

Red Cross Society in Imperial China

1904-1912

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The first Geneva conference in 1863 marked the official establishment of Red Cross. It was still a young organization when introduced to China at the turn of the twentieth century. At the time, the state was under the authoritarian reign of the Qing dynasty, with imperial powers from Western countries and Japan colonizing along its border. Famines, rebellions, along with the invasion of foreign military forces, created numerous humanitarian crises that the corrupted imperial system was unable to solve. Meanwhile, the Red Cross model of national humanitarian relief seemed to provide a useful scheme for philanthropic practice in the era of turmoil.

In addition to considering the demand side effects, it is important to understand reasons that led to the acceptance and support of this new form of institutional philanthropy, from both liberal-minded individuals and politically conservative government. What aspects of Red Cross appeared to be in line with their interests? How Red Cross Society, a nongovernmental, voluntary organization with a national focus and an international recognition, was adapted to the context of late Qing society? By examining the founding history of the first Chinese Red Cross organization from 1904 to 1912, the paper aims to identify the key factors that contributed to the indigenization of Red Cross in the public and private spheres. It uses content analysis of press releases, correspondence and government statements of the time to examine how Red Cross initiatives addressed the congruent interest of the imperial court and social elites, and how individuals in both spheres facilitated the transformation of traditional charity to modern philanthropy in China.

Pre-founding Era

The modernist ethos in China can be traced back to the Self-Strengthening Movement in 1861, a top-down institutional reform under the reign of Emperor Tongzhi. After losing the Second Opium War, the dominant conservative faction and the progressive faction reached a consensus that Chinese military must be modernized by adopting advanced technologies from the West. Wartime humanitarian aid, however, was not yet on the agenda. As a philanthropic tradition since the Ming dynasty, medical and poor relief was provided through regional benevolent societies. Most of them tended to be responsive and expedient as they were founded on the basis of specific demands. The main funders and supporters were local gentry, land owners and literati, who adopted philanthropy to shape their personal vision of the benevolent community and to develop an extended kinship system (Yao, 2008).

Three years after the Movement, twelve European states signed the Geneva Convention to promote humane treatment of sick and wounded soldiers in the battlefield. Although the convention only addressed humanitarian and medical assistance to casualties in land wars, it was known as the official establishment of Red Cross as “an institute of international law” (Parsons and Vecchio, 1963, p. 581). It was not until the Hague Conference in 1899 that the same principles were extended to maritime war. Fields of activities in times of peace were defined even later.

In 1874, the military confrontation between China and Japan in Taiwan ignited early discussions about Red Cross in the civil sphere. An English article that introduced the relief work of Red Cross volunteers in Franco-Prussian War was

translated and published by *Shenbao*, one of the most influential modern newspapers at the time. The editor commented on the neutrality of the organization and urged China to set up a similar mechanism.¹ From 1874 to 1894, Western missionaries and doctors had established Red Cross hospitals in northern China to provide Western medicine and medical care, but the scale remained small and none was indigenized.

The outbreak of the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894 made a turning point. In Yingkou, a group of Western doctors and missionaries established a field hospital to attend the wounded under unofficial Red Cross rubric. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also sent medicine and donations to China (Zhou, 2008). Because western-style surgery tended to be more effective than traditional Chinese medicines in attending the wounds caused by firearms, the Red Cross hospital attracted many injured soldiers to come for treatment. In four months, another three Red Cross hospitals were established in Yingkou, admitting over one thousand Chinese soldiers. Meanwhile, the Japanese Red Cross sent tens of thousands volunteers to the battlefield. Acting as the neutral humanitarian agency, they extended their assistance to the wounded Chinese.

The activities of Western and Japanese relief workers made a great impression on Chinese social reformers. From the May of 1898 to the April of 1899, *Shenbao* published a series of articles to introduce the history and mechanism of Red Cross society, and advocated it as a solution to China's humanitarian emergency during the war. On March 26, 1898, the newspaper published a memorial to the Minister to

¹Published in *Shenbao*, September 7, 1874.

Japan, Yu Langxi. The author was Sun Gan, a Chinese merchant doing business in Japan. In this article, Sun discussed the origin of Red Cross Society in Switzerland and explained how it was modeled in Japan. He praised the practice of the Japanese Red Cross in Yingkou for “saving countless Chinese soldiers”, and pointed out it had earned Japanese government an international reputation. The Chinese army, on the other hand, suffered from the lack of medical treatment. He contended the establishment of Red Cross society was not only necessary but also crucial to China’s national image:

As a civilized country in Asia, China does not participate in such benevolent act [of forming Red Cross society], while all other countries did. It will only make the Westerners despise us further. We must consider it seriously as it is important for our national dignity.²

The concern of misconception by the international community reflected the ethos of westernization since the Self-Strengthening Movement. The foreign occupation of China in the late 19th century exposed the feudal patriarchal society to not only the market economy, but also a progress of modernization in science, technology, education and political system. Patriots encountered the challenge of preserving traditional Chinese values while adapting to the Western model of civilization. Zhang Zhidong, a senior official of the late Qing, proposed to reconcile the dilemma by applying Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical use. His proposition set the mindset for the Self-Strengthening Movement and following social reforms. It also explained why Sun’s memorial addressed an emergent need to align the Chinese philosophy of beneficence with the western-style,

²Memorial submitted by Japanese overseas Chinese merchant Sun Gan to Yu Langxi, Minister to Japan, for submission to the Zongli Yamen, published in *Shenbao* and *Shanghai Shibao*, 1898.

organizational benevolent act.

Sun also outlined four benefits that the nation could enjoy by having the society: first, the medical support can promote military morale; second, as a benevolent act it can earn China respect both domestically and abroad; third, it can provide public health support during disasters; and last, it can advance the Chinese medical science. It was the first time that appeal from the private sphere articulated the Red Cross statute of “providing humanitarian relief during the wartime and medical services during the peacetime” (Zhou, 2000, p. 160). His knowledge of the Red Cross was built on his overseas experience, for he joined the Japanese Red Cross during a business trip to Osaka. His vision of developing a national humanitarian response system with public-private partnership was in line with the Japanese model.

Thirty years after the Meiji Restoration, Japan successfully adapted the technology and tactics of modern warfare and became an imperial power. On the one hand, its technologically advanced military posed a serious threat to the security of Asia Pacific region, whereas on the other hand, the nation’s presence in the world community was improved by its active engagement in international humanitarian movements. As Reeves (1998) points out, “Japan's careful manipulation of Western institutions and public opinion was overwhelmingly successful” (p. 61). In 1886, Japan became the first Asian country to join the treaty of Geneva Convention. Unlike voluntary associations in Europe and the United States, the structure of the Japanese Red Cross, like its military system, was highly centralized and under the control of the Ministry of War:

Subordinate to the Ministry of War, the Japanese Red Cross Society was explicitly intended to supplement Japan's military, and the military closely managed its membership drives. The Japanese imperial family sponsored the new national Society (Nihon Akaisekkijūji), popularizing the Society at home and guaranteeing its funding. (Reeves, 1998, p. 62)

The centralized model, which was brought up later by many Qing officials in their petitions, seemed to be quite favored by the throne as it served the interest of maintaining the authoritarian regime. Endorsed by Minister Yu, Sun Gan's memorial was then forwarded to Zongli Yamen, the China Foreign Ministry. Although no further official action was taken, it was the first time that government officials disclosed a supportive attitude to Red Cross initiatives.

In 1899, China was invited by the czar to attend the First Hague Peace Conference. The conference produced three main conventions: the Convention for the Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes, the Convention for the Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of the Principles of the Geneva Convention of August 22, 1864, and the Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Chinese delegation could not sign any of them at the official ceremony without imperial order. After the conference, the chief delegate Yang Ru submitted several memorials to the throne to explain the general terms of Hague Treaty and evaluate “the benefits and obstacles China would encounter from each” (Reeves, 1998, p. 80). The memorials revealed a particular interest in joining the ICRC. As an internationalist, Yang viewed the importance of Red Cross initiative through the lens of international relations:

Every country that joined the [Geneva] treaty has its own Red Cross Society and it is regarded as a humane endeavor. Japan has established the society with government sponsorship and private support. It indicated great success. China

would be considered as the only country that stands aloof from humanity if we do not join [the ICRC]...If we can sign the treaty upon the approval [of the court], we should follow the Japanese to establish the organization and to show the world that China is committed to philanthropy just like other countries.³

The argument of following the trend of global humanitarianism seemed to help factions in the Qing court to reach the agreement. On December 6, 1899, the throne approved the delegation to sign the 1864 Geneva Convention and all articles of the Hague Treaty, except for the Land War Convention. In 1900, the year before the retirement, Yang Ru submitted his final petition, proposing a pragmatic framework of Chinese Red Cross based on the Japanese model:

The government needs to take the lead in the establishment, with the imperial treasury providing the start-up fund. The operation must be supervised by the throne. The government should also launch public fundraising campaigns to attract private donations. Every small donation counts as they can lead to a great sum, which keeps the organization financially sustainable.⁴

At the first glance, the Red Cross society Yang envisioned was similar to a variation of traditional benevolent societies, as he claimed the society can “instill civic virtues in the citizens”. The public education function, according to Liang (1997), was an important aspect of private charities in Ming and Qing dynasties. Yet more than a responsive, temporary relief agency, Yang argued the organization must be modeled with Western standards to provide long-term, sustainable services:

In the future [the society] will build hospitals, purchase ships, store medicines, and train doctors and nurses. [These activities can be] experimented in branches at the treaty ports. [Because these ports are protected by international conventions,] it will be easier for the society to utilize Western law to accomplish the work [without intervention].

³*Qingji waijiao shiliao* 140:17-19, memorial dated GX25.9.11 (October 11, 1899).

⁴*Qingji waijiao shiliao* 141:20-23, memorial dated GX25.12.28 (January 28, 1900).

With great enthusiasm, Yang conceived the task as part of his retirement plan: He committed to donate five thousand of silver from his salary “as a meager contribution”, and pleaded to take charge of the endeavor. Because China at the time was slowly recovered from the aftermath of Boxer Uprising, a grass-roots rebellion against foreigners and missionaries, Yang was concerned with the Red Cross emblem as it might be perceived as a symbol of Christian values. He suggested to replace it with a similar Buddhism symbol to reduce cultural resistance.

With the lobbying of Yang, the Qing court seemed to be more receptive of this new form of humanitarian aid. The throne might have found the symbolic value of the Red Cross extremely appealing: If it represented the international trend of philanthropy, then China should follow and form its own Red Cross Society, as it would demonstrate that China was civilized even according to the Western standards. The benefit of international recognition was also intriguing: With the legitimacy of the organization reinforced by the international common law, the government could leverage its international influence to strengthen the diplomatic position and to gain bargaining power while confronting with the foreign military forces – both for the safety of citizens and for the territorial integrity. Given the fact that China was gradually colonized by imperialist powers, such recognition was very important.

The time seemed to be ripe. Following Yang’s memorial, the China Foreign Ministry contacted the Japanese Embassy for the constitution of Japanese Red Cross. The path, which was very likely to lead to the establishment of the first indigenous Red Cross organization, was interrupted by the Boxer Rebellion in the following year,

during which all ratification documents for the Hague Treaty were missing.⁵ After several rounds of international negotiations, the ratification of the Treaty and Geneva Convention was finally completed in 1904. The initiative was picked up again in the same year, yet this time, by a group of civic-minded individuals.

Manchuria Red Cross Benevolent Society and IRCSS

In the civic sphere of pre-modern China, the gentry always played an active role in leading and supporting local philanthropic initiatives. In the late Ming era (1550-1644), this particular class was composed of wealthy land owners, Confucian literati, civil servants and candidates, and officials who retired from the court and returned to their hometowns. From early Qing (1644-1795), the boosted market economy along the east coast accumulated huge wealth for merchants, who gradually became a new group of philanthropists (Smith, 1998).

In 1904, the outbreak of Russo-Japanese war in the three eastern provinces within Manchuria accelerated the call for a neutral medical force. Although China was not directly involved in the war, the combats were on Chinese soil and created numerous casualties and refugees. Because the Qing government claimed neutrality, dispatch of relief workers under imperial order was prohibited. The attempts to send ships to evacuate Chinese citizens also failed due to Russia's blockade of Manchurian ports.

On March 3, 1904, led by Shen Dunhe, a group of patriotic merchants in Shanghai founded Manchuria Red Cross Benevolent Society to address the crisis. On the same day, *Shenbao* published its constitution and relief protocol:

⁵*Letters to the Ministry of Army*, dated May 9, 1918. In Archives of Diplomacy, 03-35/4-(1).

1) The society follows the regulation and protocol of Western Red Cross society, with the priority to provide wartime relief for refugees in the three eastern provinces; 2) The society will ask the embassies of Russia and Japan in Shanghai to notify their military field personnel to respect its neutrality in humanitarian relief operations;... 5) The Red Cross emblems will be written in both Japanese and Russian;... 14) The relief workers will appeal for the military protection from Russia, Japan and China if their activities are jeopardized by domestic riots. To ensure the security of volunteers and refugees, Japanese and Russian armies must not prohibit workers from carrying weapons;... 24) The society will elect Western board members to contact missionaries in the three provinces and to reduce external intervention ... 27) Self-funded volunteers are welcome, otherwise the society will provide stipend to cover travelling expenses;... 29) The headquarter is set in Shanghai, with local branches in Beijing and Tianjin. Besides the Executive Board Committee, the society will recruit additional board members to oversee fundraising; ... 34) Although the society is a private endeavor funded by merchants, the committee is looking into to assistance and guidance from the government. It will solicit support from the Political Affair Ministry, Foreign Ministry, the Business Ministry and local administrations to facilitate the operation ...⁶

Although the society still adopted the name of benevolent society, its operation plan revealed the replication of the Red Cross style of humanitarian aid: It was formed as an independent, national organization; the goal was to provide cross-regional humanitarian assistance; and it solicited support from both domestic and international sources, and from public and private sectors. It was also the first time that the term of Red Cross was addressed in the title of an indigenous philanthropic initiative.

However, by that time China had not officially become a member state of the Geneva Conventions. ICRC hence could not charter the society and entitle it to use the Red Cross emblems. The problem was soon recognized by Chinese founders. Seven days later, the organization changed the name to the International Red Cross Society of Shanghai (IRCSS, Shanghai Wanguo Hongshizihui). The structure,

⁶*Dongsansheng Hongshizi puji shanhui zhangcheng bing qi* (The Constitution of Manchuria Red Cross Benevolent Society), published in *Shenbao*, March 3, 1904.

constitution and most of the Chinese board members were preserved. To appeal for international support, the new committee added representatives of the four neutral Western countries: British, France, Germany and America. The ratio of Western board members was significantly higher: Thirty five were Westerners, whereas ten were Chinese. The board meeting was organized in English, with translated scripts provided to Chinese members afterwards.

The title, the composition of the committee and the official language suggested the new society was formed through the joint efforts of Chinese and Western philanthropists. Although its international character did not quite comply with the Geneva Conventions, which stipulated Red Cross Society must operate independently under the authority of the nation where it is founded, it indeed solved the crisis of that time. Given the weak diplomatic posture of Qing government, the international board was effective in appealing for international intervention against the blockage of Manchurian ports. Under the protection of international conventions, the Red Cross Society was able to penetrate the war zone, even before the official signing of the first Geneva Conventions on June 29, 1904.

From the Manchuria Red Cross Benevolent Society to IRCSS, the government offered “covert” support. Most of the board members shared close working relationship with ministry level officials. According to a petition submitted in 1907, authorized by Sheng Xuanhuai and Lu Haihuan, the commissioners of Commercial Treaties, and Wu Zhongxi, commissioner of the Telegraph Administration, the founding of IRCSS was catalyzed by an edict that ordered the commissioners to

mobilize gentry and foreign merchants in Shanghai to launch Red Cross initiatives.⁷

Officials from both the central government and local administrations played a facilitator role. Foreign Ministry and Business Ministry communicated with Russian and Japanese embassies to ensure the relief operation was not compromised by military intervention. When relief workers were caught by the crossfire, the ministries initiated negotiations with foreign forces for rescue. Senior officials contributed to the modeling of the constitution and wielded their personal influence to lead fundraising campaigns, while regional officials in Manchuria worked closely with members and volunteers to coordinate supplies and transportations. The support from individual officials was both political and substantial. Commissioner Wu Zhongxi donated the telegraph services of his administration so volunteers can use telegraph for free.

Commissioner Sheng Xuanhuai, who was the head of the Board of Posts and Communications and the owner of the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, offered free or reduced passage on steamers for the society to transport volunteers and refugees.

At the beginning, the throne hesitated to express its support in public for the concern of losing the Red Cross' and their own neutrality in the war. On the founding ceremony of IRCSS, a German merchant asked the board member Timothy Richard if the society was under the leadership of the court, he replied, “The Chinese

⁷In *Zhongguo hong shi zi hui li shi zi liao xuan bian, 1904-1949* (The historical materials of Chinese Red Cross Society, 1904-1949), p. 7-10; Petition dated July 21, 1907.

government does not plan to [involve] because it might jeopardize its neutrality.”⁸

Initially, the court was also afraid of provoking the Japanese and Russian militaries if it showed supportive attitude of international initiatives. Later on, however, the support became more explicit. On May 24, the Empress issued an edict to praise the society for “attending the wounded and relieving the suffering”. It gave credit to the gentry and officials for organizing fundraising activities which “greatly expressed the benevolence of the court”. The edict also granted one hundred thousand taels of silver from the treasury and encouraged the committee “to be more dedicated to their work”.⁹

The support of government was acknowledged and appreciated by IRCSS. In the new constitution, Sheng Xuanhuai, Lu Haihuan, and Wu Zhongxi were appointed as the directors of the board. It also confirmed the leadership of the Emperor and Empress, the consultation role of ministries, and the cooperation with foreign embassies.

With the ratification of Geneva Conventions in 1904, the endorsement of the Chinese government, the proclamation of neutrality, and the participation of domestic and international philanthropists, the society seemed to satisfy the two primary requirements of ICRC: a national relief organization recognized by its own government and the respective nation is a member of the Geneva Convention. Many

⁸*Shijun Zhaoji biyi Shanghai chuangsh Wanguo Hongshizi zhihui huiyi dazhi* (Shi Zhaoji’s translation of the Conference Notes of the International Red Cross Society of Shanghai), published in *Shenbao*, March 14, 1904.

⁹*Guangxu donghualu*, volume 5, p. 5184.

Chinese historians thus argue the activities of indigenous Red Cross began in 1904 with the operation of the International Red Cross Society of Shanghai, even though the official charter was not bestowed until January 12, 1912.

From IRCSS to CRCS

The 1907 petition reviewed the wartime services of IRCSS from 1904 to 1907. It highly commended the society's achievement of saving more than four hundred and sixty thousands lives, and asked the court to award the board. Meanwhile, it perceived the international body of IRCSS as an "expedient solution", and proposed to establish hospitals and medical training facilities in Shanghai to recruit Chinese students to study military medicine and nursing in the post-war era. A follow-up petition submitted by Wu Zhongxi indicated the proposal was adopted and implemented by the board. The cost of facilitates was covered by the surplus fund raised during the wartime.

In fact, IRCSS turned out to be more than a temporary humanitarian agency in response to wartime emergency. After the war, it was continued to provide medical aid and food for victims of riots in Northern China until 1908, when it was dissolved under the imperial order. However, the infrastructure was preserved and turned into the Chinese Red Cross Society (CRCS) in the same year. The headquarter remained in Shanghai. From 1908 to 1910, CRCS was operated independently under the private leadership of Chinese elites.

The 1907 petition, on the other hand, urged the court to transform the infrastructure of the society so it can be under the government's supervision. In 1910,

it was finally sanctioned. On February, 27, 1910, the throne issued an edict that renamed the society to Great Qing Red Cross Society (Da Qing Hongshizihui) and subordinated it to the Ministry of War. Sheng Xuanhuai was appointed as the first president.¹⁰ However, the decision was opposed by Shen Dunhe, the primary founder of IRCSS and the president of CRCS. In a telegraph to Lu Haihuan, he complained:

The Shanghai Red Cross was a private organization funded by private money...now under the supervision of Ministry of War, it is ordered to provide medical relief away from the front fire zone. The order is against the independence and neutrality of Red Cross, and violates the Geneva Convention. It is pragmatically infeasible to incorporate the Shanghai society into the government body, since its funding is from both domestic and foreign sources.¹¹

As a civil servant in Shanghai's foreign affairs bureau, Shen was fully aware of the hassle of bureaucratic control. His persistence to maintain the private status of the organization was surprisingly tolerated by the court: No substantial governmental intervention was observed, the society remained independent, and Shen retained "de facto managerial control" (Reeves, 1998, p. 110). One explanation was at the time the Qing government was so swamped in the Revolutionary War that it did not have the energy or resource to deal with Shen's "rebellion" (Zhou, 2000). The theory seemed to be supported by the incident of Sheng Xuanhuai's resignation. On October 26, 1911, Sheng was resigned by the court for his misconduct in the recovery of telegraph and railway rights in Manchuria. The position was vacant for nineteen days until Lu Haihuan was appointed as the successor. In the edict of appointment, the name of the organization was revised to Chinese Red Cross Society. It was perceived as a victory

¹⁰*Daqing Xuantong Zhengji*, Volume 30, page 9.

¹¹Published in *Shenbao*, October 31, 1911.

of Shen. With the acquiescence of the court, the international board committee was reassembled during the 1911 Revolution and continued until 1912.

Interestingly, more critiques were raised in the private sphere. On October 26, 1911, *Minli Bao* released an article from Zhang Zujun, the founder of another quasi Red Cross organization in Shanghai. She censured Shen Dunhe for “acting capriciously”, as he “kept changing the name and nature of the society” and “turned the organization from private to public, then to private again” to “enhance his own authority”.¹² Two days later, Shen responded to the accusation through *Shenbao*:

When the Red Cross Society was founded during the Russo-Japanese war, there were twelve board members including me, and we were all gentry. The next year the government endorsed our petition, delegating Zhang Deyi to Switzerland to sign the Geneva Convention, so the society can legitimize its own presence in China. The directors of the board during that time were Ren Fengxin, Shi Ziyin and I, and we were all gentry. ... from the very beginning the society was led by gentry, and [the fact] was acknowledged by the nation and the international community. Where does this idea of changing come from?¹³

The debate nevertheless reflected the tension between the perception of the Red Cross as a war-time humanitarian expedient and the vision to build the organization into a permanent institution. It was also embedded in the paradox of the international board. With the international board, the society cannot be considered as completely indigenized. But without it, it became extremely difficult to fulfill the wartime duty in the semi-colonial, semi-feudal China. As the Qing government had very little control over its diplomatic affairs, the society must solicit international support of any kind to facilitate its operation in the era of turmoil.

¹²*Zhangzhujun zhi Shengzhongli shu* (The Letter from Zhang Zhujun to Sheng Zhongli), published in *Minli Bao* (People's Independence Journal), October 26, 1911.

¹³Published in *Shenbao*, October 28, 1911

Philanthropic Imagination: From Tradition to Modernization

The Red Cross in China was not born in vacuum. By reviewing the news releases and public correspondences, the notion of Red Cross was found frequently associated with words of modernity, neutrality, civilization and humanity. It suggests the acceptance of the society was based on the convergence of China's philanthropic tradition and the Western model of humanitarian aid, and the process was accelerated by the pressing need for neutral relief agencies during the war.

The traditional thoughts of benevolence, which was grounded in Buddhism and Confucian ideologies, had motivated Chinese people to engage in widespread, yet sporadic philanthropic endeavors in Ming and Qing China (Smith, 2009; Yao, 2008; Liang, 1997). With the focus on lineage and neighborhood, most charities were locally based and sponsored by local gentry and merchants. Some provided immediate relief in response to domestic riots and disasters, while others complemented the social welfare system in the forms of private schools, widows' pensions, orphanages, and burial corps (Reeves, 1998; Yao, 2008). However, philanthropy at the regional level became insufficient when China was involved in international warfare for two reasons. First, to penetrate the combat zone, the neutrality of operation must be legitimized by international law, which was premised on the national and international recognition of the relief entity. Second, devastated by several modern wars, the Manchurian regions lacked the basic infrastructure and resource to satisfy the numerous demands for food and medicine, cross-regional cooperation was therefore not only necessary but imperative.

On the other hand, the increasing geographic disparity of wealth made certain cities and areas incubators of modern philanthropy. By studying the local root of Red Cross, Zhu (2005) contends it was not a coincidence that the first indigenous Red Cross society was founded in Shanghai. In the late 1870s, in response to the frequent occurrence of famines and the corrupted imperial system, the private sector took the responsibility to do benevolent relief. As the major economic and intellectual center of the time, Shanghai had a vivid presence of charitable activities that were not bound to local jurisdictions, thirty years prior to IRCSS.

The earliest experiment of Red Cross model was found in the China Relief Benevolent Society in 1900. Headquartered in Shanghai, the society was founded by merchants of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. The mission was to address the humanitarian crisis in Peking and Tianjin, which was caused by the Boxer Uprising and the following military oppression of foreign militaries. The operation model, as described by Chi (2005) and Min (1988), was very similar to Red Cross initiatives: It transcended regional boundaries and pleaded for national support; it claimed the wounded refugees and soldiers should receive equal treatment regardless of their nationality; and it followed the international protocol, asking local officials to notify foreign embassies and issue special passports for volunteers (Chi, 2005). The evidence suggested the essence of Red Cross spirit had been well digested by the civic-minded Chinese and incorporated into their philanthropic practice.

The heritage of benevolence was also highlighted by the title of the interim origination, the Manchuria Red Cross “Benevolent Society”. Instead of replicating the

traditional model of community charities, the society developed its fundraising strategy and operation plan upon the pioneering work of other modern charities in Shanghai, and they shared a close partnership. Among the ten Chinese board members of IRCSS, eight were active in other philanthropic endeavors. News releases on *Shenbao* indicated many charities in Shanghai were involved in the fundraising campaign for IRCSS, some were even delegated by the organization to collect donations.

The mindset in the civil sphere was also mature for the reform of philanthropic sector. With the termination of civil service examine system in 1905, access to state employment became extremely limited to merchant-gentry elites. They turned to philanthropy to fulfill their Confucian ideal of serving the general public. There were, indeed, enough opportunities for their philanthropic imagination. In the last decades of Qing dynasty, China suffered from domestic riots, famines and foreign colonization. Inspired by nationalism and patriotism, concerned individuals were reaching out to other cultures for solutions to their national crises, and some of them found remedies in modernization and civilization (Reeves, 1998). On the other hand, the exposure to the modern Western world and the trend of colonization raised concerns for foreign invasion in economic, cultural, and political forms (Bullock , 2011). Many called for national solidarity to survive Social Darwinism and to preserve indigenous culture. The appeal created an impetus to transform local undertakings to national welfare movement. In such ethos, the prosperity of China as a nation was believed to be the responsibility of each individual Chinese. With the

responsibility shifted from the throne to individuals, patriotism was liberated from the bureaucratic structure, and people were motivated by the spirit of benevolence and voluntarism to participate in civic affairs. It thus created space for nationalism to be manifested through non-governmental bodies, and engaging people in a variety of social activities which earned themselves national and international recognition (Reeves, 1998).

The transformation towards national movement was also fueled by new technologies. Through the patronage of China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, railway authorities and the Telegraph Administration, many of the communication and transportation services were offered free to the society. The railway, steamer and automobile allowed medical workers to transport the wounded to hospitals far away from the combat zone. The telegraph system facilitated the exchange of information for need and aids between the headquarter and branch offices in the front line. Meanwhile, local and national newspapers took the lead to educate the public about this new philanthropic concept, and supported the society through free media exposure of photographs, reports, and fundraising advertisements (Zhang, 2004).

In the international arena, Japan, the student of westernization and rival of China in Asia, had established the Red Cross Society under its centralized government. Its utility was proven during the Sino-Japanese war and Russo-Japanese war, whereas its achievement on China's soil brought Japan worldwide recognition. The model was endorsed by reformers in both the private and public sectors, yet they tended to

disagree on the governing body of the organization: While Qing officials believed the organization should be subordinated to the imperial government, merchants and gentries were in favor of developing it into a private initiative with governmental support.

In the court, it revealed a different path that led to the acceptance of this new form of institutional relief. From 1907 to 1910, it took three years for the government to officially organize the indigenous society. The cautious, yet conservative attitude of the throne nevertheless created more bureaucratic entanglement. Yet senior gentry-officials, like Yang Ru, Sheng Xuanhuai, Lu Haihuan and Wu Zhongxi, played an active role in lobbying the court for consent and support. Approved petitions and imperial edicts indicated two trends of ideas might catch the attention of the throne. The first was the responsibility of benevolence in rulers. The political ideology of the monarchical sovereignty at the time was grounded in Confucianism, which emphasizes a benevolent government has the duty to provide welfare for its citizens. If the Red Cross spirit was consistent with the universal idea of humanitarianism, then it was a moral imperative for the court to support it, so as to show that the ruling class kept its citizen's well-being in mind. The second thought was the importance of internationalization, which was highlighted in the memorials of Sun Gan and Yang Ru. In their view, the success of the Japanese Red Cross did not only demonstrate the feasibility of Western organizational model in Asian context, but also underlined an approach to present traditional Chinese morals to the world and to obtain global acceptance.

Another characteristic of the Red Cross that attracted prevalent attention was its emphasis on medical philanthropy. For both the ruling class and civic-minded elites, the major concern was the well-being of the nation. They suffered the same humiliation when the semi-colonial and semi-feudal China was described as “the sick man of Asia” (Bullock, 2011, p. 6). With the focus on medical services and education, the acceptance of Red Cross society benefitted from such perception (Reeves, 1998). From Manchuria to Shanghai, quarantine hospitals were established to provide Western-style medical care with the universal impulse of saving lives (Hinrichs, 1998).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The earliest presence of the Red Cross in China was associated with relief activities of Western and Japanese volunteers during the Sino-Japanese War. Their outstanding work raised attention among Chinese social elites and sparked discussions in the civil sphere. In line with the effort of government to retain domestic control and to gain reputation in the global community, and citizens’ desire to strengthen the fragile nation, Red Cross organizations in China were gradually indigenized with support from both the public and private sectors. The process was also facilitated by the Qing officials, who endorsed and patronized the society’s activities and appealed for its legitimacy. The society itself was a unique product integrating the Chinese tradition of benevolence into the Western model of national humanitarian relief. Its successful indigenization seemed to provide a solution to the dilemma between the

ethos of learning from abroad and the attempt to safeguard China's national and cultural identity.

The first Chinese Red Cross society was formed as a non-governmental organization. Founded by a group of civic-minded merchants and gentries, the goal was to provide medical relief for Chinese refugees in the northern provinces. More than an expedient solution, the society was devoted to the post-war development of modern hospitals and medical education programs. Its dedication to the modernization of humanitarian relief system filled in the gaps ignored by the Self-Strengthening Movement. The international composition of the board helped the organization to solicit international support, both economically and politically. With the leverage of international network, the society was able to send volunteers to the battlefield. Donations from domestic and overseas sources enhanced its autonomy and hindered the takeover attempt of the Qing court. The dynasty in its final years was too exhausted with internal and external crises and could not wield enough power to control such an organization backed with international resources, connections, and influence.

The medical focus, modern organizational model and neutral stance of Red Cross justified its fitness in the context of late Qing society. Although the ground was laid by early missionary activities and evangelical aid, services provided through Red Cross were more secular and less exclusive. As Reeves (1998) contends, during a wartime emergency, the overwhelming demand for care and the necessity of multi-denominational coordination prohibited "any concerted effort to save souls

while saving lives” (p. 37). Meanwhile, Western medication and surgeries in the Red Cross hospitals gained great reputation for their immediate effects. Pragmatically, the early society was established on the shoulder of pioneers: It referenced the framework of Japanese Red Cross Society, and leant valuable lessons from other domestic relief operations. The centralized organizational structure by which the headquarters coordinated local activities and raised fund for front line agencies indicated its efficiency in allocating resources and personnel across long distances. Fueled by the convergent local and national interests, such structure also improved fundraising and distribution activities. Last, with the mediation of the Western board and Foreign Ministry officials, the organization was able to convince the belligerent parties of its neutrality in the battle zone, even without the official charter from ICRC.

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