The George Fitch family -- supporters of Korean independence activists

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On 8 January 1952, the government of the Republic of Korea conferred the Order of Cultural Merit unto the American missionary Dr. George Ashmore Fitch (費吳生博士). Again on 1 March 1968, the Korean Government conferred unto Fitch the Order of Merit for National Foundation (Independence). Fitch was none other than the Soochow-born U.S. missionary who had provided a meeting place for Korean independence activists in Shanghai, Republic of China (中華民國上海) in 1919, acted as director of the Korean Relief Society and adviser to the Korean Christian Inseong School (仁成學校) in the 1920s and provided refuge to Kim Gu (金九) after Yun Bong-Gil's (尹奉吉) patriotic deed at Hongkou Park (虹口公園) in 1932. His importance to the movement was such that the Independent featured an article on the news of《Reverend Fitch's Death》in 1923.





Who was George Ashmore Fitch?

George Ashmore Fitch was a remarkable Rotarian in his whole life when he was the national head of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea, respectively. Though he was not a charter member of the Rotary Club of Shanghai (上海扶輪社) in 1919, he was one of the organizers. Later he had served as Club President of Shanghai Rotary Club in 1930-1931 and Chungking Rotary Club (重慶扶輪社) in 1942-1943, respectively. Before 1948, Fitch had been instrumentally in forming a number of Rotary clubs in China. He had also joined Seoul Rotary Club in Korea and also Taipei Rotary Club (臺北扶輪社) in Taiwan (臺灣) after he left the Chinese Mainland in 1949 and prior to his final retirement in the United States.

Encounter with Koreans

George Ashmore Fitch was born on 23 January 1883 in Soochow (*Suzhou*) of the Ch'ing Empire (大清國江蘇省蘇州府吳縣) to Presbyterian missionaries George Field Fitch (費啟鴻) and Mary McLellan Fitch as the third child in a family of two sons and three daughters.

Since he was given his father's name with only a differing middle name, there have been many instances where the activities of father and son have been confused. In order to know who the George A. Fitch who aided the Korean independence movement was, there is a need to distinguish father from son.

George F. Fitch was born in Avon, Ohio, U.S.A. on 28 January 1845 and graduated from Adelbert College (now Case Western Reserve University). After graduating from the Presbyterian Lane Theological Seminary, he moved to Shanghai (上海) in 1870 under the conviction to dedicate his life to serving as a missionary in the Ch'ing Empire.

Consequentially, in 1888 he became chairman of the Chinese branch of the U.S. Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. The same year he also became editor of《The Chinese Recorder 教務雜誌》, a monthly that dealt with liberal theology and Chinese nationalism. He became acquainted with the unknown world of Korea while meeting Yun Chi-Ho (尹致昊) in November 1893.

It was through the American Presbyterian Mission Press (美華書館) that George F. Fitch was given the chance to truly get to know Koreans. Yeo Un-Hyeong (呂運亨), who had studied at the Nanking Academy (匯文書院), was active in the Commissioned Sales Department of the Mission Press. Meeting with Yeo, Field learned about the oppressive reality of Japanese colonial rule over Korea and afterwards introduced Yeo to his son who held Bible study sessions with Chinese and foreigners.

Supporting Korean independence despite Japanese surveillance

George F. Fitch began to be surveilled by the Japanese Consulate-General in Shanghai after actively participating in the Korean Red Cross Society re-established under Ahn Chang-Ho (安昌浩), the General Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Provisional Government of Korea (KPG).

Despite this, he promoted the collection of donations and relief aid when the Korean Relief Society ran into difficulties with its fund-raising. Even at the old age of 75, he began fund-raising activities at Korean Presbyterian Church of San Francisco in April 1920, and lavished financial support as a member of Inseong School's Fundraising Advisory Committee.

Although the Japanese Consulate-General expressed their diplomatic "sympathies" to the U.S. Consulate-General in Shanghai, this did not stop George F. Fitch from aiding Koreans. He died at his home in Shanghai on 17 February 1923 at the age of 78 and was buried in Pahsienjao Cemetery (八仙橋公墓) (renamed Huaihai Park 淮海公園 since 1 July 1958).

Next generation took the lead

The elder Fitch's interest in the Korean Independence movement deeply influenced his second son. While George F. Fitch worked as a missionary, he sent his son George Ashmore Fitch to be educated in the United States in 1900. After graduating from the College of Wooster in Ohio in 1906, George A. Fitch attended Union Theological Seminary in New York and was ordained a minister.

After arriving in Shanghai in 1909, George A. Fitch became head executive secretary of the YMCA and led weekly Bible study sessions on Wednesday evenings, which saw the participation of Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) (中國國民黨) leaders such as Sun Yat-Sen (孫中山), Tang Shao-Yi (唐紹儀), Wang Ch'ung-Hui (王寵惠) and famous businessmen such as Charlie Soong (宋嘉澍), Nieh Ch'i-Chieh (聶其杰/聶雲台), and Moh Hsiang-Yueh (穆湘玥/穆藕初).

When the Mukden Incident (九一八事變/瀋陽事變) occurred on 18 September 1931 and the Imperial Japan's invasion of China began in earnest, George A. Fitch took the lead in supporting the anti-Japanese struggles of China and Korea. When the Japanese police began to inspect the Koreans in Shanghai's French Concession immediately after the patriotic martyrdom of Yun Bong-Gil at Hongkou Park in 1932, the leaders of the KPG, starting with Kim Gu, had no choice but to search for refuge to escape arrest. At the time, George A. Fitch concealed them in the second floor of his own home for an entire month.

Prominent leader and educator of the Korean independence movement Ahn Chang-Ho was unlawfully arrested on 30 April 1932 by the Japanese police in the French Concession of Shanghai shortly after the Hongkou Park bombing orchestrated by Korean activist Yun Bong-Gil. Because the arrest took place inside the French-administered territory, Fitch immediately sent formal protest letters to the French authorities and local newspapers, arguing that the Japanese police had violated international law and French jurisdiction by carrying out the arrest there.

Exposing Japan's brutality

With his appointment as head executive secretary of the YMCA in Nanking (*Nanjing*) (南京) in September 1936, George A. Fitch left Shanghai where he had been active for 27 years. Within a year after his arrival, the Imperial Japan launched full scale aggression to China and occupied the national capital of Nanking. The Japanese troops conducted a large-scale massacre of soldiers and civilians alike.

Hence, George A. Fitch established a safety zone to protect people from these atrocities with President of the Nanking branch of the Siemens AG company John Rabe and American professor at Nanking University (金陵大學) Miner Searle Bates (貝德士教授). Forming an international committee, George A. Fitch alerted the world of the tragedy occurring at Nanking and exposed the brutality of the Japanese with talks around the United States.

In addition, he also supported projects that improved the lives of Koreans in the United States. When Hawaiian authorities began a redevelopment project at a cost of about USD 2 million, George A. Fitch arranged negotiations with them for the redevelopment of Korean residential areas while also taking part in fund-raising for the project.

When the KMT government moved to Chungking (*Chongqing*) (重慶), George A. Fitch followed and became head executive secretary of the YMCA National Committee in Chungking.

In addition, in April 1941, Koreans in the United States held the Overseas Korean Convention in Honolulu, Hawaii, and organized a resident U.S. Diplomatic Commission exclusively charged with diplomatic dealings with the United States.

At the time, Rhee Syng-Man (李承晚), who would later become the first president of the Republic of Korea, established the Korean-American Association and the Korean Christian Friends

of Korea Society in order to support his diplomatic policies toward the United States, and George A. Fitch and his wife joined both societies.

George Ashmore Fitch also arranged for independence activists such as Jo So-Ang (趙素昂) whom he had known since the 1920s to meet with Kuo Tai-Chi (郭泰祺), Foreign Minister of the Republic of China, and corresponded with to request the Chinese recognition of the KPG.

Leaving behind great contributions

During World War II, George A. Fitch joined in on transportation activities on the Burma Road linking Chungking of China and Rangoon of Burma. He also conveyed information on the KMT government and KPG to the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (which is now the CIA) and aided in the operation to invade China.

In 1944, George A. Fitch was transferred to Lanchow (*Lanzhou*) (蘭州) as head executive secretary of its YMCA, and resigned from his post after the World War II ended in 1945. Afterwards, he acted as the officer of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to China for the postwar rebuilding.

In July 1947, George A. Fitch received a warm welcome from Rhee Syng-Man and Kim Gu for aiding the Korean independence movement when he was dispatched to Korea as head executive secretary of its YMCA. As he had established YMCA meeting halls everywhere around the country and distributed relief aid supplies for two years, a warm welcome was a matter of course.

In 1951, George A. Fitch resigned as head executive secretary of Korea's YMCA and served as administrative adviser to the Tamkang College of Arts and Science (淡江文理學院) (today Tamkang University 淡江大學) in Taiwan from August 1958 to July 1960.

Then, George Ashmore Fitch retired to California and passed away on 21 January 1979 at the age of 95, leaving behind a profound legacy of wartime rescue and cross-cultural service in East Asia.

His wife walked the same path

Geraldine Townsend Fitch, who became George A. Fitch's wife in 1924 when she remarried, also aided the Korean independence movement along with her husband and the elder Fitch. Geraldine Fitch toured North America in the 1940s, supporting American recognition of the KPG.

She participated as a backer of the Korean-American Association in the Korean Liberty Conference held in Washington in February 1942, and reported widely on the Korean independence movement and the KPG's activities, as well as the illegal occupation of Korea by Japan in the《New York Times》and other media.

In addition, she met Kim Yong-Jeung (金容中) and discussed the direction of support for the Korean independence movement. When the United States pursued a non-recognition policy of the KPG based on William R. Langdon's "Some Aspects of the Question of Korean Independence" memorandum in 1942, Geraldine wrote to Cordell Hull, then U.S. Secretary of State, to prevent the measure.

Thus, the father George Field Fitch, son George Ashmore Fitch and Geraldine Townsend Fitch were foreigners with unique histories of supporting the Korean independence movement. They open one's eyes anew to the fact that the spirit of Korean independence was the restoration of peace and freedom.



In April 1943, the Koreans in China held a rally in Chungking. The photo shows a Korean revolutionary giving a rousing speech while standing in front of a slogan that says "Up with an independent great Korea". The meeting included a resolution to ask for other countries to support an independent Korea.



In April 1947, Korean revolutionary leader Rhee Syng-Man visited China. He took the train from Shanghai to Nanking, and was welcomed by Chinese and Korean friends at Hsia-Kuan Station.
In 1919, in Shanghai, Rhee became chairperson of the Korean Provisional Government.
About 30 years later, he was back in Shanghai where the revolutionary government was established.
(All photos courtesy of Hsu Chung-Mao)

A Letter from Pusan

By George A. Fitch

IT WAS New Year's Eve when I landed here in Pusan at the Southeastern tip of Korea. Nowhere in the crowded city could I find any sort of accommodations. The military had taken over the "Y" building that very day, the AMIK and U. N. billets were full.

It was then that a kind Australian Presbyterian missionary let me throw my air mattress on the floor of his study. As I write this, I am sitting at the dining table in his mission, and three other people who also have found shelter here are sitting at this same table, each pounding his typewriter.

Pessimism was rife during my first days here. The U. N. armies were retreating before the Communist waves of suicide attacks, and even many of the military said we would have to get out. Then commenced the evacuation of many of the nongovernmental leaders to the island of Quelpart. That confirmed the fears of most Koreans. But a few days later came the statement that we were going to "stay and fight." What a change in the atmosphere that brought! For the moment at least the people were given new hope.

What the Koreans have suffered is almost beyond belief. Their grief and misery are appalling, appalling! Practically every friend I meet has lost one or more of his family in the Red slaughter. And the hardships of the flight—thousands and thousands frozen to death, thousands wandering hopelessly in the mountains trying to avoid the armies of both sides, families separated, everything lost.



Born of American missionary parents in China, George Fitch has served the YMCA in the Orient for 40 years, and has been a member of Rotary Clubs from Chungking to Seoul. Residing in the U.S.A. during the past year, he enplaned for Korea late in December. In mid-January he wrote the letter of which this is an excerpt.

Take the case of my good friends the Lee Young-Pills, whom I first knew in Shanghai years ago. Mrs. Lee is a charming woman, a gifted singer. I lunched with them a few days ago and got part of their story. Her father was the famous "Korean Moody," for 50 years the pastor of a big Presbyterian church in the North. He was shot and then stabbed four times while at prayer in his church on August 25. Mr. Lee's elder brother, the president of the YMCA in Choonchon, and his entire family were all killed in cold blood when the Communists entered that city. The Lees themselves hid away in a semi-basement to their house when the Communists occupied Seoul. An American rocket bomb crashed through their house, completely destroying it at 2:15 A.M. August 24, while they and their four children were asleep. Miraculously none of them was hurt.

Many Rotarians from Seoul are here and last Wednesday we held a meeting at which I was the speaker. The roll was read of those killed or missing among the membership of some 45. There were ten names, not all Koreans though, for the list included British Minister Holt, Kris Jensen of the Methodist Mission, Bishop Byrne (Roman Catholic), and a couple of other foreigners. Yet despite their losses and grief and the uncertainty as to their future, the people are amazingly cheerful. Tears are frequent, though, when loved ones who are gone are mentioned. One's heartstrings are sorely tried.

It was good to see such a fine turnout as we had at that Rotary meeting. George Paik, now Minister of Education (formerly president of Chosen Christian University), presided; Bill Rhee, our Secretary, was there, of course, and perhaps 15 of the old members who had succeeded in getting down from Seoul; also U. S. Ambassador Muccio, USIS Chief Van Patten, Seoul's Mayor K. P. Lee, and one or two other guests. We met for lunch crowded around little tables in the Seamen's Club, the only place we could find which could serve us a meal. It was Bob Kinney who made the arrangements and who acted as host.

We debated briefly whether we should try to hold meetings weekly. Owing to transportation difficulties and a suitable place where we can have lunch it will be difficult to do so. Different ones of us will probably be writing as to how things are going.

A Torch Flames in Korea

IT'S THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE ABOVE SELF GENERATED BY A CLUB PATTERNED AFTER ROTARY.

By Geraldine Fitch

Far Eastern Writer; Wife of Past President of Rotary Clubs of Shanghai and Chungking



At a birthday dinner, the Torch Club hears Major General Archer Lerch, since deceased, then second in U. S. Korean Command.



Scouting chiefs (right) from all Southern Korea gather for training at the Torch Club's Boy Scout camp some five miles from Inchon.

THERE is no Rotary in Korea. Yet a flame it has lighted in this troubled Far Eastern land is brightening the way for hundreds of orphans, youths, students, teachers, and needy people.

The story centers around the important Korean port of Inchon. Inchon, by the way, is the city where every American G. I. assigned to Korea has seen (and most have photographed) the huge sign saying: "WELCOME TO INCHON. BEST 'DAMN' PORT IN THE PACIFIC."

In Inchon there meets each week a group of 41 business and professional men, each representing a different vocational classification. They eat together, talk of service above self, and then go out and practice that principle in an intensive and widespread program of community service. The name of this group is the Torch Club. That it so closely resembles a Rotary Club is no coincidence. A former Rotarian started it.

One day in February three years ago—about the time your Rotary Club was celebrating Rotary's 41st anniversary—a Korean returned to his native land after many years of exile. He was David An, son of a family of Korean patriots whose long fight for Korean independence from Japan has written the name "An" large in the history of the nation. David An had come home from Chungking. For his many fellow nationals who also found haven in China's wartime capital during World War II he had organized a Korean Christian Welfare Association and had become a member of the Rotary Club of Chungking. My husband, George Fitch, of the YMCA in China, had proposed him for Rotary membership.

Now home at last David An lost no time in starting what he felt Korean communities needed: an organization which would stress unselfish service. Two weeks after his return he called together eight of the most representative, nonpolitical men he could find and organized a club. Naturally he patterned it after Rotary as he had known it in China. That was the beginning of the Torch Club of Inchon, and among the 41 men on its roster today there are the principal of the boys high school, the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, the manager of a porcelain company, the submanager of a bank, a surgeon who has his own clinic, and the head of a coal and coke company.

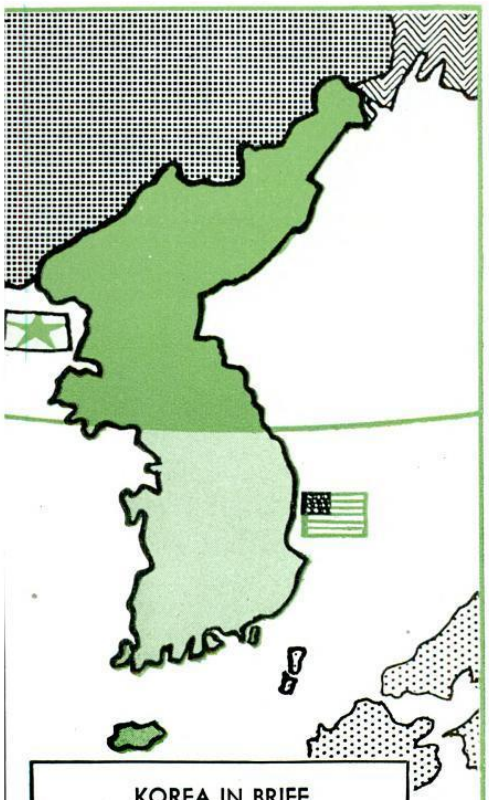
Koreans love speechmaking. I once attended a Korean dinner where 23 persons were present. There were 23 speeches! So David An decided that the Torch Club should concentrate on civic activities rather than speeches. As a result, here are some of the club's achievements:

1. It made ten water stands for crowded street corners where poor people can get a drink of safe water. American Military Government (AMG) donated gasoline drums and chlorine tablets for the purpose. A public-spirited Korean painted the drums and made faucets for them. "I got this idea from Chungking Rotary," says David An, "where free tea stands were established for ricksha men."

2. It provided funds for Christmas parties for orphanages in and around Inchon, while the wives of club members made much needed underwear for the homeless children. Both AMG and American Red Cross helped provide clothes, shoes, and candy.

3. It gave a series of concerts, movies, and other entertainments to benefit Inchon schoolteachers who, like teachers throughout Korea, are underpaid, and sold 100,000 *won** of tickets. Club members covered all expenses so

* *Won* is Korean for *yen*. Official exchange is 50 *won* to $1 U. S.; open exchange is 800 to 1.



KOREA IN BRIEF

Mountainous peninsula 600 miles long, 135 miles wide, off Manchuria. Has 25 million people, 4,000 years of history. Japan ruled it from 1910 to 1945. At fall of Japan, 38° parallel became division between Russian and U. S. occupations. Still divides. New free government in Southern Korea has United Nations okeh as only lawful government in Korea.

that every *sen* of receipts went into the teachers' fund.

4. It has given monthly donations and club fines of several thousand *won* to needy individuals and charitable institutions.

5. It has awarded prizes, sometimes cash, sometimes gifts, to students for competitions in art, sports, and music.

6. It has set aside a citizenship prize of 20,000 *won* to be awarded annually to the citizen most outstanding in civic affairs.

No member would think of listing it among club activities, but the Torch Club has exerted a steady influence for civic honesty and against public extravagance. When the city waterworks, with a network of pipe lines, had been completed, municipal and provincial authorities planned a celebration to cost about 400,000 *won*. Torch Club members saw that such a celebration would in no wise benefit the laborers who did the job, but would merely provide entertainment and much free liquor for officials who had never lifted a finger on the project. So the club sent representatives to the capital . . . and the affair was called off. It was enough that people had running water, without hard liquor flowing free in a land where much drunkenness is a cursed heritage from the Japanese occupation.

The greatest of all Torch Club accomplishments, however—and David An's chief hobby—has been the organization of Boy Scouts. Today from Inchon's better homes, from the thatched huts of the poor, and from off the streets, the Torch Club has gathered some 450 boys into Scouting. Fourteen troops! David An has instructed both the Scouts and their leaders, has secured salvage equipment and a campsite for them from U. S. Army officers. For the Scout camp David was able to provide movie projectors and films and a public-address system, obtaining them from the Office of Civil Information, which he directs.

Many an official post was offered David An on his return to Korea, but he refused all of them. "I felt we Koreans, at long last liberated from the Japanese, should learn how to walk before we tried to fly," he says. Community spirit seemed to him a basic need in rebuilding Korea, and he saw the Torch Club as an effective means for meeting that need.

In many lands where Rotary Clubs existed before the war—and Korea was one of them, having four Clubs—a host of problems balks the reëstablishment of those Clubs. While waiting the solution of those problems former Rotarians and other men impelled by the service motive have taken interim measures, sometimes setting up weekly fellowships that resemble Rotary Clubs.

Perhaps that explains the Torch Club of Inchon—that, and David An, who, when anyone praises him for the prodigious amount of work he has done, recalls what Confucius said: "Build up and train yourself first, then your home, then your community; thus you will help your country and finally the whole world."

American soldiers, to whom this building is headquarters in Inchon, Korea, proclaim their regard for the city in typical "G. I." idiom—and letters four feet high.



Photo: U. S. Army Signal Corps

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