

The Internationalisation of Disaster Relief in Early Twentieth-century China

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There is much in favour of the view that a process of internationalisation of disaster relief in China began during the Great North-China Famine of 1876-9, when Protestant missionaries, most prominently Timothy Richard (1845-1919), launched a widely-publicized, international fund-raising campaign and went to the famine districts in the north to offer their services as relief workers (see e.g. Li 2007: 276-7).¹ To boost the fund-raising drive an illustrated pamphlet originally used by Chinese philanthropists in Suzhou, the capital of Jiangsu province, close to the treaty port of Shanghai, who had organized their own relief campaign for the famine in the North, was translated and published in London under the title *The Famine in China* (Committee of the China Famine Relief Fund 1878). A total of 204,560.37 silver *taels* contributed by donors from Great Britain, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, India, Singapore, Penang, Hong Kong, China and Japan – with more than half of the money coming from Britain – was distributed in parts of the provinces of Zhili, Shanxi and Shaanxi (China Famine Relief Fund, Shanghai Committee 1879: 29-31). However, in terms of the relative amount of money and the man-power the foreign relief effort could rely on, the overall practical effect of this missionary campaign must have been rather limited,² even though single localities may have benefited disproportionately. Neither did disaster relief become a permanent feature of missionary activity. The symbolic effect was huge nevertheless.

Western involvement clearly triggered the expansion of private charity relief (*yizhen* 義賑) organized by local philanthropists and their institutions (*shantang* 善堂 or benevolent halls) – historically an important feature in coping with famines that had grown in importance since the early nineteenth century – to include trans-regional and trans-provincial disaster relief operations and the establishment of special relief bureaus (*xiezhen gongsuo* 協賑公所 or *xiezhenju* 協賑局) that coordinated the fund-raising and relief campaigns.³ These new-style relief operations thrived

¹ I would like to thank Teresa Tomás Rangil, Gareth Davies and Patricia Clavin for the opportunity to present a first draft of this paper at the international workshop 'Dealing with Disasters: an International Approach' at Oxford University's Faculty of History in September 2013 and an anonymous reviewer for very valuable comments and questions and in particular for alerting me to Michael Barnett's work on the history of humanitarianism.

² Just 31 protestant missionaries and about 40 catholic missionaries were involved in the distribution of foreign relief in these three provinces (China Famine Relief Fund, Shanghai Committee 1879: 157). As a basis for comparison, in Zhili, the province surrounding Beijing, the state used more than 400,000 silver *taels* (a weight measure for silver) for work relief projects, and 140,000 *shi* of tribute grain were distributed as relief (1 *shi* of unhusked rice was roughly equivalent to 60 kg). In Shanxi reportedly 10 million *taels* of silver and 1 million *shi* of grain could be 'raised through official and voluntary sources' (Li 2007: 274-5). Still, overall, official relief was woefully inadequate in comparison to earlier Qing relief campaigns.

³ Some of these were official agencies, but most were not (e.g. the relief bureau set up by the Shenbao Publishing House in 1889). Nevertheless, the co-optation of successful philanthropists into some official

during the following two decades among the merchant-gentry elite of the Lower Yangzi region, and Shanghai quickly became the centre of these activities (Rankin 1986, Zhu 2006 and 2012). But there was little cooperation with Westerners. Timothy Richard himself moved on to become a newspaper editor and publicist, advocating socio-political and in particular economic reforms, which he saw as a more effective way to address the famine problem than short-term emergency relief (Janku 2014: 342-5). Zhu has argued that it was only once private relief had become an officially endorsed part of China's disaster relief system at the end of the century that foreign relief could find a lawful channel, and thus genuine cooperation – as opposed to the situation of open and sometimes hostile competition in the 1870s – could take place. This change coincided with a shift from a discourse of reward and retribution (*fubao* 福報) to a discourse of the state (*guojia* 國家) in the process of the modernization of China's disaster relief system (Zhu 2006: 147, 388-90). Thus, the expansion of charity relief during the North-China Famine and thereafter was an important element in that transformation, but whatever international factors played a role in that story, they could not develop roots in Chinese soil until after the turn of the century.

In the first decades of the twentieth century this form of charity relief – as a force operating on the national level – was largely replaced by a different type of organization, such as the Red Cross Society (1904) and later the China International Famine Relief Commission (CIFRC, 1922), as well as new, nationally operating religious relief bodies, such as the Chinese Society for the Relief of Sentient Beings (Zhongguo Jishenghui 中國濟生會, 1917) and the World Red Swastika Society (Shijie Hongwanzihui 世界紅卍字會, 1922). At the same time the older type of local charitable organizations or benevolent halls continued to proliferate. The increasing importance of these organisations, in particular the CIFRC, has been explained by the lack of an efficient government, in particular after the revolution of 1911 when they took on what were essentially state functions. (The CIFRC's declared aim was to work towards the betterment of the lives of the people in China's vast countryside. It was interested in economic development rather than mere emergency relief.) The formal reunification of the country and the establishment of the Nanjing government in 1928 that once again declared itself in charge of the welfare of the people brought a shift back to firm state control, which involved a move towards the incorporation of nationally-operating private organizations into state organs. Nevertheless, as a multitude of disasters were reported during the 1930s – in itself to some extent a response to the existence of the new government –, big and small, local and international private societies continued to thrive until the outbreak of war in 1937 and beyond. Thus a weak state was compensated by a vigorous society and one could argue that international organizations were both an intrinsic part of this society and rejected by it at the same time.

While it may be difficult to neatly separate 'indigenous' relief on the one hand from 'international' relief on the other, the idea of a dual system of humanitarian organisations along these lines may still be useful to capture the dynamics of the republican disaster relief system. An interesting aspect here is that it was the international organisations that were much more dependent on cooperation with the state, and the state, once it was able to do so, sought to incorporate both. At the level of society, while humanitarian motives were important, national self-assertion was an omnipresent factor in this story. It happened in an era dominated by increasingly

capacity was a common practice. See e.g. Li Hongzhang's attempts to enlist Xie Jiafu's services (Edgerton-Tarpley 2008: 140).

anti-imperialist and nationalist sentiments; at a time when growing numbers of Chinese people spent considerable amounts of time abroad, often in the US, and growing numbers of people from Europe and America (and also Japan) moved to Chinese treaty port cities; when the collapse of the old regime, intermittent warfare and more general social and political instability had led to the neglect of water control and irrigation systems, and unpredictable and exploitative behaviour by regional military leaders had made the people, in particular the rural population in central and northern China, more vulnerable; and, finally, when the media, with its new tool of news photography, made all kinds of big and small disasters far more visible than they had ever been before. This essay is an attempt to trace these different overlapping aspects of disaster relief in early twentieth-century China and to understand the tensions between its national and international dimensions as well as those between society and the state. The well-documented history of the CIFRC is a convenient starting point, which is why international cooperation in disaster relief is the subject of the next section (1). This will be followed by a discussion of the Nationalist government's relief policies after 1928 (2), and two of the Chinese humanitarian organizations that represent the second strand of China's dual disaster relief system (3).

1 International cooperation in disaster relief

The decade between the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 has been identified as 'the decade that prompted the formation of the first large-scale, international charities' in China (DuBois 2011: 89). The first of these was the Red Cross Society whose Chinese chapter was founded in 1904 in Shanghai in the wake of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war (Reeves 1998: 92-125, Zhou 2008: 25-41).⁴ This decade saw indeed a decisive change in the character of disaster relief, due in part to the novelty of international relief for the victims of war. In 1900-1, during the Boxer Rebellion when the Qing court had been forced to evacuate the capital and seek refuge in faraway Xi'an, private charity relief of a severe drought-induced famine in the northern provinces received full-fledged official sanction for the first time (Zhu 2006: 411-2). The thorough political reforms inaugurated after the Boxer debacle – known as the New Policy or *xinzheng* 新政 reforms – and in particular the inception of the local self-government movement (1905) brought further change to the way the Qing state approached disaster and in particular famine relief, eliminating the formerly central task of *huangzheng* 荒政 or the 'administration of famine' by putting greater emphasis on economic development, and ultimately endorsing the legitimacy of private disaster relief by shifting the responsibility to local communities.⁵ Foreign relief committees reappeared briefly in 1906 and in 1910. After the revolution the new government in Beijing (1912-28) tried to resume proper state functions, but never managed to restore control over the entire or even substantial parts of the country. Private Chinese societies flourished during the 1917 floods in Zhili province and even more so during the drought of 1920-1 when the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee was formed, which later (as CIFRC), with the approval and the cooperation of the government, assumed quasi-state functions – a situation that continued until

⁴ However, it was only in January 1912 that the Chinese Red Cross Society became a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

⁵ The local self-government regulations published in 1909 included a whole range of charitable activities, including famine relief (Zhou and Xu 2006).

Jiang Jieshi's 蔣介石 (Chiang Kai-shek, 1887-1975) success in the Northern Expedition (reunifying the country) and the establishment of a new Nationalist government in Nanjing in 1928.

How did it start? International cooperation – as opposed to Sino-foreign competition – in disaster relief started in a haphazard manner with the formation of ad-hoc committees. In 1906 a Hua-Yang yizhen shanhui 華洋義賑善會 or China International Charity Relief Society was established in Shanghai to raise funds and organise relief for flood victims in northern Jiangsu (Zhou and Zeng 2006: 449),⁶ but ceased to exist after six months. During a flood that affected the provinces of Jiangsu and Anhui in 1910-1911, another international committee (Hua-Yang yizhenhui), referred to in English as Central China Famine Relief Committee, was formed in Shanghai to organize relief and fill the void left by the foundering Qing government on the one hand and the new provisional government in Nanjing and Yuan Shikai's 袁世凱 (1859-1916) fledgling Beiyang government that succeeded it on the other hand. According to Zhu, this political weakness was the condition of the committee's success (2013: 83). Committee members included representatives sent by the governors of the afflicted provinces as well as people from gentry-merchant-official-student circles in Shanghai, eight Chinese and eight non-Chinese, including American, British, French, German and Japanese citizens (the CIFRC later followed the same organizational principles).⁷ Here the different aid cultures melted into one, with appeals to spend less on banquets, gifts and other luxuries, and a return of the discourse of retribution combined with Western-style charity events that emphasized spending money. The Chinese method of using illustrated contribution ledgers (*zaimintu juance* 災民圖捐冊) was updated by using photographs that had been taken by one of the committee members in the disaster area (Zhu 2013: 77).⁸ The committee combined the better organizational capacities on the ground of the Chinese members with the stronger financial resources of the foreign members. Large-scale cooperative work relief projects that would become a hallmark of relief in the republic were pioneered. The plan for the Huai River conservancy project was explored (but not implemented) by an American engineer sent by the American Red Cross Society, together with Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853-1926), who had founded the Jiang-Huai River Control Company, and smaller but still substantial building projects, such as repairing dikes, dredging canals and building streets, could actually be completed (Zhu 2013: 78). This emphasis on work relief would become the model for disaster relief in the next decades.

But it was by no means only foreign philanthropists who unfolded an unprecedented activism. In 1915 when another major flood hit South China, the Chinese Red Cross Society and a newly formed Shanghai Mercy Corps (Shanghai cishantuan 上海慈善團) that brought together a large number of smaller local charities, or rather 'old-style' benevolent halls, under a quasi-official

⁶ Lü Haihuan 呂海寰 and Sheng Xuanhuai 盛宣懷 served as directors (both were successful businessmen as well as imperial commissioners of trade and postal communications respectively), a certain Hobson was vice-director, Shen Dunhe 沈敦和 and Li Jiabai 李佳白 served as secretaries, Zhu Baosan 朱葆三 and a Westerner referred to as Yide 意德 as treasurers. A little later both Lü and Sheng also became directors of the newly-formed Great Qing Red Cross Society (Zhou and Zeng 2006: 450).

⁷ Shen Dunhe, the chairman of the Chinese Red Cross Society, and John C. Ferguson, American missionary and owner of the daily *Xinwenbao* 新聞報, were the two initiators. Contrary to what the existing literature (including Nathan 1965 and Huang 2004) suggests, the Chinese members played a crucial role. The committee existed until 1913, by which time the composition of its members had changed twice (Zhu 2013: 76-7).

⁸ Published in English as *Famine Scenes in China, 1910-11* (Shanghai: Central China Famine Relief Fund, 1911).

umbrella were the major players in the organisation of relief.⁹ In 1917 Xiong Xiling 熊希齡 (1870-1937), former Minister of Finance and then Prime Minister under Yuan Shikai's first Beiyang government who had left office in 1914, was put in charge of relief of a major flood that had devastated Zhili province and the capital region in the preceding summer (nominated by the then acting president, just after Yuan's death).¹⁰ Funding came from the government, charities, and individuals from the official, and merchant-gentry classes. The charities involved included the Chinese Red Cross Society, the Shanghai Red Cross Society, the Flood Relief Commission of the newly-founded Chinese Society for the Relief of Sentient Beings (Zhongguo Jishenghui), the Shunzhi Native Place Association in Shanghai, the Tianjin Flood Relief Commission, the American Red Cross Society, the Christian Flood Relief Committees of Tianjin and Beijing, the Shunzhi Relief Bureau and the Chinese Anglican Church. Xiong Xiling also used his contacts from his former posts as Finance and Prime Minister to raise funds from government bodies, merchant organisations and banks. The overall amount raised was 700,000 yuan (Zhao 2012). According to the Chinese Red Cross Society's own reporting, they generated at least 200,000 of these (Chi 2005). Even though from a Shanghai perspective the Red Cross work looked pretty autonomous, it is clear that Xiong had assigned them to particular localities to organize emergency relief. The model that worked in a major disaster was to bring together the multitude of private charities – regardless of their national affiliations – under a strong central leadership, whether official or unofficial. In 1917, this was clearly in Chinese hands, even at the local level. We know of at least one case where a certain Yin Wangda from Beijing negotiated a work relief project with the American Red Cross Society (ARCS), employing 20,000 men from the disaster villages in a road construction project, with the ARCS taking care of the salary payments (5 yuan per person per month) and the Chinese Red Cross Society of the distribution of cotton clothes to each of them (Chi 2005: 223 citing a *Shenbao* report).

In a sense, the formation of the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee in 1920, when a drought of the proportions of 1877-8 threatened the lives of 20 million people in the northern-Chinese countryside, was not substantially different from Xiong's 1917 campaign, only that it was operating on a national scope and that it is more often seen as an international, if not an Anglo-American operation. It is regarded as a milestone in the history of disaster relief, marking the beginning of the 'stage of maturity' of charity relief, by some of the leading Chinese scholars in this field (see e.g. Xia 2000: 6). The Committee brought together and coordinated the work of the North China Famine Relief Society¹¹ led by former monarchist and patriotic statesman Liang Shi'yi 梁士詒 (1869-1933), statesman-turned-philanthropist Xiong Xiling, and official interpreter and finance

⁹ The Shanghai cishantuan was formed after the revolution in August 1912. It coordinated the work of member organisations that included the following benevolent societies: Tongren fuyuantang 同仁輔元堂, Guoyutang 果育堂, Puyutang 普育堂, Yuyingtang 育嬰堂, Qingjie baojietang 清節保節堂, Shizhouchang 施粥廠, Jiushengju 救生局, and Pinmin xiqinsuo 貧民習勤所 (Zhou and Zeng 2006: 450).

¹⁰ According to one report, about two thirds of the province were inundated, affecting 20 million out of a population of 30 million (*Yishibao* 益世報 report cited in Zhao 2012: 58). In a letter published in *Shenbao* 申報 in 1918 Xiong Xiling reports that 17,646 villages in more than 100 counties were affected, and that as yet incomplete statistics showed the number of 5,611,759 people in need of relief (cited in Chi 2005: 221).

¹¹ The North China Famine Relief Society consisted of the following 14 local societies: the Beiwusheng Society, the Mohammedan Society, the Peking Christian Society, the Zhili Jiuhuang Society, the Nengxue Jiuzai Society, the Chinese Red Cross Society, the P'ing T'ing Society, the Huabei Society, the Shanxi Hanzai Society, the Shanxi Chouzhen Society, the Zhili Yizhen Society, the Buddhist Society, the Shunzhi Hanzai Society, and the Beifang Society (Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 1922).

expert Cai Tinggan 蔡廷幹 (1861-1935),¹² and the various foreign societies that had been formed over the summer of 1920 united in an International Executive Committee chaired by a Dr G. Douglas Gray.¹³ John E. Baker, who became the chairman of the CIFRC in 1922, participated in the campaign as Director of Foreign Operations of the ARCS (American Red Cross 1921), although at the time he also worked for the Ministry of Communications. The last name on the list of Chinese members of the Administrative Council was the Government Relief Bureau.

While on the surface this all looked like cosy togetherness, hidden underneath were ongoing tensions nourished by an undercurrent of Chinese resentment of the foreign, in particular Western dominance – as this is how ‘international’ was commonly read. Overall, the relief campaign in 1920-1921 has been celebrated as an unprecedented success, largely based on the fact that the death toll was a ‘mere’ 500,000 – compared to the estimated 9 to 13 million in the 1876-1879 famine. This has been ascribed to the advantage of having railways that did not exist in the 1870s, but also to the work of the International Committee that had the better methods and resources to organize and coordinate an efficient fund-raising and relief campaign (see e.g. Nathan 1965 and Huang 2004). Recently, Fuller has criticized this view, pointing to the importance of local neighbourly relief, the work of Chinese charities, such as the Buddhist Society, and also relief provided by regional military governments (Fuller 2013). While it is true that much of what happened locally, and in particular much of what happened before the relief of the International Committee even started early in 1921 remains largely undocumented, this imbalance between centrally organized relief and the local relief that always preceded and overlapped with it is not a feature of the 1920-1 campaign alone, but of famine relief in China generally. It is therefore important to uncover these underrepresented forces in the fight against famine. At the same time it seems that the work of the International Committee incorporated some of these forces (local governments, Buddhist Society), and moreover, the authors of the final report published in 1922 present a less polarizing view than some of the later studies would suggest. For example they took care to emphasize what they saw as an unprecedented ‘interest and support in relief work by the Chinese for their own people,’ pointing out that 44% of the money administered through the International Committee and 60% of the total sum of \$37 million used for the relief campaign came from Chinese sources.¹⁴ The report also stated very clearly that a total of 8 million people had been fed through the work of the International Commission, while the remaining millions survived through 1) government measures such as the Ministry of Communications’ reductions of grain shipment rates and remission of charges on famine relief grain, 2) the ‘surprising capacity of the Chinese people to eke out an existence on food that other people would find impossible to even think of eating,’ 3) an ‘unusually mild winter,’ 4) the work of the Government Relief Bureau, 5) the ‘relief done by the distinctly Chinese Societies’ (the total sum handled by them was estimated at \$8 million), 6) relief given out by missions from sums privately

¹² Cai had spent his teens in the US as member of the Chinese Educational Mission (1873-1881).

¹³ The International Executive Committee included representatives from Belgium, Denmark, France, Japan, Russia, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, Norway/Sweden, and the USA.

¹⁴ Interestingly, in 1929, it was a Chinese newspaper report that emphasized the Western contribution by pointing out that in 1920-1, from a total of \$9 million non-governmental contributions, 70% came from foreigners, to which the 75% contributions from Chinese sources in 1929 compared of course positively. *Dagongbao* 大公報, 11 November 1929, cited in Janku 2012: 253. What the figure of \$9 million is based on, when the 1922 CIFRC report quotes a figure of \$17,358,633 (Mexican dollars) subscribed in China and abroad (Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 1922: 19), is unclear.

received (a total of just over \$2 million), 7) and large-scale emigration (Peking United International Famine Relief Committee 1922: 21-26). But this spirit of genuine cooperation could never be taken for granted and was never shared across all the involved players equally. While there were objective circumstances that made it sensible to have Western figures spearheading the operations (such as easier access to donations from abroad), on the Chinese side there was always the desire to manage without outside help, as illustrated by the example of Xiong Xiling, who did not continue to work for the CIFRC but became the chairman of the World Red Swastika Society (Shijie Hongwanzihui) in 1925 instead. It seems that after this exemplary cooperation the two strands separated again.

After the campaign representatives of eight committees met in Beijing and decided to use the left-over funds to establish a permanent organization with the aim of building on the experience gained and working towards the prevention of similar disasters in the future. For this purpose they envisaged the formation of a commission for the study of famine conditions and a focus on preventive work dealing with 'colonization' (i.e. resettlement of people away from densely-populated areas), economics and credit, the improvement of highways and waterways, and afforestation. In 1922 the Hua-Yang yizhen jiuzai zonghui (known in English as the China International Famine Relief Committee) established its permanent headquarters in Beijing and remained the most visible player in the field of disaster relief and development work for the next fifteen years. With the establishment of the Nanjing government in 1928 the autonomy of the CIFRC came seriously under threat, but it continued to play an important role in particular in rural construction and the cooperative movement until 1939 when its work was finally taken over by the State Administration for Cooperative Enterprises (Hezuo shiye guanliju 合作事業管理局) and Baker left the country. Accordingly, the last issue of the bilingual newsletter it had published from October 1923 – the *Jiuzai huikan* or *Famine Commission Bulletin* – appeared in April 1939.

The CIFRC – presumably quite consciously – showed different faces to its different national clienteles. Just to cite a tiny example: while the Chinese version of the editorial of the first issue of the bulletin ('Fakanci' 發刊詞) started with the words 'our country' (*wu guo* 吾國), the English version opens with the words 'One of the great problems of famine relief work *in a country like China*, where the distances are great and where local famines may occur even in adjacent provinces from quite different causes, is co-ordination ...' [italics added]. This might explain why an organisation that from the outside looked very much like a 'foreign' organisation dominated by an Anglo-American culture could be seen as a perfectly 'Chinese,' perhaps simply a 'modern' organisation by its Chinese members, who were mostly drawn from the 'Westernized' elite staffing new political and commercial institutions, such as the chambers of commerce and provincial assemblies.¹⁵ Nevertheless, despite the nominal parity of Chinese and non-Chinese members of the CIFRC board (one Chinese and one Western representative from each of the province-level member organisations), it would seem that through the allowed number of additionally co-opted members – eight, six of which were non-Chinese – the committee was predominantly Western (the two co-opted Chinese members were Zhang Yuanshan 章元善, a Cornell graduate better known as Djang Y. S., and a Reverend Liu Fang 劉芳). In particular the key positions of chairman and secretary were

¹⁵ See e.g. the list of members of the CIFRC's provincial committees in Yunnan and Shandong as published in the *Famine Commission Bulletin*, vol.5, no.4 (April 1928), accessed via the Shanghai Library's Minguo shiqi qikan quanwen shujuku 民国时期期刊全文数据库 [Republican Period Periodicals Full-Text Database].

filled by two Americans, John E. Baker and Walter Mallory.¹⁶ Prominent figures such as Xiong Xiling or diplomat and statesman Wang Daxie 汪大燮 (1860-1929), who had been members of the Administrative Council of the 1920-1921 Committee, were nowhere to be found. Cai Tinggan seems to have been the only one of the high-profile Chinese who stayed on.

Further it is interesting to note that most of the Chinese members of the provincial boards appear to have held official positions, whereas in the case of the Chinese charities it was the other way round: after 1928 the government seems to have been eager to co-opt their leaders - if Wang Zhen 王震 (aka Wang Yiting 王一亭, 1867-1938) is a representative example. He was one of the founders of the Federation of Charity Organisations in Shanghai (Shanghai cishan tuanti lianhehui 上海慈善團體聯合會, 1927) and held positions on the boards of a large number of charities in Shanghai. He was asked to serve on the board of Xu Shiying's Relief Commission and became chairman of its Shanghai bureau.

2 The Nationalist government's relief policies after 1928

1928 marked the beginning of a new approach to disaster relief, essentially meaning that the state was back in charge, or at least that is what the newly set up institutions seem to suggest. A relief policy was drafted shortly after the formation of the new government in Nanjing by members of the newly established Relief Office (Zhenwuchu 賑務處) and released via the national press (see Box 1).¹⁷

國民政府施賑標準 – 'Government Outlines Relief Policy' (press report of 12 Sept 1928)

- 一. 地方偏災應由省政府辦理
1. Local catastrophes should be dealt with by the local government concerned.
- 二. 新稼已收者不賑但舊災過重之區得酌施工賑
2. No relief will be given in districts where crops have recently been harvested. Labor relief may be distributed in places where the effects of a previous crop failure have not yet entirely disappeared.
- 三. 雖有一部分受災而地方富庶政府尚有餘力者不賑
3. No relief will be undertaken by the government in localities stricken by famine where local resources are known to be sufficient to cope with the situation.
- 四. 中央賑款以辦工賑不辦急賑為原則
4. As a rule, funds of the National Government are intended for labor relief and not for free relief.
- 五. 實有辦急賑之必要時以施糧為原則
5. Where free relief is undertaken, grain, as a rule, is to be distributed.
- 六. 工賑以用人多工作易能舊地施工而與防災有關者為原則例如築圩穿渠修堤濬河疏湖鑿井等是修路雖與防災無關而與交通有益者亦在首先舉辦之例
6. Labor relief projects are chosen among those which will give employment to the maximum number of people, and are of famine prevention significance. Such projects include dikes, irrigation ditches, drainage ditches, impounding reservoirs and wells. Roads improve means of communication, and are therefore also included, although they have but indirect bearing on famine prevention.

Box 1: The Nanjing government relief policies as published in the CIFRC's *Jiuzai huikan* 6.1 (1928).

¹⁶ See 'Zonghui huiyuan xingshi biao' 總會會員姓氏表 – 'Members of the Commission,' *Jiuzai huikan* 1.1 (1923): 5.

¹⁷ The Shanghai daily *Shenbao*, for example, reported on this on 7 September 1928 ('Guofu zhenwuchu chengli' 國府賑務處成立).

It is noteworthy that this policy represents a continuation of the old practice of relying on local forces as far as possible, as well as a confirmation of the new emphasis on work relief measures. Xu Shiying 許世英 (1873-1964) was put in charge of the government Relief Commission (Zhenwu weiyuanhui 賑務委員會) that was to coordinate official relief measures, as well as the work of private organisations, ultimately bringing disaster relief back under the umbrella of the state. After a transitional period that saw the deadly Northwest famine of 1928-30, which due to a combination of drought and warfare cost the lives of an estimated ten million people,¹⁸ what Xia Mingfang calls a 'formally relatively complete new-style disaster relief system' emerged (2000: 5). With the formation of Xu's commission a frenetic process of institution-building and law-making started. Meetings were held, investigations carried out. A newsletter, the *Zhenwu yuekan* 賑務月刊 (Relief affairs monthly), was published from 1930 to 1933 with the aim of furthering the exchange of information about disaster conditions throughout the country, improving the use of limited resources, and effectively addressing both the symptoms and causes of the calamities haunting the people year after year ('Fakanci'). It is hard to imagine that this bulletin became a very popular reading, as it consists of page after page of official communications, but edifying phrases on the moral value of giving relief in the calligraphy of such illustrious people as Xu Shiying and Wang Zhen on the covers of the first year's issues were all intended to reflect the sincerity of the government in ensuring the welfare of the people.

The extremely long list of reported disasters in the ten years the Nanjing government lasted suggests that the existence of a government that took over formal responsibility encouraged people in all provinces to report their disasters (see e.g. the records for 1928-1937 in the chronology in Li Wenhai et al 1994: 339-345). However, how effective the work of the commission was is debatable (and more research is needed). We know for example that despite the often-cited curtailment of the private associations' freedoms, the bulk of the relief work done on the ground continued to rely on them throughout the Nanjing decade. The names of the major charities, such as the Chinese Red Cross Society, the Chinese Society for the Relief of Sentient Beings, the World Red Swastika Society as well as the CIFRC appear in the government newsletter with great regularity. And although in 1929 the CIFRC *Bulletin* duly reported in unambiguously positive terms ('[w]e take pleasure in presenting a summary of it') on government relief measures, including over \$4.5 million 'distributed since last autumn,' a custom surtax, forced officials' contributions, free transportation of relief goods, and official awards for people making relief contributions, it seems very likely that the 'proposal for reserving \$5,000,000 yearly for relief purposes' remained a proposal (*Jiuzai huikan* 6.4).

National self-assertion played an important role in this period of the internationalisation of disaster and in particular famine relief. There is a certain logic behind the assumption that the state and nobody else had to be in charge, and certainly not foreigners or other states or even transnational organisations. Xu Shiying's Relief Commission was a clear statement that the times where international organisations such as the CIFRC took the lead in famine relief were over. This is unmistakably expressed in the Commission's response to an enquiry from the League of Nations, asking whether in disaster relief China would cooperate with foreign charitable agencies. The answer was that it would be inconceivable for the government to ask the League of Nations to raise funds

¹⁸ Reportedly Jiang Jieshi met representatives of the CIFRC to explain that they would no longer be needed in the future, but still asked for support in this transitional period (Janku 2012: 246).

and distribute relief [on its behalf]. If, however, there were foreign charitable agencies that were enthusiastic about giving relief aid, this would be welcome, and they would be happy to provide assistance, only the mode and scope of this cooperation would have to be decided by the government (*Shenbao*, 19 April 1930).

National self-assertion in the field of famine relief was particularly important as it was intrinsically related to the question of political legitimacy. Therefore, the government was eager to show that they were committed to finding a better and more long-term solution to what had then become known as China's 'food problem' (*chifan wenti* 吃飯問題). In the context of the famine in the Northwest and the simultaneous propagation of Sun Yatsen's Principle of the People's Livelihood the debate about the 'food problem' spread like wildfire.¹⁹ The government's answer was the formation of a Food Commission (Minshi wenti weiyuanhui 民食問題委員會), which in turn called in a Grain Research Commission (Liangshi yanjiu weiyuanhui 糧食研究委員會). In a speech on 'how to solve the nation's food problem,' Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879-1936), party ideologue and political rival to Jiang Jieshi, bemoaned the government's inability to effectively relieve the famine in the northwest, despite the issuing of disaster relief bonds (*zhenzai gongzhai* 賑災公債) worth ten million yuan and vigorous fund-raising abroad. He complained about warlords using relief grain to feed their armies and confiscating vehicles so that grain could not be transported – all leading to the ARCS saying in their report that 'the famine in China was due to the fact that the government did not take responsibility,' and the country was 'losing international trust.' 'We certainly do not hope to rely on foreigners to help us in this kind of situation, but hearing this kind of words from others, we feel even more that we have to solve the food problem ourselves and quickly!' (Hu 1929) Clearly, here was a serious threat to the political legitimacy of the regime, both from inside and from outside. The new Food Commission would solve the problem of famine from its roots.

But despite his affirmation of this move, Hu Hanmin did not miss the chance to criticize the government. He reported on five action points the party's Central Committee had already forwarded to the government, two of which, reducing the cost of grain transportation, and abolishing grain taxes, could be implemented immediately. He considered the grain duty 'a mistaken move by the government' harming the people without actually gaining much. And he added: 'In the past we did not have this kind of grain duty (*liangshi juan* 糧食捐) and this was because the people's food was regarded as important (*zhongshi minshi* 重視民食). Only at the end of the Qing the most muddleheaded people such as the likes of Zhang Zhidong introduced this wicked practice.' In the same vein he emphasized the need to revive the granary system, and more generally criticized as mistaken the development of the cities at the expense of the countryside, rather than also developing the countryside and educating the farming population (Hu 1929). The weekly *Xinghua* 興華 or 'Revive China,' a missionary publication known in English as *The Christian Advocate*, went as far as to see the solving of the food problem as a solution to all of China's problems: 'As long as the food problem has not been solved, no high-sounding politics and no isms will be able to pacify internal rebellions. If only everybody has enough rice to eat, then this will be enough.' And all hope

¹⁹ Not only Guomindang publications such as *Shidai* 時代 (Time, published by the Propaganda Department of the Nationalist Party's Shanghai branch) reported on 'the national food problem,' but also national papers such as *Shenbao* and *Dagongbao*, and learned journals, such as *Nongsheng* 農聲 (Agricultural Information) published by students of agriculture at Guangdong University, and trade journals, such as *Yinhang zhoubao* 銀行周報 (The Bankers Weekly) or *Nongye zhoubao* 農業周報 (The Farmers Weekly).

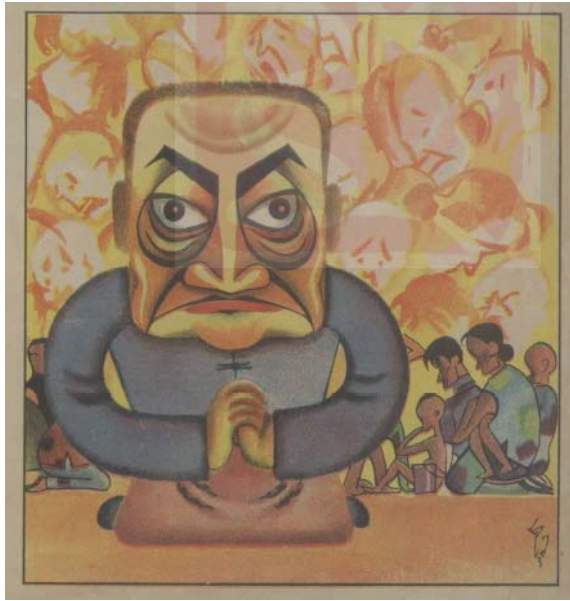
is put into the newly called in Grain Research Commission ('Minshi wenti weiyuanhui shi shiju zhi jiuqing,' 1929).

Famine and disasters had to be a thing of the past, something that had been overcome in a modern nation, at best something that only 'others' suffered from. Or at least something 'others,' too, suffered from, in which case one could show one's equal standing by offering relief oneself, such as happened in 1923 and 1933 when the World Red Swastika Society (and others) raised funds and brought relief to the victims of earthquakes in Tokyo and Southern California respectively and expressed their sympathy for the plight of the Japanese and American people.²⁰ Clearly, the activities of the newly-founded Chinese humanitarian institutions supported the government's agenda of national self-assertion and they did so by following their agenda of universal salvation. But perhaps more significantly, the entire disaster relief sector within China, or rather the country's wealthy southeast, showed an attitude that was similar to the foreign humanitarian attitude towards a backward China. It was perhaps as much an exercise in self-assertion and social image making as an expression of genuine compassion for the plight of fellow human beings. Thus disaster relief had effectively been transformed from an activity focused on people in need starting locally in their own communities and moving up the government bureaucracy if necessary, with each level interested in keeping the disaster contained, to one focused on those on centre-stage in the charity business, often literally so, with a potential interest in displaying the huge scope of a disaster in order to increase its redemptive potential.

3 Transcending borders

One of Shanghai's most illustrious philanthropists in the 1920s and 30s was the above-mentioned Wang Zhen. From a humble background he started out as an apprentice in the Yichuntang, a shop for mounting paintings in Shanghai. Then he became a banking apprentice, learning painting in his spare time, and soon started to work as a comprador for a Japanese company. He was hugely successful and became one of the big figures in Shanghai's world of business and finance. Still, today he is probably best known as a painter of the Shanghai school (Tsao 1998, Shen 2008). But he was also a devout Buddhist and used his extended social and business networks to support his various charities, which he considered 'a part of his spiritual practice as a lay Buddhist' (Dillon 2008: 184). And he was considered to be very good at that (Figure 1). Indeed, as one of the founders of the Federation of Charity Organisations in Shanghai, he was the one who kept this city's networks of philanthropist societies together, as became obvious only after his death in 1938 (Dillon 2008: 196).

²⁰ This was clearly different from earlier campaigns in 1905 where Shen Dunhe and others in Shanghai organized relief aid for Chinese nationals in Vladivostok who suffered from the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war in the name of the International Commission of the Red Cross and in 1906 when the same group of people in Shanghai sent money to aid overseas Chinese who had become victims of the San Francisco earthquake (Zhu 2006: 484).



Ladies and Gentlemen! Now we are again confronted with scenes of drought everywhere. There are several million of disaster-stricken people in every province. Without clothes and without food, they could die every day. I hope you will all give a little money to save these starving people. As the ancients say: To save a single human life is better than building a seven-storied pagoda. It is a great merit. I beseech you: If you don't do it for them, do it for me (literally: Do not look at the face of the Buddha, look at the face of the monk), everyone just add a bit to my bit. Save these millions of starving people! Amithaba!

Figure 1: 'Na shou hao xi: Wang Yiting mukuan zhenzai' [His specialty: Wang Yiting raises funds for disaster relief], news painting by Zhang Bailu in *Liangyou huabao* (Young Companion Pictorial), No.93 (1934), accessed via the Shanghai Library's *Minguo shiqi qikan quanwen shujuku*.

His many contacts in Shanghai's business, cultural and religious circles as well as his experience with charitable work and disaster relief finally also opened him the doors to the world of politics. As mentioned above, in 1928 Xu Shiyong made him a member of his Relief Commission and head of its Shanghai office. When his career as a philanthropist began is not entirely clear, but it seems likely that this happened – similar to Xiong Xiling – at the time of the Beijing-Zhili flood in 1916-7. This was also the time when the Chinese Society for the Relief of Sentient Beings was founded in Shanghai, as a response to the 'ceaseless reports on floods in Zhili, Fengtian, Shandong, Henan, Sichuan, Hubei and Hunan' and an expression of people's sympathy with those in distress.²¹ In 1929, Wang was the chairman of this organization and it is likely that he was involved in its work from the beginning. While the Zhongguo Jishenghui was a thoroughly Buddhist organisation – its activities included ritual lectures explaining Buddhist sutras that were attended by hundreds of novices (*Shenbao* 17 May 1918) – it had a clear humanitarian mission aiming for the happiness of Chinese society at large and thus also formed part of the Chinese strand of the dual disaster relief system that easily matched the growing influence of international organisations. In 1929, the CIFRC bulletin published a summary report of the work of the Jishenghui under the title 'Effectiveness keynote of Chi Sen Hui Policy,' where they acknowledged their valuable work and noted – surprised, it seems – the fact that this was entirely done without seeking any public attention, and even without public fund-raising (*Jiuzai huikan* 6.3). While the resulting dearth of knowledge about its activities is somewhat symptomatic of many of the 'native' relief organisations, this was certainly not true for Wang Zhen. One of his fund-

²¹ 'Jishenghui er zhounian dahui ji' 濟生會二周年大會記 [Report of the general assembly at the Jishenghui's second anniversary], *Shenbao*, 3 December 1918. More than 100 members are reported to have attended the meeting. Contributions came from members exclusively, there was no public fund-raising. Records and account books (*zhengxinlu* 徵信錄) were distributed internally.

raising paintings showing famine refugees was published in the government's relief bulletin (Figure 2), and in the national crisis of 1931 he was reported as 'praying for the nation's plight.'²²



Figure 2: 'Ben hui Wang weiyuan Zhen shouhui zaimin liuwangtu yi fu' 本會王委員震手繪災民流亡圖一幅 (A scene showing famine refugees painted by committee member Wang Zhen), published in *Zhenwu yuekan*, the monthly bulletin of Xu Shiyong's Relief Commission, in 1930 (vol.1, no.3).

Six years later he launched another Buddhist charity, the World Yellow Swastika Society (Shijie Huangwanzihui 世界黃卍字會), dedicated to medical relief, complete with a flag-hoisting ritual and an inaugural meeting attended by over 100 personalities from Shanghai's religious charities. These included the World Red Swastika Society, the Chinese Society for the Promotion of Virtue (Zhongguo Daodehui 中國道德會), the Chinese Relief Society (Zhongguo xiejihui 中國協濟會), the Fahua diyuan Buddhist Association (Diyuan fahui 祇園法會), and older benevolent halls such as the Guangyi Shantang 廣益善堂.²³ Interestingly, there is no indication of his involvement with the World Red Swastika Society that became so important in particular in the 1930s and during the war, but remained quite obscure for a long time both due to a suspicion of having collaborated with the Japanese occupiers and due to its highly syncretistic character that made many people believe it was a kind of subversive religious group (Song 1997). But nevertheless, both Wang's Buddhist beliefs and the spirituality that inspired the Red Swastika Society were very much part of the global

²² And he was accused of working for the Japanese at the same time. Jianren 建人 1931. 'Wang Yiting wei guonan qidao!' 王一亭為國難祈禱! [Wang Yiting prays for the nation's plight!], *Fendou* 奮鬥 (Hankou) 16.

²³ 'Huangwanzihui chengli' 黃卍字會成立 [The founding of the Yellow Swastika Society], *Shenbao*, 21 January 1937.

phenomenon of the rise of new religions in the early twentieth century. Xiong Xiling – who was put in charge of the government’s flood relief effort in 1917 – is another example.

For Xiong, who also campaigned forcefully for a Buddhist revival as he saw religion as the way leading to a better world, the 1917 flood marked the beginning of his career as a philanthropist. In 1919 he became the first director of the All-China Federation of Chinese Philanthropic Bodies (Zhonghua cishan tuanti quanguo lianhehui 中國慈善團體全國聯合會) in Shanghai, and then in 1925 director of the World Red Swastika Society based in Beijing. But at all times, his activities remained closely related to national politics: campaigning with Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), Zhang Jian and others for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Sun Yatsen in the south and the Beiyang ‘warlords’ in the north in 1918, organizing anti-imperialist protests in Beijing at the time of the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925, mobilizing his charities for anti-Japanese activities after 1931, doing rescue work with the Shanghai Red Swastika chapter in 1937 (Zhou and Wu 1990).

The World Red Swastika Society was founded in 1922 as the secular arm of the Daoyuan 道院, a syncretistic new religion founded in 1921 in Jinan, Shandong province, based on the authority of a revelation by the Venerable Patriarch of the Former Heaven (*xiantian laozu* 先天老祖) and revering the saints of the Five Teachings (Laozi, Kongzi, Shakyamuni, Jesus and Muhammad). Its proclaimed aim was ‘to bring peace to the world and provide disaster relief’ (*cujin shijie heping, jiuji zaihuan* 促進世界和平，救濟災患, Fang and Cai 2005: 75), and this was essentially regarded as the external part of the exercise of cultivating one’s religious body. Their Manifesto shows that the founders clearly saw themselves in an extraordinary time haunted by all kinds of natural and man-made disasters, epitomized by the war in Europe and the famine in Russia, requiring a joint global effort, both spiritual and material, to prevent ‘natural disasters and military calamities’ from happening in the future.²⁴ Similar to the CIFRC, the society established its own newspaper, the *Wanzi riri xinwen* 卍字日日新聞 (Swastika Daily) in 1923. Its headquarters were in Beijing. After the death of the key founding members, Xiong Xiling became the director in 1925, heading a 15-member board that oversaw a growing organisation. Soon more than 300 branches had been established throughout the country and also abroad, including in Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. The Nationalist Government confirmed the legitimacy of its registration as a disaster relief organisation in 1928 and it continued to engage in a wide range of philanthropic activities from the care for orphans, widows and disabled people to the establishment of schools and hospitals. In 1934 it was formally transformed from a religious to a charitable organisation to conform to the new law on charities passed in 1929 that banned them from pursuing religious aims (Fang and Cai 2005, DuBois 2011: 96).²⁵ By 1937 the World Red Swastika Society under Xiong’s leadership had become an

²⁴ This is the main message of the ‘Shijie Hongwanzihui xuanyan’ 世界紅卍字會宣言 [Manifesto of the World Red Swastika Society] as published in the Daoyuan’s organ *Daode zazhi* 2.6 (28 October 1922): 113-4. This published version of the Manifesto appears to be different from the archival document referred to by Fang and Cai (2005).

²⁵ See ‘Jiandu cishan tuanti fa’ 監督慈善團體法 [The law controlling charitable organisations], *Shenbao*, 26 May 1929. It may be noted here that through its association with the Daoyuan, parts of which openly declared their allegiance to the Japanese occupiers, and probably also simply by staying on in the Japanese-occupied parts of China after 1937, most notably in Nanjing during the Rape of that city, Red Swastika Society members were later regarded as collaborators and traitors. Research on the World Red Swastika Society has only just begun in recent years. Before, even their existence was unknown, to the extent that the Shandong provincial archives mistakenly labelled Red Swastika (卍) materials as Red Cross (+) materials (Li Guangwei 2008: 114).

internationally-engaged body.²⁶ During the refugee crisis of 1937, it was one of the most active societies (Dillon 2008: 187), and it continued relief work, including in the occupied parts of the country, throughout the war years (best studied in Manchuria, see e.g. DuBois 2011, Duara 2000).

One recent Chinese PhD emphasizes that the work of the Red Swastika Society in the field of war and famine relief was not inferior to that of the Red Cross Society. It even goes as far as seeing cultural nationalism as the guiding principle (*daoxiang* 导向) of Daoyuan – which somehow seems to contradict its proclaimed inclusive and universalist beliefs – and disasters, both natural and man-made, as the root of the emergence of popular religions (Gao 2009: 9). Given the nationalist atmosphere of the May Fourth Movement (1919) period and the loudly publicized foreign achievements of both the CIFRC and the ARCS in the 1920-1 relief campaign, it is certainly possible to see the foundation of the World Red Swastika Society in 1922 as a nationalist response to this. Even if members of the Daoyuan and its ‘secular’ arm may have harboured nationalist sentiments, this should not overshadow the fact that it was a deeply spiritual organization with a genuine humanitarian agenda. Simply because the International Red Cross Society served as a model – which is also reflected in the fact that relief work in war zones was among the first activities of the World Red Swastika Society²⁷ – does not mean that members of the World Red Swastika Society were any less sincere in what they were doing.

What did they achieve? If money is used as a measure, the conclusion would probably have to be that they were far from having the power of the CIFRC. The sums the World Red Swastika Society was able to raise for disaster relief ranged from 11,052 yuan for the 1929 flood in Hebei to 378,211 yuan for floods and droughts in various parts of the country in 1934. But money was not the only important part of their contribution, as Table 1 shows.

Year	Event	Funding and relief measures
1924	Floods (Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Fujian, Zhili, Beijing, and Chahar)	100,000+ yuan; grain, clothes and medicine distributed to 100,000 people; government urged to grant tax relief; in Chahar: grain, clothes and medicine distributed, 10 shelters and 4 soup kitchens established, 4800 people taken in, 150 corpses buried.
1928-30	Drought (North and Northwest China)	87,339 yuan, 1500 shi of rice, 114,609 shi of misc. grains; relief distributed to 1,140,000 people, 4080 taken into shelters (in Shaanxi and Shandong)
1929	Flood (Hebei, Yongding River)	11,052 yuan, 568 bags of flour 8266 people received relief 13,840 refugees from Henan were supported on their way to Manchuria
1930	Bandits and Drought (Northwest and Henan)	73,080 yuan, 87,800 lb of rice, 3723 pieces of cotton clothing distributed to 65,801 people
1930	Flood (Manchuria)	28,400 yuan, 51,430 lb of rice, 5100 shi of red sorghum distributed to 18,101 people, 171 corpses buried
1931	Flood (Yangzi and Huai River floods, submerging 380 counties in Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, Jiangsu,	157,049 yuan; relief distributed to 813,128 people, 396,015 refugees accommodated

²⁶ Xiong Xiling himself was also active on an international stage, most famously when he travelled to Bandung in 1937 to participate in the League of Nations’ Far Eastern Conference to address the Commission on the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children in the Far East (Xiong 1996: 2205-2233).

²⁷ Special regulations were drafted for emergency teams in war zones. See ‘Shijie Hongwanzhui Jinan fenhui jiujiudui jianzhang’ 世界紅卍字會濟南分會救濟隊簡章 [General regulations for the emergency relief teams of the World Red Swastika Society’s Jinan branch], *Daode zazhi* 4.1 (1924): 128-133.

	Jiangxi, Zhejiang, Henan and Shandong, directly affecting more than 5.3 million people)	
1932	Floods (Jiangsu and Anhui; Harbin, Bin River; Shanxi, Fen River)	103,000 yuan, 21 wagons of rice, 23,683 bags of flour, 3000 shi of misc. grains, 4000 pieces of cotton clothing; 279,463 people received relief, 32,991 refugees accommodated
1933	Drought (10 counties in Guanzhong, Shaanxi); Yellow River floods, affecting dozens of locations in Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Henan and Shaanxi	131,350 yuan; 1,660,528 people received (some form of?) relief
1934	Drought in the south, floods in the north, storms, earthquakes, insect plagues, hail (300 counties in 13 provinces)	378,211 yuan, 11,483 shi of rice, 5,600 shi of red sorghum, 72,123 pieces of clothes, 600 bolts of cloth, 10,000 lb of salt, medicine; disaster investigations carried out by the local branches to identify areas most in need; relief distributed to more than 1,000,000 people, 3096 corpses buried
1935	Floods (Yangzi River dyke break, Yellow River floods, 16 provinces affected, worse than 1931, more than 20 million people affected)	272,500 yuan, 2700 bags of flour, 48,500 pieces of clothing, medicine; relief bureaus established in Shanghai, Jinan, Hankou and other major cities across the country; 1,006,591 people received relief
1937	Drought and epidemics (Anhui, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, Gansu, Ningxia and Henan)	54,000 yuan; groups of relief workers organised to go to the disaster districts in Sichuan and Guizhou; campaign stalled by Japanese invasion

Table 1: Major World Red Swastika Society disaster relief activities, 1922-1937 (data from Fang and Cai 2005, based on the Society's own work reports held in the Shanghai Municipal Archives)

As a comparison, as stated above, in 1920-1, the Peking United International Famine Relief Committee had a total of \$17 million available for their relief work. In 1928-30, the CIFRC raised 6,700,000 yuan for their famine relief campaign – boycotted by the ARCS who after an investigation refused to put resources into what they saw as a self-inflicted calamity (Janku 2012). How does this compare to the figure of 87,000 yuan raised by the World Red Swastika Society for relief work during the same crisis? How can we value the donations in kind, and most of all, the apparently considerable work done by their people on the ground? Even if it would appear that their work was more in line with ‘old-style’ relief activities, including the distribution of food and clothes and the burial of corpses, which was indeed a most important task (as opposed to the CIFRC’s emphasis on the building of infrastructure), was this not what was most needed in an emergency situation? The work of the World Red Swastika Society was also crucial in an area that the international organizations found more difficult to touch: relief in war zones. This was important as most of the severely affected areas were actually war zones (and for this very reason the ARCS had refused to support the fund-raising campaign in the US in 1929). In fact in the first decade of its existence relief in war zones, mostly in the form of providing shelter and care for wounded soldiers and refugees and burying the dead, was its most important activity (see Table 2).

Year	Event	Relief measures
1924	Jiangsu-Zhejiang war	Shelters for 18,500 wounded soldiers and refugees
1925	Civil war in various provinces	30 relief expeditions sent to war zones in the Yangzi valley, and in Hebei, Shandong, and Henan provinces, protecting 115,900 people, burying 5069 corpses, and giving shelter to more than 50,000 women and children
1926-7	Northern expedition	Shelters established in 32 places taking in 200,000 refugees and wounded soldiers,

		medical treatment for over 1000 people, 1600 corpses buried; provisional hospitals established in seven places treating more than 6000 soldiers, 4700 corpses buried
1928	Northern expedition, cont.	100,000 refugees given shelter, 11,2000 wounded treated
1928, May	Jinan massacre	More than 500 corpses buried, 1500 people treated, and 2000 taken in temporary shelters
1931	Shenyang	1500 fed, 100 soldiers treated, more than 800 corpses buried
1932	Japanese attack on Shanghai	28 shelters established in the Lower Yangzi area, 8 temporary hospitals, 177,000 wounded soldiers and refugees treated, 3059 corpses buried
1932	Japanese advances (Shanghai Pass)	Rescue teams sent, treating more than 3000 soldiers, who were sent to hospitals in Beijing, Tianjin and Chahar, 20 shelters established, more added later; cemeteries established where more than 1000 soldiers were buried
1934	Suixi (in today's Inner Mongolia)	5820 soldiers sheltered, 1800 treated, 500 vaccinated, 590 corpses buried; more than 160 shi of rice distributed in two counties
1937	Open war	13 refugee shelters in Beijing, 2 temporary hospitals, 9 shelters in Tianjin and other places; care for 22000 refugees, 4600 soldiers treated, 700 bodies buried; 500,000 yuan used to shelter refugees, treat the wounded and bury the dead
1937	Rape of Nanjing	600-strong burial team, burying 5000 corpses in the period from Jan to Feb 1938; by mid-March this number had grown to 31,791 ²⁸

Table 2: The World Red Swastika Society's relief work in war zones, 1924-1937, based on archival sources as well as on figures published in contemporary Shanghai newspapers (Fang and Cai 2005)

Looking at these two tables in conjunction with each other, it seems clear that the work of the World Red Swastika Society shifted from a focus on war relief in the 1920s to disaster and famine relief in the 1930s back to war relief when the conflict with Japan turned into open warfare. Interestingly, in their reporting, the number of people who received aid was more important than the money involved. In some cases the relationship between the two highlights that their work relied more on man-power than on cash donations, which seems to be shown most clearly in 1934 when reportedly 1.6 million people received relief, but only 131,350 yuan were available for the campaign. The opposite was the case in their activities abroad, when sums of money sent were quoted next to expressions of sympathy (*weiwèn* 慰問) with the disaster victims – the only exception here is the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, when they sent 2000 shi of rice.²⁹ 10,000 yuan were sent to Japan in 1924 for the victims of a typhoon; 5,000 yuan as earthquake relief aid in 1927; 2000 yuan and 10,000 Japanese yen were sent for the same purpose in 1933; and finally the World Red Swastika Society sent a staggering 100,000 yuan to San Francisco when Southern California was struck by a 6.4-magnitude earthquake in 1933. At a press conference Xiong Xiling repeated that 'the aim of this society was to relieve the world's disasters, that it never held views that would draw lines between different places, and regardless of which country suffered a disaster, they would spare no effort to provide relief.' And he explained how the assembled society members decided to give 100,000 yuan for the victims of the American earthquake (negotiated down from the originally-proposed sum of 120,000 yuan, considered the equivalent of US\$40,000). At the same time he also reported that two delegates were sent to the American embassy to explain that 'since the founding of the Republic, China has repeatedly suffered from disasters, and each time we have received aid from the Americans who have done their utmost to help. Following on from the principle of

²⁸ These figures on the Rape of Nanjing are from a 1994 *Jiefang ribao* (Liberation Daily) source.

²⁹ But the Chinese government and other humanitarian and civic organisations, including the Hua-Yang yizhenhui and the Zhongguo Jishenghui, did organize financial and material aid for Japan in 1923 (Li 1998).

reciprocity, it goes without saying that we have to fulfil the obligation of mutual help. So we hope that you will understand our humble feelings and accept [our modest contribution] so that the people's minds can be at ease' (*Dagongbao* report in Xiong 1996: 2121). There were different priorities for different places. But the Society members clearly operated within an international context, and very consciously so.

Conclusion

Although important, neither personal ambitions or nationalist sentiment, religious motivations or genuine compassion for the suffering of fellow human beings suffice as an explanatory framework for what we have called the internationalisation of disaster relief in China. There were more profound changes at work. By the early twentieth century human societies had to face a world transformed. Improved communications multiplied the impact of disasters and at the same time provided more efficient means to cope with them. Moral indignation over what was increasingly seen as unnecessary suffering grew and motivated privately-organized, cross-border humanitarian action. The first international campaign in China happened in the 1870s, but the significance of that campaign was mainly to accelerate the rise of private relief across provincial borders within China, then mostly perceived as a supplement to state-administered relief. The state remained the main player in the field until the devolution of relief to localities during the early twentieth-century reforms. Then the international factor came back in the guise of modern humanitarianism. Or, as Nathan has it, there was a shift from seeing famine relief as a proselytizing tool to 'a feeling of responsibility of the Western community toward the famine problem' (Nathan 1965: 5). Humanitarianism as a child of the Enlightenment is characterized, in the words of Michael Barnett, by 'assistance beyond borders, a belief that such transnational action was related in some way to the transcendent, and the growing organization and governance of activities designed to protect and improve humanity.' It was thus far more than the 'impartial, neutral, and independent provision of relief to victims of conflict and natural disasters' that had become the hallmark of the International Committee of the Red Cross from its foundation in the mid-nineteenth century (Barnett 2011: 10). All these three characteristics can be observed in the forms of private disaster relief evolving in China from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards. Only that 'the transcendent' was overshadowed by the 'discourse of the state,' originating to some extent from what was perceived as a lack of reciprocity in a scenario where the 'Western community' saw itself as in charge of solving China's famine problem. Two decades into the twentieth century it was manifest in the new religious organisations that represented the shift in focus from individual reward and retribution to universal salvation. This new mission found an expression in religiously-inspired organizations committed to disaster relief across borders, such as the Chinese Society for the Relief of Sentient Beings and the World Red Swastika Society. However, even these developments tend to be seen as a reaction to the strongly paternalistic side of (Western) relief aid, as an exercise in national self-assertion in the face of a hegemonic Western humanitarianism, rather than just motivated by genuine compassion for suffering fellow human beings.

Another aspect that makes the story of the internationalisation of disaster relief in China highly political is that China is a country with a century- (some would say millennia-) old system of the 'state administration of famine' (*huangzheng*) based on a hierarchical structure of responsibilities that started with familial and communal support mechanisms led by patriarchs and

village elders at the local level (which were an informal part of the official system under the name of ‘village relief’) and ended with the emperor’s acceptance of personal responsibility for the welfare of the people as formalized in the *zuijizhao* 罪己詔 (a decree by which the ruler acknowledged his personal responsibility for a disaster). Thus whereas in Europe the emergence of humanitarianism was accompanied by the rise of the welfare state, in China the expansion of private humanitarian organisations potentially meant a challenge to the state’s role as ultimate carer for of the people. Therefore the dynamics were different. The two did not grow together but the growth of the one appeared to diminish the other.

What we can observe in China is the rise of private relief operating on the national level, but still very much within the confines of the state in the nineteenth century, and a new form of humanitarian organisation with a bigger claim on governance in the early twentieth century. The latter reflected an increasing cosmopolitanism of some parts of Chinese society that enabled the emergence of international relief bodies as well as Chinese ones (whose activities did encompass international campaigns), which operated alongside each other. A kind of dual system emerged, with the former perceived as Western, efficient, and progressive and the latter as inefficient, backward, and Chinese. But in fact, both represented vigorous and autonomous sections of society, which the state, once it was in a position to do so, sought to co-opt into its services. A constructive co-evolution of both, strong autonomous humanitarian organisations, and the state, would not have been unthinkable.

The problem with internationalisation is of course that it is mostly understood as ‘Westernization’ and thus intrinsically linked to notions of inequality. The same is true for humanitarianism. It is impossible to decouple the idea of humanitarianism from the fact of inequality (the better equipped, technologically and organizationally superior people supporting vulnerable and essentially helpless populations). Therefore the two accounts of a China that is regarded as an object of Western humanitarianism – and responds to this in ways that are described as nationalist – and a China that is cosmopolitan, autonomous, with strong, emerging social institutions, engaging in the international community, extending support to vulnerable populations both in China and elsewhere (even in the world’s most affluent societies), exist alongside each other and cannot be fully reconciled. We need to acknowledge the legitimacy of both, even if we tend to be more familiar with the former. Ambiguities are here to stay. What it means for our analysis of the disaster relief system in the early twentieth century is that we see Chinese humanitarian institutions emerging that operated alongside the better-known international ones, that engaged in similar activities, and that were even active on an international level. Their motivation was compassion for fellow human beings, their aim was to bring peace to the world. At the same time, the standard account focusing on the prime importance of the Western contribution and the national concerns of the Chinese organisations is deceptive – but both are in fact different sides of the same coin. At the time of a shift in the global visibility of famines and other disasters we see a shift in responses to disasters in the form of an expansion of humanitarian intervention. In republican China this resulted in a dual system of disaster relief, both parts of which were responses to the rise of modern humanitarianism in a social and political environment that was visibly rife with injustice. The tension between humanitarian ideals, a purpose that is ‘intertwined with the desire to demonstrate and create a global spirit’ (Barnett 2011: 20), and the pursuit of national interests and the inherent inequality in humanitarian relationships remains.

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