himself or out of his negligence. Helping those in need is the manifestation of the Bushido samurai spirit, he told himself.

“Dr. Kaufman, you can leave the refugee issue to me. I'll deal with it. Please start preparations to host them right away; arrange food and clothes for them,” said Higuchi. His powerful words overwhelmed Dr. Kaufman, causing him to cry in front of Higuchi.