

# American Missionaries Who Played a Significant Role in Anti-Japanese Propaganda Warfare

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## 1. “Nanking Massacre” propaganda spread by missionaries

### (1) Missionaries were used by a Chinese intelligence agency

Recently, researchers are more and more confident, based on their analysis, that the so-called “Nanking Massacre” was an anti-Japanese campaign or war propaganda conducted by the Nationalist Party’s intelligence agency. According to Chinese Nationalist Party’s top-secret documents entitled *The Outline of Operations of the International Propaganda Office of the Central Propaganda Department*, discovered in Taipei by Professor Higashinakano Shudo, anti-Japanese intelligence operations were conducted during the Sino-Japanese War using foreign agents, under the direction of the Central Propaganda Department’s International Propaganda Office. With regard to those foreign agents hired by the Nationalist Party, Harold Timperley, a Shanghai-based correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, has already proven to be an important player, but, naturally, Timperley alone could not have engineered the biggest “massacre” fable of the century. The truth is that many American missionaries, who were in Nanking, and Christian organizations in the United States that supported these missionaries together helped Timperley and joined in the anti-Japanese propaganda warfare themselves as agent’s tools.

### (2) Intelligence apparatus manipulation behind “Magee’s film”

What is popularly called “Magee’s film” refers to a 16- millimeter film, in which American missionary Rev. John Magee supposedly recorded Nanking before and after its fall.

Those proponents who claim that a “massacre” actually took place often regard this film as visual evidence of the alleged massacre. However, all there is to it are scenes of a hospital where patients are being treated and unremarkable battlefield scenes. Rather, what is more interesting about this film is the fact that throughout this film one can catch a glimpse of

behind-the-scenes maneuvering by the Nationalist Party's intelligence agency.

"Magee's film" was supposedly filmed in Nanking between December 1937 and January 1938. However, the person who first got hold of the developed film was Timperley, who worked in Shanghai as an operative of the Nationalist Party.

As there were no facilities to develop film in Nanking at that time, American missionary Rev. George Fitch took the film out of Nanking and brought it to Timperley, who was operating in Shanghai.

Judging that this film could be of great use as anti-Japanese propaganda, Timperley immediately set to work, editing the film and adding subtitles, and then sent a notice of delivery invoice of the film dated February 16, addressed directly to then Undersecretary of State Stanley Hornbeck (supposedly, Timperley had the film delivered separately by a messenger). At the same time, Timperley suggested that Fitch immediately return to the United States and, using Magee's film, begin lobbying Congressmen and government officials. Though Timperley was responsible for getting Fitch's plane ticket home, it is very unlikely that a mere newspaper reporter should have the means to casually purchase, at the time, an expensive plane ticket. Very likely, then, the International Propaganda Office of the Central Propaganda Department provided ample funds for intelligence operations.

Incidentally, Fitch, who took the film out of Nanking to Shanghai, and later worked as a lobbyist at home in the U.S., was not at all an ordinary missionary. This man was a part of "the dictator's entourage", and he and his wife were close friends of Mr. and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek. He was a dyed-in-the-wool anti-Japanese activist who ardently supported anti-Japanese terrorists. For instance, in January 1932, a Korean terrorist attempted to assassinate with a bomb the Emperor Showa at the Sakurada-mon (gate) at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. Moreover, in April of the same year, on the occasion of the Emperor's birthday, there was another bombing in Shanghai. The Japanese Minister in China, Mr. Shigemitsu, as well as military personnel present at the ceremonial celebration, were attacked by a terrorist's bomb. Two men were killed, one of whom was General Shirakawa Yoshinori of the Japanese Army, and Minister Shigemitsu was seriously wounded. The mastermind behind these two terrorist attacks was Korean activist Kim Gu and Fitch was also closely

involved in these acts of terrorism. Fitch hid Kim in his house after Kim's successful bombing in Shanghai. Furthermore, Fitch, together with his wife, translated Kim's statement of responsibility into English as a press release, distributed it and finally helped Kim to escape to safety by driving the get-away car himself. In retrospect, Fitch was absolutely one of the criminal terrorists who should have been immediately arrested or detained.

Furthermore, Fitch was decorated with a medal by the Chinese Nationalist government after the War, and he even published an autobiography in Taiwan. We will be justified in regarding him as a proxy for the Chinese Nationalist Party. Naturally, in his autobiography, Fitch leaves out all that is problematic to himself. For instance, as to the part describing how he took Magee's film out of Nanking, Fitch made up a quite different story: Out of a pure sense of justice and risking his own life, he got on a Japanese military train, hiding the film by sewing it to the inside of his coat to bypass luggage inspection. Thus, he turned what really happened into a childish story of bravery. However, the truth is that he managed to get onboard an extraterritorial British gunboat, and unfailingly and safely delivered the film to the Nationalist Party agent living in the extraterritorial concession.

It has been also left unsaid that Fitch went home to the U.S. and carried out lobbying activity, whereas he describes that he went home, following a recommendation of a certain group in America. The very fact that he made up such a false story makes us suspect that he was actually involved in clandestine activities which he could never openly discuss.

### **(3) Propaganda used for the fundraising campaign of the YMCA**

Fitch, urged by Timperley, went back to Nanking once to resolve personal matters, and at the end of February he left China for the United States, where he lobbied U.S. government officials in Washington D.C., and then proceeded on a lecture tour, citing anti-Japanese propaganda across the country. Moreover, Magee's film was used by the YMCA in its anti-Japanese campaign and shown throughout America. The last part of the movie goes like this: "Aid is needed urgently now. One dollar saves one adult for one month, while twenty dollars save one child for one year."

In reality, Fitch was chief secretary of the YMCA China, and so he used the "massacre" propaganda in his own fundraising campaign.

## 2. Missionaries who contributed to anti-Japanese propaganda books

### (1) Close relationship with the Chinese agent

According to the aforementioned confidential documents *The Outline of Operations of the International Propaganda Office of the Central Propaganda Department*, American missionaries made two propaganda books, directed and funded by the Nationalist Party's International Propaganda Office. These propaganda books were written in English for European and American readers, and published with the titles, *What War Means* and *War Damage in the Nanking Area*. Up to now, the former, *What War Means*, in particular has been frequently quoted as the Bible of the "massacre" propaganda.

It has been proven that in the process of writing *What War Means*, American missionaries in Nanking (Miner Searle Bates and Lewis Smythe among them) contacted and closely cooperated with Timperley in Shanghai. Particularly, between Bates and Timperley, letters were frequently exchanged about the whole plan, concept and contents of the book, and parts of these correspondences were translated into Japanese and included in *Nankin Jiken Shiryoshu, Amerika Kankei Shiryohen (Nanking Incident Source Material: American References)* (Nankin Jiken Kenkyukaihen [Nanking Incident Research Group], Aoki Shoten, Tokyo).

As for *War Damage in the Nanking Area*, the book's contents carry Smythe's signature, while the preface is signed by Bates. However, it is not yet clear what portion of the book the two authors actually wrote themselves. The real identity of this book is a propaganda book, produced with the funds from the Nationalist Party's International Propaganda Office, and outwardly published by the Nanking International Relief Committee. In the preface of the book, the neutrality and academic quality of the book's contents are all the more emphasized.

Incidentally, both Bates and Smythe were leading members of the "International Committee", which was in charge of the Nanking Safety Zone, and yet they were closely involved in the making of the two propaganda books. This fact implies that the "International Committee" itself was most likely to be part of the propaganda machine to promote the Nationalist Party's anti-Japanese intelligence operation.

## (2) How *What War Means* came to be produced

*What War Means* was basically written by Timperley in Shanghai. What the missionaries did was to give information to Timperley, to check the draft sent by Timperley from Shanghai and then to send their feedback. However, as the book was primarily intended solely as anti-Japanese propaganda, it seemed that Timperley did not pay much attention to their feedback, let alone reconsider and reflect on it.

In March 1938, a draft was sent to Nanking from Timperley in Shanghai. Upon reading the draft, the missionaries were dumbstruck and embarrassed by the utter exaggerations of Timperley's accounts.

Bates says in his letter dated March 14;

Study of your materials was followed by a real conference on the subject, held today with Mills and Smythe.

They both feel strongly that the job should not be too rushed, and that some one from our group here (preferably myself, they say) should go over it with you before sending to England. They wish to guard against errors that would be inevitable on the part of anyone who had not been here, but which would give a handle for rebuttal by the Japanese and might weaken total effect anyhow. ...

...

Another reason for this recommendation is that we all fear a tendency to "atrocious stories", at least in the impression given to many readers. And that closes some minds at once. Title should guard carefully against such suggestion.

However, before this letter reached Shanghai, Timperley had already sent the draft to the publisher in London, acting on his own judgment. Later, Timperley wrote back to Bates as follows;

... The book must be shocking in the better sense of the word and here, I feel, the kind of balance which might be called for in a more academic treatment must be sacrificed for the sake of dramatic effect.

After all, the publication of *What War Means* proceeded as Timperley

arbitrarily kept his way, while the missionaries were left with no alternative but to admit it against their will after the event. Bates comments as follows in his letter dated March 21, 1938;

We were pretty much bowled over by the speed you have put (?) on, ... However, Mills, Smythe, and I, who have taken the responsibility, decided to approve going ahead, balancing probable good against possible or probable evils. ... But this may be the end of deeply set life-work for Fitch, for me, perhaps for Smythe and others.

At this point, the missionaries finally made up their minds, that is, to cooperate with Timperley in the publication, in spite of their knowledge that the book was nothing more than ill-conceived, malicious propaganda.

### **(3) Editing policies arbitrarily decided by Timperley from beginning to end**

In writing this book, specific editing policies were also arbitrarily decided by Timperley throughout the process. Except for a few minor corrections and deletions, suggestions made by the missionaries regarding the editing policies were not heeded and were completely turned down.

For example, Bates suggested in his letter dated March 14;

... Complete economic dislocation, lasting damage to property and means of production, dislocation of social life and connections of millions people those are in some senses more basic than shootings and rape.

So, he argued that the book should mainly examine economic damages, rather than to tell dubious cruel stories. But Timperley flatly refused his suggestion and the book ended up being mere arrays of one exaggerated atrocity after another. Moreover, when it came to whether the Japanese Army's deeds in Nanking should be referred to as terrorism, at first, Bates was very cautious and deliberate about it, writing in his letter of March 14, "Not sure of a policy of terrorization, though some things look like it." But in the end, the subtitle *The Japanese Terror in China*, which Timperley had proposed, was adopted as is, and thereupon the entire book was written in the same tone, wording and context.

#### **(4) How the missionaries came to cooperate in the war propaganda**

As mentioned previously, the American missionaries in China so easily fell for the Nationalist Party's anti-Japanese propaganda warfare, were incorporated into the machine and were totally used. Particularly, although they must have fully understood that *What War Means* was apparently a propaganda book full of exaggerations and overstatements and that it was totally unjustifiable to take part in such malicious propaganda, they didn't so much as protest against Timperley's forcible way.

What made them get involved in vicious war propaganda? If you examine what these missionaries did in China at that time, you will get a clear picture of the American missionaries working obediently and blindly for Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, while regarding Japan as the hated enemy.

### **3. Praise for Chiang Kai-shek and antagonism toward Japan**

Long before the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, the American missionaries in China had tended to bear unadorned antagonism toward Japan. According to a report entitled *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats –The American Protestant Missionary Movement in China, 1890 -1952*, the tendency of American missionaries then in China is described as follows:

From the time of the Manchurian Incident of 1931 to Pearl Harbor the American Protestant missionaries in China dedicated themselves to enlightening the home constituency. Japan was portrayed as a militaristic nation, callous to all humanitarian considerations, bent on reducing China to a servile status.(p. 252)

Missionary antagonism to Japan continued during the interlude of peace between May 1933 and July 1937. When war broke out again, missionaries took up China's cause with renewed vigor. Their first response to the crisis was to praise General Chiang Kai-shek.(p.252)

The missionaries were not merely anti-Japanese. They admired Chiang Kai-shek, who was essentially a dictator, calling him "General" and "Generalissimo", and after the Sino-Japanese War started, they even came to good terms with the Chinese Communists, who were otherwise

incompatible enemies of the missionaries, just to slander Japan. On the other hand, the Communist Party attacked the missionaries, calling them the cat's paws of imperialism. In the aforementioned *Missionaries, Chinese, and Diplomats*, the following passage depicts how things were at that time:

The editor of the *Missionary Review of the World* testified that "China has now the most enlightened patriotic and able rulers in her history." Long articles on the New Life Movement told how the Chinese, led by the wife of Generalissimo, were engaged in a great crusade to eliminate old evils from Chinese life and replace them with "Christian" virtues of cleanliness, patriotism, and self-sacrifice.

A protestant missionary explained that the Communists in China had abandoned many Russian ideological concepts and much of their violence; "they are now Chinese first and foremost; their aim now is to institute a movement for socialized reform compatible with the aspirations of all progressive people."(p.255)

Where, then, did this general trend come from?

#### **4. Chiang Kai-shek's political use of Christianity**

##### **(1) Establishing co-existent relationship**

Essentially, the Christian missionary movement in China was far from successful. During the 1920s in particular, Christians often became targets of violent, xenophobic insurgencies, and their missionary movement faced a grave crisis. Once a riot erupted, it frequently followed that churches and mission schools were robbed and set on fire, while missionaries were murdered.

Moreover, rumor had it that many of these xenophobic movements were instigated, tacitly agreed, or silently recommended by the Chinese government then in power and the Soviet leader at that time. The Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek was no exception. With political intention, it instigated xenophobic riots almost openly.

Furthermore, in March 1927, when the northern expeditionary force led by Chiang Kai-shek entered Nanking, many cases of murder, violence and plunder were committed by the out-of-control army (the Nanking Incident).

Amid this confusion, an American missionary, who was vice principal of the University of Nanking, was shot to death by Nationalist Party troops who had broken into the campus.

Chiang Kai-shek, having been bitterly accused of this brutal incident by European countries and the United States, hurriedly married Song Meiling, who was a known pious Christian, in December of the same year. Later, Chiang was baptized himself, putting up a good show of his conversion to Christianity, though only nominally. In actuality, at this point, Chiang was not eligible to marry, for he already had a wife. However, in marrying Song Meiling, he had not yet divorced his former wife. In other words, this couple, Mr. and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek, were in the state of dual marriage. One would think that this is a totally unforgivable sin in terms of Christian ethics, but somehow the missionaries turned a blind eye to this marriage, and instead, they praised “Christian General” Chiang Kai-shek and his new wife.

In the following year, 1928, the Nationalist Party announced its policy to protect the Christian missionary movement, and thereupon the missionaries came to regard Chiang Kai-shek as benefactor and messiah of Christianity. Here, the foundations of the co-existing relationship between Chiang Kai-shek and the missionaries were established, whereby Chiang Kai-shek protected the missionaries and the missionaries praised Chiang Kai-shek.

## **(2) Missionaries getting tamed**

The protection of Christianity by Chiang Kai-shek sounded sweet, but, in reality, it was a limited protection granted only within the autocratic political system of the Nationalist Party. For example, in Christian schools run by missionaries, it was a requirement to teach students the Nationalist Party’s party platform and regulations, but they were not allowed to make teaching of Christian activities and theology their required subjects. Moreover, as the Party’s policy stood, it was required to participate in the ceremonial tribute to The National Father, Sun Yat-sen, every Monday morning.

The missionaries were said to be obedient to those tyrannical policies, without any earnest protest against them. To lose Chiang Kai-shek’s protection meant to go back to those bitter days that they had suffered, constantly exposed to the danger and horrors of xenophobic terrorist attacks.

Above all, they could find no proper reason why they should dare fight

back against a dictator with such a vicious criminal record, instigating xenophobic terrorism and murdering many of their fellow missionaries.

### **(3) Fundraising campaign and the Chinese illusion**

Entering the 1930s, the missionary activities were recovering from the damages inflicted by past xenophobic movements. However, missionary work did not reach a financially independent status, and so, the large financial shortfall needed to be filled by donations from Christians at home in the United States. In order to collect large donations, it was necessary for them to proudly report that their mission in China was very successful and to emphasize that a rosy future awaited them ( an objective analysis showed that the missionary program in China was clearly on the decline). Behind the phenomenon that saw Chiang Kai-shek praised as a Christian General by the missionaries, there were commercial factors. For the sake of fundraising, it would be most inconvenient to have a boss on top of the missionaries who was, at the same time, a violent tyrant.

## **5. Loser in the propaganda war**

In the diplomatic relationship between China and the United States, the influence the missionaries had was extremely important. John McMully, American diplomat and expert on Asian diplomatic affairs in the 1930s, commented on the relationship between the missionaries and the Chinese Nationalist Party in *How the Peace Was Lost*:

...The vigorous partisanship of the religious organizations in this country was reflected in the press; it became popular to refer to the Chinese Nationalists as duplicating, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek as their George Washington, the patriotic spirit of 1776. The movement brought considerable pressure to bear both upon the Congress and upon the Administration. (p.84)

Their effects on the mass media were equally great. For instance, Henry Luce, founder of *Life* and *Time* magazines, was a son of an American missionary who spent time in China and fanatical admirer of Chiang Kai-shek. Naturally, the two magazines maintained an extremely biased

pro-Chinese stance, and led the American public opinion toward anti-Japanese sentiment.

In 1938 and thereafter, nationwide anti-Japanese campaigns led by missionaries eventually involved the U.S. government, Congress and mass media and significantly expanded, until Japan and America were finally trapped in a quagmire of antagonism.

Japan was defeated in the propaganda war Chiang Kai-shek had waged, using American missionaries to the best of his advantage.