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(Classification)

Reference to Tokyo
despatch No. 1089 of
1/31/52

W H Sullivan
January 12, 1952

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: White Lotus Society

Background
The White Lotus Society (*Byakuransha*) is a Buddhist organization founded in 1948 by a prominent Japanese lay Buddhist, Kuzomasa ONISHI. Its original purpose was to undertake welfare and charitable missions on a scale comparable with the Christian charitable organizations founded in the United States and by the missions abroad. It was intended to activate lay Buddhism in Japan and to make Buddhism more vital and less confined to the temples.

In organizing this society Onishi sought support from a scholar-priest associated with the temple in Sagami, who has been recognized as one of the foremost modern writers on Japanese Buddhism. This priest, **TAJIMA** was to act as the publicist for the society and to give it roots in the orthodox hierarchy of Japanese Buddhism. At the time of its organization the society was also endorsed by a Seminar-ian who has since come to dominate the organization. This seminar-ian, Tsunezo WAKAI is a remarkable figure whose personal characteristics will be described below.

Shortly after the society was founded and incorporated in Japan Onishi went to the United States to study the organization of Christian charitable societies there and to make arrangements for donations which would assist in the financial support of his scheme in Japan. Apparently he succeeded in acquiring a certain amount of financial support before his departure to the United States, since he is said to have had in his possession dollar instruments totaling approximately \$10,000 when he arrived in Chicago. In Chicago ONISHI made arrangements with certain Buddhist sects which have their headquarters there to receive donations and to purchase used clothing for distribution. His primary intent was to establish a channel through which used clothing could be accumulated preferably by donation but through purchase if necessary, in order to assist in the welfare establishments throughout Japan.

While ONISHI was in the United States, WAKAI was named acting head of the society. WAKAI managed to persuade **TAJIMA** to change the character and the general purpose of the organization in quite a different direction than that he had originally intended. When the first shipments of clothing reached Japan, **TAJIMA** and **WAKAI**, instead of distributing them free of charge, disposed of them through used clothing dealers and accumulated a good sum of money capital. They used this capital to undertake certain projects which were devised to enhance the prestige of the society and to acquire new and strategic

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A big plan concerning Iwo Jima, Wachi has moved ahead with a single minded purpose that demonstrates his tenacity and ability. He has pursued his plan to hold religious rites and to repatriate the remains of the war dead on Iwo Jima with both the Japanese and the officers of General Headquarters over the past four years. He has a great many contacts with the Bereaved Families Association (Izako Kai) and also with highly placed officers in General Headquarters. Through both these avenues he has assumed a distinct position in Japan as the primary champion of this cause. In 1949 he succeeded in persuading the United States Air Force to send one of his assistants to Iwo Jima in search of a diary which was alleged to be embedded in one of the craters. This diary was kept by a member of the 1st Marine Air Force and allegedly traced an accurate record of the Air Force and Navy bombing and bombardment damages to the island. However, upon his reaching Iwo Jima, this assistant committed suicide by throwing himself from the top of Mt. Surabachi, thus bringing with greater publicity and more drama to Wachi's cause.

In the past few weeks, Wachi has finally succeeded in persuading the Japanese Government to sponsor him officially in his scheme to visit Iwo Jima to hold services for the war dead and to repatriate certain of the remains. This plan has been approved by SCAP Headquarters and accorded to by CINCPAC. Wachi, accompanied by two officials of the Japanese Government Repatriation Bureau, will depart for Iwo Jima on January 17 and will spend about ten days on the island. The publicity resulting from this trip and the primacy of Wachi's example will doubtless strengthen his prestige and make his activity much more significant than it currently is. The potential publicity from these circumstances and from the other activities in which the society engages would indicate that it may become an important factor in Japanese life and may have certain political implications in the following.

Wachi himself is a graduate of the Japanese Naval Academy, the class of 1928. He spent about half of his career in the Japanese Navy engaged in intelligence work and specialized in crypto analysis. When the Japanese Army, the Navy and the Foreign Service divided the crypto-analysis responsibilities, Wachi was given the specific duty of intercepting and breaking the American and British diplomatic codes. He has engaged in work on diplomatic codes of other nations and as the war drew near was also involved in signal intelligence work of a strictly naval character. In 1940 until the outbreak of the war, Wachi was stationed in Mexico designated as the center of naval attacks but actually charged with the responsibility of signal intelligence work in monitoring the operational messages of the United States Fleet in the Atlantic. After internment in the United States, he returned to Japan and worked with the Office of Naval Intelligence until 1944.

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1944 Wachi was assigned as commander of the naval garrison in Iwo Jima. As such, he was in command of the Marine and Navy troops garrisoning that base. These troops, together with the Air Force contingent servicing the air field on the Island, made up the entire garrison force. Wachi was relieved of his command of Iwo Jima as a result of a disagreement with the Air Force commanding officer who wished to divert certain of Wachi's coastal defense artillery to anti-aircraft purposes. Shortly after his release from Iwo Jima, Iwo Jima was assaulted by U.S. troops, resulting in approximately 22,000 Japanese dead. Wachi remained in Japan on service with naval intelligence until the end of the war. At that time he was picked up by U.S. Occupation Forces and was detained in Sugamo Prison for investigation. Although he was held there several months, he was never tried as a war criminal. During the period of his detention, he managed to strike up acquaintance with several U.S. officers and gave them considerable information concerning his pre-war and wartime activities. He has told the story of his intelligence work to Navy historians and I believe he has written a short treatise on the use of American counter-intelligence organizations.

Because of his naval rank, Wachi was purged after his release from Sugamo and immediately retired to Kyoto with the intention of entering the Buddhist priesthood. He studied in the Buddhist temple at Kyoto for two years and went from there immediately into his work with the White Lotus Society. He has only recently been divorced. In the course of the post-war years Wachi has kept active contact with his former navy colleagues and also has association with a great many other senior military officers of his former acquaintance.

He has learned to speak English and speaks with considerable fluency. He is a large man for a Japanese and is extremely vigorous and healthy. His personality is forceful and he dominates any assembly. He thinks quickly and has no hesitation in expressing his thoughts. He is a man of obvious charm and prestige. Potentially he has the characteristics of a forceful leader, given the right springboard and blessed with his inherent ambitions. He could become a significant figure in Japan.

I have come into contact with Wachi in connection with the projected trip to Iwo Jima. There are at least three occasions of personal experience with him which I consider significant. The first I had occasion to introduce him to Commander L. G. Findley, the 36th Land Government officer on Admiral Radford's Staff at Pearl Harbor. Findley at the time expressed his willingness to permit Wachi to come to Iwo Jima and in return asked Wachi to assist in securing information with respect to the defense systems of Iwo and Chichi Jima. Findley particularly wanted the names of any engineering officers who had been associated with the plans or maintenance of the cave systems on those Islands. Within three days

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WACHI returned to me with a list of a half dozen officers who had been so associated. This list gave all military details concerning rank and organization, together with exact information concerning their present addresses. It occurred to me that WACHI must have fairly well developed associations with former military officers to produce such a complete document in so short a time.

The second occasion was at a dinner to which WACHI invited me along with Walter Nichols of CIAE. This dinner was held in a large, rambling house directly behind the Old War Ministry at Pershing Heights. The house is now a "hotel" which is run by a former Japanese Navy captain and whose guests appeared to be almost entirely of the people were associated with the White Lotus Society. Those who did not wear the priestly robes wore their old Japanese Navy uniforms with the buttons and stripes removed. They addressed each other in terms of their former naval ranks.

At this dinner WACHI told me with great relish of his activities in connection with the American diplomatic codes. He particularly delighted in his former exploits breaking into the American consulate ~~franklin~~ General at Kobe on a regular monthly basis to extract the code key from the Consulate General's safe. He talked at great length about the difficulties in intercepting, monitoring and breaking Soviet codes, and indicated that he had given the benefit of his experience to the signal intelligence officer of the FEC. In discovering that I had been in the Navy during the war and that my ship had been hit twice by Japanese suicide planes, he went into a long discussion of the merits of suicide tactics and his personal evaluation of what could have been done in the Philippines if proper kami-keze squadrons had been stationed there. The atmosphere of the whole gathering was considerably more military than religious. The priestly robes did not noticeably inhibit the wearer's appreciation of sake or the geisha waitresses.

My third experience with WACHI and his organization was in attendance at a sumo wrestling exhibition held in the recreation area at Sugamo Prison for the benefit of the war criminals interned there. This exhibition, which featured all the champion sumo wrestlers who will shortly appear in the national finals at Tokyo were arranged by the White Lotus Society. Almost all of the war criminals were present and obviously enjoyed themselves. Most of them, from the young bullies imprisoned for atrocities to the dignified old generals and statesmen imprisoned for their war plans, rose removed their caps and stood at respectful attention while Chaplain SEKIGUCHI, addressing them as ~~xxx~~ "Men of Sugamo" described to them the efforts of the White Lotus Society in bringing the sumo wrestlers to the prison for their benefit.

It appears obvious that WACHI and his society have achieved a prominence which will continue to grow. They have recently removed

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their executive headquarters to Utsunomiya, some fifty miles north of Tokyo. It is possible that they have removed there to take their financial dealings out from under the observation of Tokyo prefectural officials. I understand that these used clothing transactions are now entirely on a commercial basis and their import is duty free and their earnings are tax free due to the alleged eleemosynary character of the organization. It is also possible that the location has been influenced by the recent establishment of a National Police Reserve encampment in that town. Wachi has already associated himself with this encampment and priests of his order are maneuvering to become chaplains in the NPR. The present publicity attendant upon Wachi's trip to Jwo Jima cannot fail to catapult him into national prominence with respect to the repatriation movement inaugurated by the Bereaved Families Associations. Wachi already enjoys special prominence with these associations and is considered to be a modern kenakobe (the term applied in the feudal period to warriors who renounced war to enter the priesthood and engage in works of atonement). At the recent dedication of a restored chapel, the costs of whose rehabilitation were borne by the White Lotus Society, numerous representative committees from the Bereaved Families Associations were in attendance. Also at the ceremony was the Tokyo Fire Department Band. The interesting annotation of this particular is that this band was formerly the Imperial Japanese Navy Band which was taken over as a unit by the Fire Department after the surrender. Also of significance is the fact that Wachi and his group have obtained entirely from any association with the Yasukuni Shrine or other former Shinto shrines specifically dedicated to spirits of fallen soldiers.

It can be expected as the movement for consolation and repatriation of war dead grows, that Wachi and his society will assume the lead. The Japanese Government which finds the whole business complicated and somewhat messy, has not taken much initiative to satisfy the popular demand along these lines. They will therefore probably welcome Wachi's zealous activity and his unquestionable organizational genius. The great popular support which he would achieve from such circumstances could provide a significant springboard for his ambitions. Just what those ambitions are or may become is highly questionable, but viewed in the perspective of his record he is capable of almost anything.

/s/ W. H. Sullivan

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