Jews in Japan until 1945
A Case Study of Eidelberg and Shillony’s Research on Setsuzô Kotsuji

Abstract

The relations between the Jewish and Japanese nations have never had top priority in Japanese government policy. This may be because Jewish people have been treated at the same level as all other foreigners from Western countries. Nevertheless, one can find different theories relating the Japanese and Jewish people. First of all, worth mentioning is the theory that the legend of the lost tribe of Israel represents the beginnings of the Japanese nation. This was promoted among others by Yoshiro Saeki, a professor at Waseda University, and is described in the first part of this paper. The first meeting with members of the Jewish nation in Japan came in the 19th and 20th centuries. They were usually merchants or professionals who took part in the Western-inspired modernization of Japan. Some of them will be introduced in this article. Judaism was never popular in Japan, and moreover was often mistaken with Christianity. The first convert was Setsuzô Kotsuji, and an analysis of his life and activity, based on his book, will be published in the third part of this article. The last problem undertaken in this paper will be anti-Semitism, which should be mentioned mainly because of Japanese relations with Nazi Germany in the 1930s. We can observe that Japanese government did not follow German leads on Jewish policy, but anti-Semitic threads can be found in Japanese history. The main aim of this article is to prove that Japanese people rarely distinguished Jewish from other foreigners or treated them in a specific way. The cases mentioned above will describe the situation in prewar Japan with a few references to the situation in World War II.

Keywords: Japan, Jews, anti-Semitism, Israel, Kotsuji.

The legend of the lost tribe of Israel

One historical mystery that will forever remain unexplained is that of the ten tribes of Israel, as described in the Old Testament. The event, which has been dated to 722 BC, is presented in the Bible as follows:

“Then in the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes”. ¹

The ancient tribes of Israel, derived from the sons of Jacob in the Bible, ceased to exist after the aforementioned attack and the subsequent destruction of the Kingdom

of Israel. Nobody knows what happened to them. One can assume that some of them perished in the desert sands or settled in Asia. It is only known that if any of the tribes survived, their descendants must now live far away from the country of their ancestors.² Looking for descendants of the Kingdom of Israel, some researchers involved in this issue have stated that the Japanese are the lost tribe, and to prove it, both Japanese and Western scientists have attempted to present plenty of evidence.³

As mentioned above, there is no evidence that the tenth tribe survived and settled somewhere permanently. At the same time, it is difficult for researchers to determine on what basis they would distinguish such a tribe from the rest of the representatives of the native inhabitants. Due to the fact that the potentially existing descendants of the Israelites certainly do not profess a religion similar to Judaism, and do not speak the language of their ancestors, research on this issue is very complicated.⁴

In this section the research on the lost tribe of Israel conducted by Ben A. Shillony and Joseph Eidelberg are introduced. In his book, *Collected Writings of Ben Ami Schillony*, in the chapter ‘The Legend of the Japanese as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel’, the author presents the observations of scientists who assumed the existence in Japan of the descendants of the tenth tribe of Israel.⁵

In 1879, a Scotsman, Norman McLeod, who lived in Japan for twelve years, published a book in Nagasaki entitled *Japan and the Lost Tribes of Israel*, based entirely on his own research and observations. To support his theory, McLeod wrote that many Jewish faces are very similar to those noticed in Japan; that the young Prince Fushimi Sadanaru had the most similar appearance to a typical Israelite; and that the emperor Mutsuhito (1852–1912) was characterized by a remarkable similarity to representatives of the major Jewish family von Epstein living in Warsaw and St. Petersburg.⁶

McLeod made a comparison of Shintō shrines and synagogues, as well as comparing cult objects such as the mikoshi portable shrine with the Ark of the Covenant. Another researcher listed by Shillony was Yoshiro Saeki, a professor at Waseda University, working at the beginning of the 20th century. He published a book apparently confirming the theory of McLeod. Saeki presents a theory – described in *Nihonshoki* (The Chronicles of Japan) – about the Hata clan, which arrived from Korea in the 3rd century, claiming that it was composed of the descendants of a Jewish tribe. According to Saeki, the Kōryūji temple, also bearing the name Uzumasadera, written in the same character as the name of the abovementioned

⁴ Ibid., p. 20.
⁶ Hiroshi Matsuura, *Yudaya inbōsetsu no shōtai* [Identity of the Jewish conspiracy], Chikuma Shobō, Tōkyō 1999, p. 90.
clan, was built to pay tribute to King David. Moreover, the author argues that the characters used to write the name of the object – read as Daiheiki – are used in Chinese as an equivalent to the name of David. He also noted that this temple is sometimes called Izaryo, which according to Saeki is a reference to the name of Israel. This researcher has contributed significantly to the spread of the theory of Nichi-Yu dōsōrōn, the common origin of the Jews and the Japanese.  

At the same time similar studies began to be carried out by the Jewish side. Shillony mentions the magazine Israel’s Messenger published in Shanghai, where an article titled ‘Japanese Jews’ was published. In this article, similarities between the Japanese eta and followers of Judaism were shown. It was mentioned that the eta were similar to Jews, who due to their hard work and discrimination, were forced to inhabit ghettos. The article resorted to even bolder statements about the appearance of the women from the burakumin group as being typically Semitic. In this publication, we can find a comparison of Jewish customs and eta, saying that the Sabbath is celebrated in a very religious way in the Nagasaki ghetto, and that the inhabitants of the ghetto neither work nor light fires, similarly to orthodox Jews.  

On October 6, 1922, the same newspaper published a letter from a Japanese inhabitant of Manchuria addressed to the Jewish population, where it was written that Japan was part of the Kingdom of Israel and both nations had been chosen by God, and the imperial family in which authority resides was an eternal example of the connections between the mentioned countries.  

These issues were also discussed by Dr. Zenichirō Oyabe from Yale University, who was also a Christian pastor. He was the author of Nihon oyobi Nihon kokumin no kigen [The roots of Japan and the Japanese people], in which he presented the theory of the origin of the Japanese people from the Israeli Gad and Menashe families. According to the author, the Japanese word mikado (emperor) is made up of two words: the honorific prefix mi and gaddo, that is, the Japanese pronunciation of the name of Gad. According to Oyabe, this is sufficient evidence that the Japanese population belongs to the nation of Israel.  

Moreover Joseph Eidelberg, researching the aforementioned Nihonshoki, the Japanese chronicles from 712, observed many similarities between the history of ancient Japan and Israel. According to Eidelberg, because nobody knows whence the people of Yamato came to Japan, or who established the foundation of the

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8 Eta (御多) or burakumin (部落民) – the lowest social class in Japan, dealing with the implementation of the most ‘unclean’ or ritually dirty professions, such as undertakers and butchers.  
9 Shillony, The Legend…  
10 Ibid., p. 311.  
11 Ibidem.  
12 Yamato minzoku (Yamato people) – Tenson minzoku (Tenson people) – a 19th-century term to describe the indigenous people of the Japanese islands. This name comes from the state called
modern state of Japan, and because all information about their origins were lost during wars, it is unlikely that the ancestors of Japanese came from Israelis who came from Assyria.\textsuperscript{13} As an example, he gives a fragment derived from the \textit{Nihonshoki} talking about a people called Tenson who were descendants of the gods, and received from them possession of the land on which they settled.\textsuperscript{14} Eidelberg compares this passage to the Book of Deuteronomy, where we can find the sentence: “You are the sons of the \textsc{Lord} your \textsc{God}”.\textsuperscript{15} He concludes that the Tenson people are in fact the Israelites who went out in search of the land promised to them by God.\textsuperscript{16} Likewise the word Yevushi, (the people with whom the Israelites fought) – translated in Japanese as \textit{ebusu} – is, according to Eidelberg, very much like the word \textit{emishi}, which is the name of the tribe with which the Yamato people fought.\textsuperscript{17}

Some researchers, examining the question of the origins of Japanese people, found the symbol of Judaism – the Star of David – in Shinto shrines. It can be seen in the streets near the Shrine of Ise, as well as in the vicinity of Kyoto, on a board placed in the Shrine of Manai. Eidenberg also mentions the Shrine of Ise in his book\textsuperscript{18}, this time in the context of its similarity to the Temple of Solomon. This Japanese temple was built at the behest of Emperor Suinin (30 BC–70 AD), the son of Emperor Sujin (97 BC–29 BC).\textsuperscript{19} as Solomon, the son of David, constructed the Jewish temple , to commemorate his father, saying: “I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees”.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly Suinin was to say that he had commanded all countries to make ponds and channels, and their number was eight hundred.\textsuperscript{21}

Another example given by Eidelberg is Solomon’s dream in which God says to him: “And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days”.\textsuperscript{22} In the dream, God indicates “my way, that is, the way of God, in \textsc{Shinto}\textsuperscript{23}, the traditional Japanese religion.\textsuperscript{24} The same similarities are highlighted by Kaoru Nakamaru, a researcher at the University of

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\textsuperscript{13} Eidelberg, \textit{Nihonshoki}…, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ise jingu} – a Shinto temple dedicated to the goddess Amaterasu, which is located in the town of Ise in Mie prefecture.
\textsuperscript{19} Eidelberg, \textit{Nihonshoki}…, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{21} Eidelberg, \textit{Nihonshoki}…, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{22} Kings 3:14, in the Bible, \url{http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Kings+3&version=ESV} (accessed 26.06.2013).
\textsuperscript{23} \textsc{Shintoism} – a polytheistic religion, derived from Japanese mythology.
\textsuperscript{24} Eidelberg, \textit{Nihonshoki}…
Columbia, the daughter of Tatsukichirō Horikawa, the alleged son of Emperor Meiji and his lady-in-waiting Chikua Kotoko, as well as by Marvin Tokayer.

Linguists were intrigued by the similarity of Japanese and Hebrew. Joseph Eidelberg focused on an exploration of the common features of these two languages. Taking as a starting point the dance of the two gods Izanagi and Izanami, as described in the Kojiki, he drew attention to the words spoken at that time, namely ‘Ananiyashi’, which in Japanese is meaningless. However, if we compare this word with the Hebrew or Arabic Ana-nisa, it means “we are getting married”.

In the 20th century studies were published with stories about Japanese who were descendants of Israelites. A Tenth Tribe of Israel Research Association (Isuraeru Jubuzoku Kenkyūkai) was even established by Yutaka Koishi. Some of these stories or histories certainly deserve attention, but there is no lack of fantasy among them. A reason for taking this kind of research seriously, according to Shillony, could be the curiosity of the Japanese towards their origin, as well as a desire to identify with Western Christians by those who have changed their birth religion to a Christian denomination.

Jews who came to Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries

Due to the closure of Japan, foreigners, including Jews, were unable to reach the islands. But Japan before the Meiji period was never of interest to Jewish settlers, because of the distance, as well as the fact that it was not a rich country. For this reason a word for Japan did not exist in Hebrew, even if there were definitions for India (Hodu) or China (Sin). The existing Hebrew name of Japan was taken from the German language. It emerged from the common usage of Yiddish, a language formed in the 10th century in southern Germany and derived from the Middle High German dialect (Mittelhochdeutsch), and used by Jews from Europe who settled in Israel.

There is some speculation that the first meeting of Japanese and Jews could have occurred in the 8th century in Changan, the Chinese capital during the Tang dynasty (618–907). Japanese Buddhist monks residing in this city could have come into contact with Jewish merchants trading silk. Such statements are, however, only speculation, because we cannot find references to this subject in any documents.

25 A lady-in-waiting of higher rank, the mother of children acknowledged by the emperor: Shigenomiya Akiko and Masunomiya Fumiko.
26 Eidelberg, Nihonshoki…, p. 50.
27 Ibidem.
28 B. A. Shillony, The Legend of…, p. 313.
29 Ibidem.
It is most likely that the first Jews who arrived on the territory of Japan were citizens of Portugal, who came to the islands as traders and missionaries in the 16th century. Due to the policy of the Portuguese authorities from the end of the 15th century, Jews living in this country were forced to convert to Christianity or leave. Some of them decided to settle in European countries or the newly discovered lands, while others practiced the religion of their ancestors in secret.33

One Portuguese who came to Japan was Frenão Mendes Pinto, a merchant and traveler, who probably came from the Jewish Mendes family.34 Likewise, it is presumed that the doctor Luis de Almeida, who arrived from Portugal, was a marrano.35 Also among the members of the Jesuit order, founded in 1540, there was a few converts at the beginning, so the members of the Society of Jesus included people of Jewish descent in its ranks.36 About a quarter of the shares of the Dutch East India Company, which engaged in trade with Japan, were held by the Jews.37 A description of the situation in which the representatives of the company resided in Japan can be found in A Theologico-Political Treatise, and a Political Treatise by Benedictus de Spinoza, a Dutch philosopher of Jewish descent:

“(…) those who live in a country where the Christian religion is forbidden, are bound to abstain from such rites, and cannot live in a state of blessedness. We have an example of this in Japan, where the Christian religion is forbidden, and the Dutch who live there are enjoined by their East India Company not to practice any outward rites of religion”.38

On 1 May 1846, Bernard Jean Bettelheim, an Austro-Hungarian missionary from a Jewish family who had converted to Christianity, arrived on board the British ship Starling to the Ryūkyū archipelago.39 The purpose of the mission was the promotion and use of Western medicine.40 During his stay in Okinawa, Bettelheim translated passages of the Bible into Japanese.41

Another person associated with the Jewish nation was Laurence Oliphant, the originator of the idea to establish a place of settlement for the Jews in Palestine. He was secretary to Lord Elgin (James Bruce), who signed a treaty of friendship and commerce with the Japanese.42

34 Marranos were Jews forced to convert to Christianity in medieval Spain and Portugal, yet who secretly continued to practice Judaism.
35 Shillony, The Jews…
36 Ibidem.
37 Ibid., p. 305.
38 Benedictus de Spinoza, A Theologico-political Treatise, and a Political Treatise, New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005, p. 76.
40 Ibid., p. 281.
41 Shillony, The Jews…
42 Ibidem.
In 1887 the Japanese government invited a German historian, the 26-year-old Jew Ludwig Reiss, to form a Faculty of History at the Imperial University of Tokyo.\footnote{S. Conrad, ‘What Time is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography’, in *History and Theory*, Vol. 38, No. 1, February 1999, p. 67–83.} It was opened in the same year, and Reiss, lecturing at this faculty from 1887 until 1928, introduced Western research methods to Japanese historiography.\footnote{Shillony, *The Jews…*, p. 306.} Likewise, the newspaper *Shigaku zasshi* (‘Historical Journal’) which he co-founded two years later, promoted new forms of historical research.\footnote{Ibidem.}

Albert Mosse, a specialist in administrative law, was another Jewish person who worked with the Japanese government during the modernization of the country. In 1886 he arrived on the island, at the invitation of Itō Hirobumi after a previous meeting in Berlin.\footnote{Ibidem.} As a result of discussions on the constitution, Itō decided on the final shape and form of the newly created Japanese constitution.\footnote{Masanori Kakutani, *Conceptualising Education for Constitutional Monarchy System: Meiji Japan’s View and Approach*, http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/admin/pubFiles/21.GNH4.pdf (accessed 30.05.2009), p. 4.}

The first Jewish entrepreneur who settled in Japan along with other Western traders was Raphael Schoyer. He was a photographer, and the founder of the first English-language newspaper *The Japan Express*.\footnote{According to the author the title published by Scheuer was *The Japan Herald*.} In the same city, a French Jew, C. Levy, issued the first French-language newspaper *L’Echo du Japon* between 1870–1885.\footnote{Ibid., p. 304–305.}

In the 1860s, Yokohama had a population of fifty Jewish families from different countries.\footnote{Ibid.} In Nagasaki the Beth Israel Synagogue was opened, and its first supervisor was Leo Lessner, an Austrian Jew born in Romania.\footnote{Ibid.} At the beginning of the 20th century, the brothers Abraham and Moses Lury set up a company engaged in the supply of fish from Hokkaido, which was one of the more prosperous transport companies of that time.\footnote{Ibid., p. 307.}

On the other hand, the first Japanese who arrived on the territory of Palestine was «Pedro» Kibe Kasui, who stopped in Jerusalem on his way to Rome around 1620.\footnote{Ibid.} After two years of study, and being ordained at the Vatican, Kasui returned to Japan. As a result of his refusal to denounce the Christians he had hidden, he was put to death. In the 19th century, Jews residing on the territory of Japan possessed the passports of various Western countries, so it is very difficult to determine what the percentage of their population settled in Japan.
Setsuzō Kotsuji

The first Japanese who converted to Judaism was Setsuzō Kotsuji. Thanks to his recollections, described in the book *From Tokyo to Jerusalem*, we can learn about his life. This section will present Kotsuji’s life and his path to conversion, based on the information included in the aforementioned publication. ⁵⁴

Setsuzō Kotsuji was born on 3 February 1899 in Kyoto, in a family of priests. He grew up in the spirit of Shintō. His mother, Fukuko, was very intelligent but uneducated. His father, because of his function, was a respectable member of society. He was engaged in gardening, especially cultivating miniature trees, while being fluent in classical Chinese and serving as a priest in Kyoto. Setsuzō had two older brothers, Genjiro, ten years older, who exerted a great influence on his younger brother, and Kikunosuke, who later became an actor in the nō theater. His other older siblings included two sisters, Mitsu and Hisako, who both died tragically. The Kotsuji family’s origins date back to 678, when the temple in Kamo was opened. The family members appointed as priests received land near the shrine. It is not known exactly how this family moved to Kyoto, but it is certain that they served at a shrine in Ise. It is likely that the Emperor Kammu (737–806) moved to Kyoto in 794 and took priests from the lineage of Kotsuji with him. Despite not having great wealth, the family was respected because of its relationship with the imperial clan. For over a thousand years they remained in service of the emperor and the Temple of Kamo. Kotsuji described himself as a stubborn and moody child. From the age of five he attended the kindergarten, gradually getting used to life away from his parents. When the Japanese-Russian war broke out, Setsuzō’s father decided to give the youngest son the secrets of service in the temple, for fear of being drafted into the army. It was a very significant event in the life of the boy. Kotsuji learned all the rites and prayers, so that he could continue the family tradition.

Setsuzō’s first meeting with Jewish people took place during the war with Russia. During a walk he met Russian prisoners of war. One of them, named Kagan – the Russian equivalent of the name Cohen – was the first Jew whom Kotsuji had contact in his life.

As mentioned previously, Setsuzō’s eldest brother Genjiro had a considerable impact on him. He was a very diligent and intelligent man, and so he was a great role model for his younger brother. It was thanks to his influence that Setsuzō devoted himself to knowledge in the field of Biblical studies and the Talmud.

Kotsuji saw the Bible for the first time in an antique shop. He wrote:

“(…) even from my first reading of the Bible I was shaken deep to the bottom of my soul. My life was forever changed. Despite the similarities to Oriental thought and Shinto religion I found in the Bible, my acceptance of it involved a great revolution, not only in the mind of one Japanese boy, but more especially in the Kotsuji family”. ⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 64.
Despite their priestly tradition, Setsuzō’s parents showed remarkable understanding for the new passion of his son. When the young man decided to practice the new religion, he heard the following words from his mother: “You may go ahead with your new faith. Only remember your ancestors, to honor them, and be proud of your great heritage”. 56

When Kotsuji began to explore the new religion, Professor Hashimoto Senji, engaged in research on the Bible and Christian doctrine, came to have significant influence on him. As an adult, Setsuzō always regretted that his meeting with such a great man came at the time of his youthful rebellion, which did not allow him fully to take advantage of the knowledge the professor had. Most important for the young student was Hashimoto’s knowledge of the Old Testament, and his constant desire to help and support the faithful. The professor’s behavior had such a great influence on him, that Kotsuji wanted to work in a similar way during his later service.

At the age of 16 Setsuzō Kotsuji became a Christian. In his memoirs, however, he mentions that he was not completely ready to accept the new religion. At that time he already had doubts about the divinity of Jesus, which accompanied him all the time.

On 7 April 1916 Kotsuji left Kyoto for what would turn out to be a very long time. The first goal of his journey was Tokyo, where he devoted himself mainly to learning foreign languages such as Latin, German and Greek. At this time, he concluded as follows: “Jesus taught, ‘No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other.’ Jesus was a Jew, who believed in one all-powerful God, and yet Christianity has this dualism of Father and Son”. 57 Professor A. K. Reischauer, who was an intellectual authority for Kotsuji, responded to this statement thus: “You are right, Mr. Kotsuji. Theoretically Christianity is essentially a dualism. The gap cannot be bridged”. After this conversation Setsuzō understood that he now only believed in Jesus as a Jew proclaiming Christian doctrine. This event made him study the Old Testament, in which he found answers to many of his questions.

Kotsuji also moved to Ashikawa city in Hokkaido. In the spring of 1923, he became a pastor in the local church, with the aim of gathering the maximum amount of people to join the congregation. In the same year, in October, he married Mieko Iwane, a Christian he had met that summer. She supported her husband in his study of Holy Scripture as well as in time of doubt about the meaning of the work he performed. Setsuzō was becoming increasingly tired of his service, as the congregation were unwilling to accept the newly arrived members of the community.

In 1924, the U.S. government issued a new immigration law which limited the number of people that could settle in the U.S. to 2% of the number of immigrants from a given country residing in the U.S. in 1890. 58 The minimum quota, 100 people, concerned citizens of Japan. 59 Such a policy resulted in negative feelings among

56 Ibid., p. 67.
57 Ibid., p. 95.
58 Ibid., p. 108.
Japanese towards Christians, who at that time identified with the Americans. A more general anti-American sentiment was also observed on Hokkaido, which affected the situation in the church. At the same time Kotsuji moved to Gifu, which was a powerful center for Buddhism. He began working with people who sought support in religion, such as criminals or lepers. The lack of satisfactory assistance for them led to his decision to go to the United States to start studying Hebrew. One of the few pleasant memories remaining from his time at Gifu was the birth of his first daughter, Aiko.

Twenty-eight-year-old Setsuzō Kotsuji and his family were able to leave Japan with the help of his wife, who gained money for the journey by selling her kimonos. On 23 July 1927, he set off from Yokohama on board the Tenyo Maru to San Francisco. Then he went on a journey by sea to New York, arriving at their destination in September. It was the only time in Setsuzō’s life when he had to live apart from his wife and child, in a student residence. During this period, he focused on the study of Hebrew and Semitic languages. “I resolved then to steep myself in Hebrew for six solid hours every day. As I had other subjects to deal with, I had to study my Hebrew from eight at night until two in the morning. Since breakfast at the seminary was served at six sharp each morning, my regimen allowed me only four hours of sleep”.

At the same time he decided on private lessons on the Talmud, and attended a synagogue in Alburn, Massachusetts. The turning point was the visit to a Reform synagogue, when he encountered a janitor who decided to quiz Kotsuji on his knowledge of Hebrew. Setsuzō came through that test positively, and thus came into contact with American Jews. In the spring of 1931 years Kotsuji finished his research, presenting a paper on the sources and evolution of the Semitic alphabets. At the same time another daughter, Mary, was born and he was offered a post at the University of California. However, despite the insistence of his wife, he remained adamant in the decision to return to Japan. He returned to the country, as he admitted, more Jewish than Christian.

The knowledge and experience he gained in the West made it possible to return to his homeland. At the same time, Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo began searching for a teacher of the Old Testament and Semitic languages. Kotsuji accepted the offer and worked there as a teacher for two years. At that time, on 4 July 1932 his next daughter, Julie, was born. A year later, the family experienced a huge disaster, because the eldest daughter passed away of dysentery. Shortly after that, Setsuzō himself got typhus, but after his recovery, he began a series of lectures at the Biblical Association (Seisho Gakkai) in Ginza in October 1934. These classes were very popular among the students of the University of Tokyo. Also his Hebrew grammar, which was published in 1937, and the publication of his dissertation were very profitable.

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60 Kotsuji, From Tokyo…., p. 120.
61 Ibid., p. 122.
62 Ibid., p. 130.
At that time, Germany’s increasingly assertive Third Reich began to distribute anti-Semitic propaganda in Japan, using the organization of Seikei Gakkai\(^63\) (the Political-Economic Society); its chairman came to Kotsuji, regarded as an eminent expert on Jewish matters, to ask for cooperation. After giving a positive response, Setsuzô began to attend the society’s meetings. However, when it turned out that it had very anti-Semitic views, he resigned. In January 1939 the President of the South Manchurian Railway (Minami Manshū Tetsudō) unexpectedly invited Kotsuji to cooperate. This was Yōsuke Matsuoka, who later became a foreign minister, and after the war was named as a Class A war criminal. When Kotsuji did not initially agree to cooperate, Matsuoka suggested increasing remuneration for the researcher. After consulting his wife, Setsuzô finally agreed to the proposal, and on 14 October 1939 he came to Dairen.

In Manchuria Kotsuji was subordinated directly to Matsuoka. He earned respect among Jewish refugees during a conference between representatives of the Japanese nation and the Jewish community in Manchuria, who had been held there since 1937. The person responsible for the policy of the Japanese government towards this minority was Yasue Norihiro\(^64\), who organized these conferences. Kotsuji was asked to give a speech on behalf of the South Manchurian Railway during the Third Jewish Conference on the Far East, which took place at the end of December 1939.\(^65\) The fact that he spoke in Hebrew was very well received by the Jewish community, and made far-reaching cooperation with them easier.

When Yasue ordered Kotsuji to avoid contacts with the Jewish community, Kotsuji said that among Manchu Jews there is a lot if those, who could turn against General. Yasue, convinced by this argument, decided to send Kotsuji to Shanghai, while he acted as a defender of the Jewish minority in Manchuria until the end of his service.

In May 1940, a group of representatives of the Japanese government went to Shanghai to assess the situation of refugees arrived from Europe. Two months later Setsuzô Kotsuji returned with his family to settle in Kamakura in Japan. Upon learning of the large number of Jewish refugees who had come to Kobe, he begins to commute to a committee located in the city which brought together Jews living in areas controlled by the Japanese, to assist the newcomers.

At the same time Kotsuji continued publishing books on Jewish matters, even though such publications brought him the risk of arrest. In the fall of 1944, as the publisher supposed, the author was arrested by units of the kenpeitai (military police), and subjected to numerous interrogations. He was rescued by a friend he had met while living in Manchuria, Yoshinori Shirahama. Through his intercession Kotsuji

\(^{63}\) The association, which began operations in 1935, engaged in research on the Jewish problem, operating until the end of World War II.

\(^{64}\) An officer who played a key role in the Fugu Plan, in which Jews rescued from Europe were taken to the Japanese-controlled regions in Asia during World War II.

\(^{65}\) Kotsuji, From Tokyo..., p. 149.

was set free, and in June 1945 he left Kamakura for Harbin. At the same time, the city came under the control of the Soviets and return to Japan becomes impossible for the family. He was only able to return in July 1946.

For three consecutive years, due to the very difficult post-war situation in Japan, Kotsuji undertook various jobs, including those related to exports and imports of goods. At the same time he decided to formally convert from Christianity to Judaism, while desiring to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. That became possible after obtaining funds from Dr. Israel Ben-Zeev. After receiving a passport, on 8 August 1959, he went to Haneda Airport without telling his family and set out for Israel. There he visited the Sihikum Yoz’ei Sin district of Tel Aviv, inhabited by Jews who came from China and Manchuria, and participated in the opening of a new synagogue. On 9 September 1959 Kotsuji took an exam to the Beth-Din, the rabbinical court. After receiving a positive result, on 20 September 1959, he undergoes conversion, taking the name of Abraham ben Abraham, and after 47 years of searching for a religion, he achieved his goal, becoming the first Japanese who was a follower of Judaism. After returning to Japan he started activities to promote Jewish culture, and opened the Hebrew Culture Association of Japan (Nihon Heburai Bunka Kyōkai).

Anti-Semitism in Japan

Anti-Semitism as a hostility toward Jews as a religious or racial minority group often accompanied by social, economic, and political discrimination has not appeared in Japan on such a large scale as in 19th- and 20th-century Europe. On 27 September 1940 a tripartite agreement was signed between Germany, Italy and Japan, after the conclusion of which the Third Reich authorities encouraged the Japanese government to engage in anti-Jewish policy on its territory; however, it refused. Japan’s Foreign Minister Yōsuke Matsuoka said at that time that his country would never accept anti-Semitism, and that this was the view of the whole Japanese Empire. Matsuoka also added that if Germany ever asked Japan to exterminate Jews, Japan would rather break the alliance than undertake such an operation. The consequence of such policy of Japanese government was the settlement of Jews on territory occupied by Japan in Shanghai.

Similarly, the activities of the Japanese Consul Chiune Sugihara during World War II showed opposition towards Nazi efforts to exterminate the Jewish people. However, despite this pro-Jewish behavior by the Japanese government and its representatives, one cannot definitively conclude that there was no anti-Semitism in the country.

Anti-Semitism (rendered in Japanese as han yudaya shugi) appeared in Japan, together with the translation into Japanese and subsequent staging of Shakespeare’s play, The

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67 Ibid., p. 55–56.

68 During 1939–1940 in Kaunas, he gave assistance to Jews escaping mainly from the occupied territory of the Republic of Poland. For more on Sugihara, see O. Barbasiewicz, ‘Konsul Chiune Sugihara a polscy Żydzi w Kownie (1939–1940)’ [Consul Sugihara Chiune and the Polish Jews in Kaunas, Lithuania in 1939–1940], Sprawy Narodowościowe, Zeszyt 36, 2010).
Mercantile of Venice (Benisu no shōnin). The character of Shylock, promoting the stereotype of the Jew as exploiter, in contrast to the honest Christian, was used by European missionaries to promote anti-Semitism. A first fragment of the play translated into Japanese appeared in Minkan Zasshi in 1877, and in subsequent translations Inoue Tsutomu used the word *eta* to explain the concept of ‘Jew’ as the Jew Shylock. This play was first performed in Osaka in 1885 by Sōjūrō Nakamura. The Japanese appreciated the work of Shakespeare for its exceptional content and impact on people’s feelings, but the work also perpetuated the stereotype of the Jew in their consciousness.

Shakespeare’s work was not the only influence which shaped the image of the Jews in Japanese eyes. Also, the New Testament’s presentation of this nation as the murderers of Jesus, as promoted by missionaries in Christian schools, had an influence on the consciousness of young people.

Anti-Semitic texts appeared in Japan after World War I. They were a part of a global trend accusing the Jews of fomenting the outbreak of the revolution in Russia. The first Japanese studying Judaism and Jewish culture were officers who treated their learning about this knowledge as a part of their military experience. They were Norihiro Yasue, Koreshige Inuzuka, Kichirō Higuchi, Mizuho Maeda, and Nobutaka Shidoen, who were known to have studied *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Russians distributed this document by to convince readers that the Russian Revolution was a Jewish conspiracy. The first pamphlets containing the Japanese translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were issued in Vladivostok in 1919. From that time, articles and books on the subject started to appear in Japan, and theories about the Jewish conspiracy as the cause of the outbreak of the revolution began to reach more and more readers. Japanese ‘experts’ on Jewish affairs said that the world of finance and politics was ruled by the American and British Jews. To prove it, they gave the example of Jacob Schiff, a person recognized by the people associated with the world of bankers. In the 1920s and 30s there were articles with anti-Semitic content in the newspapers, including by Yasue:

“The Bolshevik Revolution is part of the Jewish plot. (...) Zionism seems to be the goal of the Jews, but they actually want to control the world’s (...) economy, politics and diplomacy (...). The Jewish plot must be destroyed by force (...) The Jews are responsible for American and European (...) control of the Chinese...”

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70 Ibidem.

71 Ibid., p. 333.

72 Ibidem.


75 Shillony, The Birth..., p. 333.

76 Kranzler, Japan..., p. 558.
Nationalist Government. (...) The Jews control the American press and thereby public opinion, turning it against Japan (...) they are responsible for the immorality of the Japanese youth”.77

In response to the spread of anti-Semitism in Japan, Shigenobu Ôkuma, the Japanese prime minister, wrote in a letter to his friend:

“Marx is certainly a great man. He is Jewish, of course, and coming from a nation that has been persecuted for two thousand years, his resentment is very deep. When a person is so filled with bitterness and discontent, his ideas reflect his feeling; these ideas are then taken up by a strong leader in order to create a despotic regime. Germany seems somehow or other to have escaped from Marxist despotism, but Russia has succumbed”.78

In 1921, a liberal law professor at the University of Tokyo, Sakuzô Yoshino, published an article in the June edition of Chûô Kôron in which he claimed that the Protocols were only a false and ‘pitiful’ document which was trying to spread false assertions about a Jewish conspiracy.79

Despite this situation, the false theories about the Jewish community did not affect the life of the Jewish minority living in Japan or in the areas under Japanese control. This was because the Japanese treated the Jews in the same way as they did the other foreigners residing in these areas. Moreover, even in Siberia, where there were specially ‘trained’ Japanese soldiers, the protection of Jewish settlements in the territories controlled by Japan was ensured.80 Furthermore, the U.S. Ambassador in Japan, Roland S. Morris, who performed this function from 1917 until 1920 and was also an admiral of the U.S. Navy who commanded the Asiatic Fleet, were Jews.

In 1922, Prince Iesato Tokugawa went on a diplomatic mission to Washington. When asked by a journalist about Japan’s policy towards Jews, he replied: “The number of Jews in Japan is comparatively small. We treat them the same as we treat all foreigners. We do not distinguish between them”.81 At that time, it was estimated that there were about 1000 Jews in Kobe, mostly businessmen from Iran, Iraq and Russia.82 In the same year, from November 17 to December 29, Albert Einstein visited Japan as a guest of the magazine Kaizô.83 He was received by the Prime Minister Tomosaburô Katô at Akasaka palace. The Japanese were aware that Einstein was a Jew; in Osaka Mainichi published on November 18, 1922 (translated by Ben Ami Shillony), we read:

“As Einstein is a Jew, Palestine is his ancestral homeland. He is not sure when he will return to Germany, because there exists now an anti-Semitic mood in the country.

77 Ibidem.
78 Shillony, The Birth...
80 Ibid., p. 334.
81 Ibidem.
82 Ibidem.
83 Ibidem.
The recent assassinations of the German-Jewish foreign minister Rathenau and of the German-Jewish journalist Maximilian Harden have made Germany an unsafe place for this scholar”.

It is worth mentioning that Japanese anti-Semitic writers treated Jews as geniuses whose gifts were due to evil powers. Among the people popularizing this theory was a Japanese Christian pastor, Shōgun Sakai. He accompanied Yasue Norihiro on a trip to Palestine in 1927. At that time they met Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, among others; they also became acquainted with the Jewish kibbutz system. Sakai began publishing his writings before going to Palestine. He published eight books in 1924 and another eight between 1928 and 1940. They included descriptions of Jews as the chosen nation, which is also a nation permeated by evil. For Sakai the Japanese were the descendants of Israelites, and the Emperor of Japan was the Messiah. The aim of Zionism according to Sakai was to integrate Israelites in Palestine, which would serve as an introduction to Japanese rule over the world.

In 1924, Yasue Norihiro translated the Protocols of the Elders of Zion under the pen name Ho Koshi. Ten years later, he published a book Yudaya no hitobito (The Jewish people), in which he denied the legend of the lost tribe of Israel in the context of the Japanese, while nevertheless examining the similarities between these two nations. He compared some of ancient Japanese and Jewish customs, and the similarity in the structure of families within those cultures. In this book he also referred to Jacob Schiff, who, according to Yasue, helped Japan during the Japanese-Russia war, not because of any fondness which he may have had towards this country, but only by a desire for revenge on the Russians because of the pogrom in Kishinev.

In 1936, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led to the creation of an institution called the Association of Research on Policy and International Economics (Kokusai Seikei Gakkai). Its task was to provide the government with reliable information about Jews. The institute issued a periodical called Kokusai Himitsu-Ryoku Kenkyū (Research on the secret force). The Protocols of the Elders of Zion were published in the first four numbers of the semi-annual publication. In 1940, the magazine changed its name to Yudaya Kenkyū (Jewish Studies) and its frequency of issue to once a month.

The increased anti-Semitic sentiment in the 1930s also reached Japan. In 1937 a translation of Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf appeared in Japanese. This marked the beginning of publications of pro-Nazi work such as Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts of Alfred Rosenberg. Also, some Japanese journalists promoted anti-Semitic sentiments
among the citizens of Japan. Especially active were the journalists of the *Mainichi Shim bun* newspaper, which glorified Nazi ideology and blamed Jews for causing wars.\(^{92}\) In 1938, under the auspices of the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, the *Mainichi Shim bun* organized an exhibition dedicated to ‘Great Germany’, as well as symposia and exhibitions on the relationship between Jews and Freemasons in 1942–1943. This propaganda activity in Japan was entirely funded by the German embassy.

In the nine years after 1926, there were 60 books and 80 articles on Jewish subjects published in Japan, most of which contained anti-Semitic content.\(^{93}\) In the decade from 1936 to the Japanese surrender in 1945, the number of books on this subject rose to 170, and of articles to 472.

### Conclusion

The relations between the Japanese and Jewish nations mainly arouse serious curiosity when considering Chiune Sugihara’s activity and the Japanese alliance with the Third Reich. Nevertheless, those events cannot be analyzed without the context of the prewar relations between Japan (i.e. Japanese government and society) and the Jewish people.

Even if the relation between Jews and Japanese was undertaken by serious researchers – among others Kaoru Nakamru, Marvin Tokayer or Ben Ami Shillony there are no considerable argumentation on this matter. We can find the Star of David sign even in the arms of some cities in Japan, in the lanterns or religious buildings but none of these can prove the origins of Japanese people.

Though the first convert to Judaism was Setsuzō Kotsuji, the Judaism in Japan developed and i.e. the Jewish Community of Kansai is a religiously very active place. Nevertheless among the board of directors there is no Japanese people. Tokyo’s community is also a very active organization, they provide Shabbat services mainly for those Jews who arrive to Tokyo from abroad.

The anti-semi movements in the pre-war Japan were nothing to complain about when we compare their range with a great help Jewish people received help in the Shanghai Ghetto or by obtaining visas from Chiune Sugihara in Kaunas.

We cannot say that Japanese society was unaware of the distinctions between Jewish people and other foreigners, or that it was the lack of an anti-Semitic policy by Japanese government which made Sugihara rescue many Jewish refugees during the Second World War. However, even if it is a minor problem, one cannot forget the anti-Semitic propaganda which was distributed in Japan, the activity of Jewish immigrants or those Japanese who decided to convert.

Nonetheless, those relations never contributed to negative Japanese-Israeli relations after World War II, and Japan was always considered as a country which disregarded the anti-Semitic policies which was implemented before the Second World War.

\(^{92}\) Ibid., p. 120.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., p. 335.