

The Abgaryan Family in Japan between the Two World Wars

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Diana Apcar (1859-1937), whose husband, Michael, was a descendant of the Abgaryan family from Isfahan, ran a mercantile house in Yokohama during 1910's and 1920's. At the same time, she published brochures on the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century and did humanitarian activities for Armenian refugees from Siberia after the Russian Revolution so that they could move to the U.S. via Japan.

Her activities are well-known to Armenian people these days. It is not enough, however, to recognize how Japan treated herself and her children especially after WWI. The Japanese government was indifferent to her political activities.

In July 1920, the government of the Republic of Armenia, a newly independent country from the Russian Empire, nominated Diana as honorary consular, and then she demanded the ministry of foreign affairs of Japan accept her representative of the republic. The Japanese foreign ministry rejected her proposal because Japan had not yet recognized the Republic of Armenia and it might be under the control of the Nation League. Soon after that the Red Army conquered Armenia and established a communist government.

In summer 1922, Diana still requested the Japanese government protect her compatriots at Vladivostok to evacuate from Russia. It would not, however, do so, for the Red Army were defeating the Japanese one in Siberia, and the Japanese Ministry of War planned to withdraw home. She provided with her house the refugees from Siberia by private vessels and issued their ID's and gave financial assistance for the trip to U.S.

On Diana's death in July 1937, the Japanese Army attacked the Chinese one and Japan confronted with Britain or U.S. over the interests in China. Soon after the war broke out between Japan and U.S. in December 1941, Michael, her son was arrested and took into jail on suspicion of espionage because the Apcar corporation was engaged in commerce with the British colonies in Southeast Asia and the Japanese police suspected he had something to do with Freemasonry in the U.S. The Japanese government confiscated the property of the Abgaryan family, and in December 1943 the women and little children of the Armenians were forced to move to the camp of Karuizawa.